

Amanda Wells, 2021 Pride Award Honoree: Social Change Starts With Your Community and Neighbors

Amanda Wells, a 2021 graduate of Rutgers' School of Arts and Sciences, believes that individual action is a critical form of social change. The Livingston Alumni Association (LAA) of Rutgers University-New Brunswick has honored Wells as one of two recipients of the Riki Jacobs Livingston Pride Award for 2021. ☒

"My experiences with community service, whether I have been a person in need or a person able to help, have become cornerstones of my development and have created a deep desire to enact social change within me," she wrote in her Pride Award essay. "My career interests are a reflection of this, and I am excited to continue to repay my community and to extend social change throughout my education, career, and personal life."

Wells has enacted individual change as a volunteer with Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA). Within FORA, she tutored a recently arrived 15-year-old refugee student to improve his literacy and English communication skills, including slang that he can use with his friends.

"... I believe that social change extends past formal roles and organizations, and is critically shaped by the way that we interact with our community and neighbors on a daily basis," Wells said. "Small, direct change is often overlooked, but because I have witnessed its resonant effects in my own life, I will always think of individual contact as one of the most critical forms of social change."

"(The student) and I often bond over our younger sisters, and I have found that he is particularly good at remembering new vocabulary words that he can use to tease her. Our work together has been incredibly valuable to me, as I have been able to watch him grow directly as a student. I see him every day, and every day I notice as he grows more comfortable speaking in English, confident in communicating with his friends, and willing to share his thoughts with me."

In March 2020, when much of society shut down, Wells joined a pandemic response team as a lead coordinating volunteer and a founding member. "I am particularly proud of our ability to respond to the educational needs of low-income families with young children, as we provided over 100 laptops to families in need. We also helped to connect these families to books, learning kits, and free childcare for essential workers unable to be at home during the day."

Wells majored in English, Spanish, and Political Science as a Rutgers student.

As an intern in a South American government office, she assisted full-time governmental workers to understand barriers to education for adolescents, visiting schools and homes to talk with students and parents.

At Rutgers, Wells was a lead tutor with the Plangere Writing Center for three years. While students were home during the pandemic, Wells found herself helping her peers not only with writing, but in coping with isolation, adapting to online courses, and living at home.

She also served as president of the Rutgers Veg Society, a group for vegan, vegetarian, and veg-curious students. The Veg Society has advocated for expanded food options in Rutgers dining halls as well as more accessible food labels for students with allergies and dietary needs. While students were home, the Veg Society held online parties, cooking nights, and trivia games, and encouraged students to share vegan statistics in their hometowns.