

## Upper St. Clair Student Honored With International Award

**Arlington, Va., March 1, 2020** — In February, **Harrison Burgess** of Upper St. Clair, Penn., received the **2020 Yes I Can Award** from the **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**.



Harrison's life motto is "Yes I Can!" That's why he embodies this award. A senior at Upper St. Clair High School, Harrison was born with Spina Bifida (myelomeningocele type) and participates in the Learning Support Program. In addition to wearing braces on his legs and using arm crutches to ambulate, a permanent ventriculoperitoneal (VP) shunt, catheterizations, and allergies are part of Harrison's daily life.

Because Harrison lives every day to the most, he has provided inspiration and hope for so many with and without disabilities. His strength, courage, and resilience have served as an example to others in overcoming obstacles of their own.

"Harrison has grown into a strong self-advocate who has a clear understanding of his needs and is willing to talk with his teachers as needed," says Colleen Czekaj, Special Education Curriculum Leader at Upper St. Clair High School, who co-nominated Harrison for the award along with high-school counselor, Jerry Malarkey. "At no time have I ever seen him use his health issues as an excuse. Rather, he has used his situation to motivate himself and be a strong positive influence on others.

"The trait that is most impressive about Harrison is his strong character," Czekaj says. "This character, along with his integrity and strong faith, serve as the motivation to all that he does. Harrison quite simply is a solid role model and an inspiration to all who know him."

In the words of Malarkey, "Harrison is one of the most impressive young people with whom I have worked in 43 years."

Not only is Harrison involved in his high-school choral program, but he was also selected to be a member of the Audition Choir, a select group of performers. Harrison is also active in his school's Theatre program, having served in lead roles in *Beauty and the Beast* and many other school productions.

Impressively, Harrison was selected to the U.S. National Development Sled Hockey Team at the age of 15, with the goal of raising awareness for the teams and leagues that are available for others with disabilities so they can benefit from the sport, too.

In addition, Harrison is very active in his community, and many children with disabilities know who he is and look up to him. Whether serving as a student elder, working with the youth group, or performing a solo, his involvement and the quality of everything he does serve as an inspiration to others.

Next year, Harrison will be starting college and plans to pursue a career in Occupational Therapy.



CEC was proud to honor Harrison with this award in the Transition category at the Yes I Can Award Ceremony on February 7, 2020, in Portland, Ore., as part of the CEC 2020 Convention & Expo. The Yes I Can program recognizes the accomplishments of 12 students with exceptionalities in six categories: Academics, Arts, School & Community Activities, Self-Advocacy, Technology, and Transition.

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The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the educational success of children and youth with exceptionalities that accomplishes its mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. Learn more about CEC at [cec.sped.org](http://cec.sped.org).

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