

Community Call honors two with Young Leader Award

Kassmin Williams

As Boston-based nonprofit Community Call moves into its second year of working with at-risk high school students, the organization has found a way to expand its focus to better serve the students in its program.

The group works with high school students in its Community Call Event Planning Enrichment Programs, where students plan and execute community events while getting hands-on training in business and leadership while making a positive difference in the community.

To further highlight the importance of community service, Community Call has created the Greater Boston Young Leader Award, which will honor two young leaders: one who is at the start of his or her community activism and another who has already made a significant impact.

“We really thought it was important that we establish role models so that we’re not only teaching [our students] the skills and teaching them self empowerment, but they have the opportunity to see that other people have made a difference in the community that are in their peer groups or maybe a little bit older,” Community Call Executive Director Carolyn Edwards said.

Edwards said the organization

hopes those honored can help students envision the long-lasting impacts their own efforts can have on the community.

Twenty-four award nominations were gathered from all parts of the city by Community Call, ONEin3Boston, various Boston foundations and the general public.

“I think they’re both wonderful role models not just for our students but really for anybody.”

— Carolyn Edwards

Community Call Executive Director

Out of the 24 nominated, Boston Mayor’s Youth Council member Benjamin Haideri, 18, and Jonathon Feinman, 29, executive director and founder of InnerCity Weightlifting, were chosen to receive the inaugural Greater Boston Young Leader Award.

“I think they’re both wonderful role models not just for our students but really for anybody who wants to see that, as challenging as things are in the community, if we really think about it and put our heart into it each of us can make a difference,” Edwards said.

Haideri was chosen to be one

of 40 students to serve on the Mayor’s Youth Council by Northeastern University, the City of Boston and the Boston Bar Association.

As a council member, he meets with Mayor Thomas Menino and other city leaders to discuss youth issues and outreaches in his neighborhood, listens to his peers’ con-

cerns and shares information and organizes community service projects.

Recently, the Roslindale resident spoke to more than 3,000 local elected officials and community leaders from across the nation requesting they recognize the importance of including young people in government.

Haideri also works with the Mayor’s Youthline program to maintain its website and post Youth Council news.

Feinman’s work also involves working with youth.

InnerCity Weightlifting seeks to deter youth from violence by

empowering them through individualized fitness goals, which in turn allows them to set other positive goals like finishing school and landing a job.

“He’s just really exceptional in terms of coming in and working with people who much people in society would turn their back on because they’ve already got criminal backgrounds or they’ve been involved in gangs,” Edwards said. “He has not only taken on the challenge of working with these people but he invests himself completely in their success not only in terms of job training but in terms of helping them receive their GED and getting them acclimated back into society.”

Community activist Lenny Zakim’s work inspired the award criteria, Edwards said.

Zakim, who died of cancer at 46 in 1999, worked throughout the Boston area to build and grow partnerships among the city’s diverse groups.

To show the link between Zakim’s work and the work done by the two award recipients, Zakim’s son will be presenting Haideri and Feinman their awards

at the sixth annual Home Sweet Home event Sept. 28.

The dessert competition, organized by Edwards to benefit an area nonprofit, is being held at the Cambridge Hyatt Regency.

In the past, the event has benefitted a program that provides funding for the homeless to get housing and Home Base, a state organization focused on caring for local veterans with traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder.

This year, Home Sweet Home will benefit Community Call, where the proceeds will pay for the event-planning classes the students participate in as part of the program as well as help fund the events the students plan.

As the event approaches its sixth year and focuses on supporting a new organization, Community Call, Home Sweet Home is being restructured to reach a larger cross-section of the community, Edwards said.

In addition to the dessert competition, the event will feature music, wine tasting, a magic show and an urban art exhibit showcase by Future Alliance Boston artists.

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