

## Spice Citizenship Awards – The Pride of Derwentside

YOUNG people across Derwentside have been honoured for their outstanding citizenship both at school and in their local communities at a glittering awards ceremony. EMMA ANDREWS was there to meet the pride of Derwentside.

POISED, super-confident and determined to make a difference, Amy Sharafi is an inspirational role model to teenagers everywhere.

The 18-year-old from The Grove in Consett is on a mission to educate her peers about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. And when she speaks, teenagers across the district stop to listen, because Amy is speaking from heartfelt personal experience.

Amy was just 12 when she started binge drinking and taking drugs. She found the vital support she needed to turn her life around when a hostel worker referred her for specialist help. Now she's working for the OutThere Project in Gilesgate, Durham, a peer led drugs education project working with 13-25 year olds.

"Just a few years ago I was struggling to find any meaning in my life," said Amy. "Drugs and alcohol were all that mattered. "Now I regularly stand up in front of a crowded room to talk about my experience in the hope that it will help others. I have spoken to trainee police officers at Akley Heads Police Headquarters in Durham and made announcements in nightclubs to warn people about the dangers of spiked drinks."

Amy was nominated by project worker Jo Hall, 35, whose brother Ian, 27, a reformed drugs addict, was killed in a car, driven by a friend on drugs.



### The winners of this year's SPICE Citizenship Awards are as follows:

- ★ Amanda Conway
- ★ Amy Sharafi
- ★ Angela Palmer
- ★ Becky Holt
- ★ Cantona Price
- ★ Chloe Coates
- ★ Colin Petre
- ★ David McElhone
- ★ David Montgomery
- ★ David Roberts
- ★ Dean Bishop
- ★ Dean Steventon
- ★ Emily Moon
- ★ Emma Pearce
- ★ Hazel Lowdon
- ★ Jade Pritchard
- ★ Jade Smith
- ★ James Craig
- ★ Jamie Ross
- ★ Jodie Listo
- ★ Jill Bowen
- ★ Karl Farrell
- ★ Kieren Cassidy
- ★ Kieren Mennell
- ★ Liam Parry
- ★ Mark Maughan
- ★ Mark Murphy
- ★ Martin Unwin
- ★ Natasha Lock
- ★ Natasha Wilson
- ★ Nikki Jordan
- ★ Paul Kendall
- ★ Phillip Jewitt
- ★ Philip Marshall
- ★ Rachel Grace Greener
- ★ Rachel Logan
- ★ Rebekkah Robson
- ★ Richard Oliver
- ★ Ryan Cranney
- ★ Sam Carlin
- ★ Sean Parry
- ★ Selina Martin
- ★ Sheree Shotton
- ★ Stefan Jansen
- ★ Stephanie Atherton
- ★ Steven Dixon
- ★ The Stanley Crew for their film 'Wasted'
- ★ Thomas Calvert
- ★ Yasmin Snaith
- ★ Zara Rusling

“Amy is just amazing,” said Jo. “She has come so far – and she is such an inspiration. We are all very proud of her.”

Amy was one of more than 50 young people to be honoured for their outstanding citizenship at a special awards ceremony at Derwent Manor near Consett this week.

The ceremony was organised by Derwentside District Council’s SPICE project which was launched in 2001 with the aim of involving young people in democracy and community issues.

Since then more than 9,000 young people and 40 schools have been involved in the pioneering programme which won the Government’s prestigious Beacon award for its work with “positive youth engagement”.

A total of 52 award winners aged from seven to 18 were presented with certificates celebrating their achievements – but there was also a special presentation to a handful of young people in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the community.

These included seven-year-old Zara Rusling, a pupil at Leadgate Infant School, who was nominated by her Head Teacher Margaret Jones for her “exceptionally caring” attitude towards other pupils.

Zara, who lost both her Grandmother and Great Grandmother to cancer last year, earned praise for her tireless and selfless support of others.

“Zara always notices when others aren’t happy – and she’s first to offer support and friendship,” said Mrs Jones. “She’s an amazing little girl.”

Zara’s proud parents Christopher, Diane and brother Lewis, six, were all at Derwent Manor to see Zara accept her award, dressed in a brand new dress for the momentous occasion.

“We’ve had a very difficult year but Zara has kept us all going,” said Christopher. “Words cannot do justice to how incredibly proud we are of her.”

For Zara, it is all very simple. “I just like making people happy.”



It's a similar story for 14-year-old Kieren Mennell who was singled out for his work with the Green Corridor's Kids Co-op and the "Say" Stanley Active Youth project.



"He's a total star," said youth participation worker Claire Everett, 29.

"He just cannot do enough. He organises activities, runs the tuck shop, helps welcome new members and ensures everyone is happy. And he's so quiet and unassuming. He's a lovely lad."

Sixth former Mark Maughan also earned praise for his work with young people – both at school and at the Burnside and Craghead Youth Clubs where he teaches football, cricket and rugby.

"Kids have a lot of stresses in their lives," said Mark, 17, who is a pupil at St Bede's in Lanchester. "But at the youth club they can relax and have fun." Mark's parents Helen and Ernie have always known their son is a little bit special.

"He is just fantastic," said Helen. "Everyone who meets Mark remembers him. He just loves helping others."

For Chair of the District Council, Olga Milburn, who was on hand to present some of the prizes, the commitment and enthusiasm of the young award-winners is quite simply breathtaking.

"Each and every young person here tonight has done something extraordinary, whether it's caring for fellow pupils at school or educating hundreds of others against the dangers of drugs. And they all deserve our praise and respect.

"They are an inspiration to us all."

**For more information contact Darren Howell on 01207 218011.**

***Issued on behalf of Derwentside District Council by Emma Andrews on  
(01661) 852 644.***