

2025 Scholarship Essay Award Winner: Wesley Van Leer

When I was in elementary school, during the summers, every so often my mother would take me to the Children's Room, where we would play some educational games together and I would choose some books to check out. I fondly remember these days, as even though it was essentially more school during the summer, the friendly and welcoming atmosphere of the library made it much more fun than school was. Now that I work in the Children's Room, I try to keep that environment alive by being proactive and helpful with all patrons, even the parents.

Later on, in my middle school years, I played Dungeons and Dragons in the Teen Room on alternating Tuesdays. Not only did this spark a lifelong passion in me, it also was one of the only times I had social interaction outside my classes in school. I was very shy, and was essentially forced to get to know a bunch of strangers for a few hours every other week. Although it may not seem like much looking at it from an adult perspective, for an adolescent me, those were some of the most important and most enjoyable hours of my life. Without that experience, I would be much more anxious around strangers today.

During high school, the library has become an even larger part of my life. Not only do I work in the Children's Room, but it also made my senior project possible. Director Chin was kind enough to let me use the gallery upstairs to display the photography show that I curated. It would have been far more difficult to find a different location, and the ease of reserving the space allowed me to focus on other aspects of the project and make it as good as it could be. Thanks to the library, I was able to pass the project with flying colors, even attaining the Honors Distinction. The library did not save my life. Without it, I would have been an ordinary child and grown into an ordinary adult. However, having had the library as an important facet of my life as long as I can remember,

I can say with confidence that the Barrington Public Library has been integral to my development as a person, having given me a safe space to learn and enrich myself in ways that I would never be able to otherwise. For that, I am eternally grateful.