

New York Student Honored With International Award

Arlington, Va., March 1, 2020 — In February, **Hunter Tobias** of Kings Park, NY, received the **2020 Yes I Can Award** from the **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**.



A tenth grader at Henry Viscardi School, Hunter has not let a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy prevent him from achieving independence in school and at home. Despite having impacted speech and limited use of his arms and hands due to significant stiffness, spasms, and ballistic movements, Hunter's physical limitations drive his quest to achieve, help others, and be a spokesperson for others with exceptionalities. Not only is Hunter an ambassador for increasing disability awareness in the local schools in his community, but he loves sports and has been part of his school's wheelchair basketball team since elementary school.

The Salutatorian of his eighth-grade class, Hunter ultimately aims to attend an Ivy League university.

Because his only consistent mode of access is through his head and his eyes, technology has opened up doors for Hunter and helps him express his creativity. Besides using his head array for driving his power wheelchair, Hunter uses assistive technology for communication and for writing. He uses his head movements and Bluetooth connectivity to type using an onscreen keyboard, and uses eye gaze technology for augmentative communication and access to his device. He has designed several paintings using Photoshop – and one of his designs was even chosen as the official logo for his school's t-shirt.

"Hunter is talented, patient, perseverant, has a big heart, and is always willing to lend a hand to his classmates, the staff at school, and to people in his community. He brings up the garbage pails for his elderly neighbors, walks the neighbor's dogs when they are away, and collects backpacks for our school's fundraiser for the homeless," says nominator Dr. Jennifer Noronha, an Occupational Therapist who works with Hunter and other students at Henry Viscardi School. "I have never heard Hunter complain about things he is unable to do, and I sometimes forget that he has such severe limitations. He is the epitome of compassion, selflessness, and humility. I feel privileged to know him and to be part of his journey."

CEC is proud to honor Hunter with this award in the Academics category. He received the award at the Yes I Can Award Ceremony on February 7, 2020, at the Oregon Convention Center 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.

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.

###