

## Nahom Berhane Scholarship Recipient 2017

Sal Sabila

### *Biography:*

Growing up, I realized that we all have superheroes living within us. Our inner superheroes are the reasons we decide to live every day and they motivate us to chase our dreams regardless of obstacles faced along the way. Sometimes we need someone to help us to find our inner superhero. My teachers and mentors have assisted me with this. By pursuing a career in teaching, I want to help my students find their inner superheroes and fight to live the life they want to live.

Almost two years ago, I dreamed about a group of young people from the community taking a lead together and voicing their rights against ethnic, racial discrimination and inequality. I was ignored when I shared the idea with my peers. As I was about to give up, my inner superhero motivated me to keep going because the youth in my local community had no voice. I asked my former peers for help to create this team of youth leaders called “Youth Gravity”. We have discussed issues of mental health, indigenous women’s education, human trafficking, homeless youth and others affecting my local community. We have also held a big donation drive in our community for a women’s shelter. We have raised over a thousand clothing articles, hundreds of non-perishable food items and hygiene products. We have also helped with organizing the International Women’s Day March in Toronto to empower women and to stand up for an inclusive nation. I have also been part of a safety initiative with Toronto Community Housing in my community for two years. Since residents of my community were being affected by gang violence and sexual assault, I led a team of youth where we surveyed over 500 people, and, as a follow up, we are working on creating safety zones where anyone can reach the closest safety advisor in times of need.

I also began an initiative called “50/50” in my school since women are often seen as the minority in conversations in our class despite the fact women are the majority in class populations. This group meets and discusses issues of gender equality. This group also discusses issues such as domestic violence against women, wage gaps between genders, cultural stigmas against gender, transgender issues etc. We have invited women from different professions to come and speak. On International Women’s Day, we invited students to come in and share their thoughts on gender equality through their original poems or poems that have inspired them. We held a discussion as a follow up to give everyone a chance to speak about what gender equality is to them.

As an executive member of the Social Justice Club in my school for the last three years, I have led several fundraising events for a Syrian refugee family, Nepal earthquake etc. I also organized Halloween for Hunger in school community where we collected over 1000 food cans and donated them to a local food bank.

I have volunteered with Newcomers Orientation Week program, where I had the chance to be a peer leader of new Canadians and help them to adjust to the new country through my experiences. I have been a tutor at Youth Empowering Parents for the last four years

where I tutor immigrant parents how to use computer and empower them to be updated with the modern technological world. This way, parents can prevent cyber-bullying among kids and computer knowledge can also help them find jobs.

Along with my community work, I made sure to succeed in my academic career. I have earned academic honours all throughout high school. I have also received a Community Excellence Award from the Pathways to Education program for having high academic marks and community involvement. Recently I have been awarded the Young Leader of Toronto 2016 by Toronto Police.

I believe a teacher can have a huge impact on a community. A teacher might be just a teacher to the rest of the world, but to my students I want to be a hero. I want to open minds of my students and touch their hearts with the light of hope. As a teacher and an advocate of mental health, I want to raise awareness about mental health stigmas in our society. I think there could be nothing more beautiful than a career and a passion coming together. This is just the story of my high school career. I want to continue my story. Eventually I want to collaborate with youth across the nation and gravitate towards positive change. This has been an absolute honour becoming the recipient of Nahom Berhane Scholarship 2017. The Nahom Berhane Scholarship stands for youth who are striving to make a difference in our community every day. I believe that my thousand plus hours of volunteer work as well as my strong dedication and passion to make a difference in my community is just the start of my thousand mile journey. This scholarship is to motivate youth to keep being the superheroes of our lives and the community and to keep pushing forward. Superheroes should never limit themselves even when barriers block their path. This scholarship has reminded me that no matter what obstacle comes on my way, I can always overcome it. I will be working hard to keep being the superhero of my community and my students by pursuing my post-secondary education at University of Toronto in Mathematics and Physical Sciences.

Thank you