



**Youth Afterschool Ambassador Program**  
**A Project of the Afterschool Alliance**

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**Minnie Howard Student One of Nine in Country to Serve as a Youth  
Afterschool Ambassador for 2021/2022**

*Belen Perez Will Work to Raise Awareness About Importance and Value of  
Afterschool Programs*

Washington, D.C. -- The Afterschool Alliance announced today that Belen Perez, a student at the Community Lodgings Afterschool Program and at Minnie Howard, is serving in its 2021/2022 class of Youth Afterschool Ambassadors. Perez is one of just nine students from across the country selected for the honor. She was chosen on the basis of her essay in a competition held earlier this year.

The nine Youth Ambassadors promote the value of afterschool programs by sharing their experiences in these programs and their views about the role afterschool programs play in their communities. They write for the [Afterschool Snack](#), the Afterschool Alliance blog, about the importance of afterschool programs. Several Youth Ambassadors, including Perez, spoke at a National Youth Town Hall for *Lights On Afterschool*, the only national rally for afterschool programs, on October 28. The Youth Ambassadors will also connect with members of Congress and their aides as part of the Afterschool for All Challenge next spring.

“We are delighted that Belen is part of this year’s class of Youth Afterschool Ambassadors,” said Jodi Grant, Afterschool Alliance Executive Director. “She has powerful personal experience that speaks to the importance of afterschool programs in her life and the lives of other youth. As the pandemic continues disrupting the lives of so many young people, their schools and communities, it is especially important that we continue to share the benefits these essential programs provide. Afterschool programs keep students safe, inspire them to learn, provide peace of mind to working parents, and also help children re-engage and recover during this difficult

time. But too many young people don't have a program available to them. Belen will do a terrific job spreading the word about the need for more support for afterschool programs.”

“I’m thrilled to be a Youth Afterschool Ambassador,” Perez said. “Since I joined in third grade, the Community Lodgings afterschool program has been an essential source of support for me. When the pandemic hit and schools went remote, I struggled because I didn’t have WiFi at home. My afterschool program became a place where I could access free WiFi and get help with my schoolwork, enabling me to earn straight As. I’ve felt very isolated during the pandemic, but Community Lodgings has continued to provide socially-distanced activities including dance lessons, STEM, a drone program, and art classes, helping me stay connected to my friends while learning new things. I’m excited to advocate for afterschool programs as a Youth Afterschool Ambassador, because I know how important the support they provide is for students like me.”

The nine Youth Afterschool Ambassadors in this class come from California, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New York, Illinois, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. They are:

- **Kyla Anderson**, from East St. Louis, Illinois’ Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East Saint Louis Charter High School’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers Afterschool Program, age 17
- **Brock Brewer**, from Kelso, Washington’s Youth And Family Link Afterschool Program, age 16
- **Kaiya Jones**, from Ellicott City, Maryland’s Howard County Library System Teen Advisory Board Afterschool Program, age 15
- **Juliana Montell**, from Gardiner, Maine’s Boys & Girls Clubs of Kennebec Valley Afterschool Program, age 16
- **Belen Perez**, from Alexandria, Virginia’s Community Lodgings Afterschool Program, age 14
- **Naomi Porter**, from Los Angeles, California’s Boys & Girls Club at LA Harbor EntrepreYOUership Afterschool Program , age 16
- **Noah Shaw**, from Murray, Utah’s Miller Family Boys & Girls Club Afterschool Program, age [AGE]
- **Ramaya Thomas**, from Dallas, Georgia’s VOXATL Afterschool Program, age 17
- **Zhonghui Zheng**, from New York, New York’s Global Kids Afterschool Program, age 17

The most recent [America After 3PM household survey](#) of more than 31,000 families, commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, finds that for every child in an afterschool program in the United States, three more are waiting to get in. The families of 24.6 million children — more than ever before — are unable to access a program. Many report cost as a barrier. There are significant inequities, with Black and Latinx children unable to access the afterschool programs

their parents want for them.

A large and powerful body of evidence demonstrates improvements in grades, school attendance, behavior and more among children who participate in afterschool programs. Researchers have also found that students in afterschool programs are more engaged in school and excited about learning and develop critical work and life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and communications.

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*The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)*

*Community Lodgings' mission is to lift families from homelessness and instability to independence and self-sufficiency through transitional housing, affordable housing and youth education programs.*