



Andrea Roscoe celebrates Thursday after being selected Youth of the Year for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Northwest Indiana during a ceremony in Merrillville. She is a member of the John Will Anderson Club in Gary. **ANDY LAVALLEY/FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE**

Boys & Girls Clubs Youth of the Year winner is Gary girl

Northwest Indiana honoree gets \$5,000 scholarship, moves on to state contest

By Doug Ross
FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE

Andrea Roscoe was named Youth of the Year for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana.

Andrea, a member of the John Will Anderson Club in Gary, competed against five other club members from across Lake and Porter counties.

"I know I'm the most busiest teenager in the world," Andrea said while receiving her award

Thursday before rushing off to another event.

"I'm glad that I won because I wanted to be the best to encourage kids to persevere through hard times," she said afterward.

"Your story is powerful, but it's all about the way you deliver it," Andrea said. "Keep your faith. Don't let anyone discourage you from what you want to do."

Andrea's theme for the night was "redirection," she said. "Redirection means something didn't go as planned and you were forced to go with the alternative."

When she first walked into the club as a seventh grader, she said, she didn't know she was meeting a new family to support her when she needed it.

"In 2025, I thought I had the definition of what leadership is," she said. "Life had a way of changing my perspective."

Andrea told of a girl who had a hard time adjusting to the club. "Unfortunately, she passed away" before she could become friends with others the way she had hoped. "I was shaken. I couldn't understand that a little girl that I thought I had a connection with would go."

Since then, Andrea has made it a mission to show up for others at the club. "A leader means to show up in hard times," she said.

"Eleanor Roosevelt once said people are like tea bags. You never know how strong you are until you're in hot water," Andrea said.

"Even though we had a rough year, we persevered. We kept going," she said.

To her fellow competitors, Andrea said, "I feel wonderful friendship with each and every one of you."

Andrea won a \$5,000 scholarship and will advance to the state Youth of the Year competition.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana rules prohibit using members' last names for privacy reasons, but granted permission for the use of Andrea's last name as the winner.

Runner-up Samara, of the Lake Station Club, won a \$2,500 scholarship.

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The four other contestants — Aubrey, Duneland Club; JaMal, East Chicago Katherine House Club; Keion, Lake Station Club; and Witten, Portage Club — each received \$1,250 scholarships. Each contestant won other prizes as well, including Beats headphones and scholarships for Calumet College of St. Joseph and Ivy Tech Community College.

"I believe this is record-setting attendance," Boys & Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana President and CEO Mike Jessen said. The sold-out event had about 500 attendees.

"We are thrilled to be here tonight to celebrate our club kids," he said. "Every kid has what it takes to be successful."

"These six young leaders have turned challenges into triumphs, and their stories represent the thousands of youths we serve across the region. When we provide a platform for their voices, we are showing our community what the future of Northwest Indiana looks like," Jessen said. "Their courage, ambition and character are a testament to the life-changing impact of our clubs."



JaMal speaks during the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Northwest Indiana Youth of the Year competition Thursday in Merrillville. JaMal is a 10-year member of the East Chicago Katherine House Club. **ANDY LAVALLEY/FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE**

Keion, one of two representing the Lake Station club, said the club is a safe space and a great environment for the kids. The high school

senior plans to attend Ball State University.

"Don't give up. Be proud of who you are, just like me," he said.

Samara, also representing the Lake Station club, said it quickly became her second home. She helps younger kids with homework. "Through

this I'll make lifelong memories and friendships," she said.

"My grandma taught me the true meaning of perseverance," Samara said. "After I lost my grandmother, I struggled with my mental health, but got support at the club. 'Kindness, passion and really making a difference in others' lives' matter, she said.

Witten, representing the Portage Club, said it has taught him discipline and teamwork as well as respect, hard work and confidence. "I like to think I'm a pretty cool kid now."

"It's about lifting people up," he said. Witten thanked the club for believing in him before he believed in himself.

Aubrey, of the Duneland Club, wants to become a professional volleyball player. Before she attended the club, she didn't have confidence. "It all changed when I walked in."

"I've made so many memories and even more connections," she said. "I was able to do things I love."

Enduring racist comments at school and her parents' divorce were difficult, she said, but the club provides a safe place for her. "Without the club, I don't think I'd be the confident person I am now."

JaMal, of the East Chicago

Katherine House Club, is a 10-year member. "As the oldest of three brothers, I've had to grow up fast."

"I'm usually the first one to ask a kid what do they need help for," he said. "Kids need a safe space for a strong bond, and the club provides that."

GreatNews.Life founder Chris Mahlmann served as emcee. "I can see any of you running our cities or our companies or our organizations or our country," he told the contestants.

"It always chokes me up when I attend these events," Portage Club Director Gerald Watt said.

Watt was 6 years old when he first joined the Hammond club. "I was loud, I was hyper, I was bouncing off walls," he said. "The club didn't try to shrink me; they shaped me."

"We're that place where that unconfident kid finds their voice," Watt said. "It's a place for the creative, the quirky, the energetic kid like me."

"That noise isn't disorder; it's growth happening in real time," he added. "We aren't just babysitters. We don't just fill time; we give kids structure."

Doug Ross is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.