

Russell Kane Presents Student Winners at National Library Awards Ceremony

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Yesterday, at an Awards ceremony in London, a primary school student from Rotherfield Primary School, London and a secondary school student from Oaks Park High School, London were named **UK Pupil Library Assistant of the Year**. Comedian and author Russell Kane presented the awards, which were organised by the School Library Association (SLA) and the CILIP School Libraries Group (SLG).

The UK Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award, now in its 12th year supported by Authors Aloud UK and Pearson, recognises the contribution made by pupils who volunteer in their school libraries. 11 finalists attended the ceremony, along with their school librarians and families, each having been nominated by their librarians for outstanding work. Over 20 authors were also there to celebrate the achievements of these inspiring students.

Darcie Farrell from Rotherfield Primary School, in London, was awarded the primary school accolade. The Judges were impressed with the impact Darcie has made on the reading ethos within her school community and how being a pupil library assistant has developed her personal skills and self-confidence.

The secondary school winner was Micah Ashford from Oaks Park High School, London. The Judges felt that Micah's kind and empathetic approach reflected the school library's inclusive culture, and his work within and advocacy of the library to the whole school community has resulted in greater recognition of its value and benefits.

Russell Kane, Guest Speaker at the event, said: "I was honoured to present the Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award to these deserving students, who are clearly going above and beyond to make their libraries special. Reading unlocks so many opportunities, not only helping to achieve better school results, but also supporting wellbeing and empathy. Having a haven at school that gives you the chance to fall in love with reading can't be taken for granted, so we all need to champion school libraries and the superstars that work in them."

Darcie Farrell, Year 5, from Rotherfield Primary School said: "I feel very happy about winning the award. I was shocked when I won because I did not think I would win! I feel proud of myself because it is an amazing achievement. I enjoy working in the library because we get to spend time with little kids helping them to read. Also, I get to do something I like with all of my friends who are also in the library team. The library is important to the children at Rotherfield because we have some children who don't like loud noises and the library is quiet and peaceful and they can come and read in peace. It is a safe space for everyone. It has helped children who don't have books at home to read. The library team has helped young children learn to read and helped them love reading."

Micah Ashford, Year 9, Oaks Park High School said: "This award means a lot to me. I was very excited to be nominated - happiness, excitement, just all the positive emotions came over me all at once. I love working in the library because it allows me to access lots of knowledge and books, to meet new people and to connect with them and that's very important because it develops friendship, kindness and compassion. My favourite thing about my school library is that it's a nice space to meet new people. The library is a safe space and happy place in school."

Guest speaker, author and comedian, **Russell Kane** gave a passionate speech about the positive impact access to a library had on his childhood. He said: "Growing up, we didn't have books at home. All that was on the shelf was the scuba diving manual for my Dad and the microwave cookbook for my Mum. I wasn't one of those children who was from a poor household but given lots of books - there were no books. Were it not for the library I would have been in deep, deep trouble. It was an oasis, where I can still feel the excitement in my belly of wandering in when I was younger. I could hang out with the picture books and enjoy non-fiction - the whole world was there."

Speaking about the dangers social media poses for young people today, Russell emphasised the importance of school libraries in guiding children and teens back to books as a way of exploring and understanding the world, instead of absorbing content delivered to them via a damaging algorithm. He was unequivocal in his support for school libraries and belief that they should be available to everyone.

Victoria Dilly, CEO at the SLA, said: "These Awards winners, and all the finalists, highlight just how important libraries are to the school community, celebrating the invaluable contribution young people make through the school library. Pupil Librarian programmes offer the opportunity to develop life skills, support well-being and of course, encourage reading. Yet libraries are not a statutory requirement and one in ten schools don't have a library at all. With children's reading for pleasure at an all-time low, the role of the school library has never been more important in helping more children to discover the joy of reading. The SLA works with schools to build an inclusive, supportive and engaging reading communities to ensure all pupils can reap the benefits and reach their full potential."

Barbara Band, Chair of the PLAA Judging Panel, said: "Many students willingly volunteer their time to support their school libraries. While this assistance allows librarians to focus on strategic responsibilities, it also provides students with valuable skills, boosts their self-confidence, and helps them find a sense of belonging within the school. These dedicated young people are truly inspiring, it is a joy to hear about their contributions and passion for their school libraries, and I am delighted we can recognise their achievements and celebrate them at these awards."

Caroline Roche, Chair at CILIP SLG said: "SLG has always supported this Award, celebrating both the pupils and their librarians - pupils who add a unique value to every library. Well done to everyone nominated, and their librarians as well."

Chantel Carpenter, Director of Marketing at Pearson said: "We're thrilled to once again host the Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Awards and recognise the role that libraries play in supporting schools to unlock knowledge, nurture empathy and value diverse voices. Darcie and Micah have shown fantastic passion and commitment to their school library and ensuring their peers reap the same benefits they have."

We would like to congratulate every child who was nominated. You should be extremely proud of what you have achieved."

Annie Everall, Director of Authors Aloud UK, said: "Pupil library assistants and their school librarians are often the unsung heroes in schools. However, they give crucial help and support to their fellow students as well as promoting and inspiring reading for pleasure and demonstrating the vital role that school libraries play within the school community. The work these young people do is invaluable and the impact this has on their own personal development and confidence is immeasurable. It is such a joy to see these pupils recognised by the Pupil Library Assistant Awards and Authors Aloud UK are proud to be a sponsor of them. Micah and Darcie are both very worthy winners, but huge congratulations should be given to all the finalists for the brilliant work they do."

At the Awards ceremony there was a speech from last year's winner, Kotryna Kazlauskaitė from St Hilda's Church of England High School in Liverpool, who talked about the positive impact winning the award had for her. There was also a performance from the Sutherland Singers of Ibstock Place School. After the ceremony, all pupils and their accompanying family members were gifted a bag of books and treated to a book signing with the many authors attending.

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