

# Tanya Manoj Awarded Aspire2STEAM Scholarship Sponsored by Jean O’Neill and Bennie Jean Schladoer O’Neill

*Manoj, teenage marketing technologist and rising freshman at Cornell University, helps disadvantaged students gain greater access to education opportunities*

DES MOINES, IA, UNITED STATES, September 2, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- “What intrigued us about Tanya Manoj is her passion and aptitude for using marketing technology to solve the problems she sees around her,” said Cheryl O’Donoghue, CEO at [Aspire2STEAM.org](https://www.aspire2steam.org). “And she’s already learned a powerful lesson about impact—if you want to make the world a better place, be persistent. If you keep pressing on, especially through those low points when you’re inclined to give up, believe in your work and you will enrich and elevate others one life at a time.”



Tanya Manoj, Aspire2STEAM scholarship recipient

Tanya is the third Aspire2STEAM scholar whose “ASPIRER” scholarship was sponsored by Jean O’Neill, an award-winning leader in the technology channel, and Jean’s mother Bennie Jean Schladoer O’Neill who passed earlier this year at the age of 87.

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*Tanya Manoj, Aspire2STEAM scholarship recipient*

“My mother was an excellent student and set to graduate second in her high school class until she started tutoring a fellow student in exchange for the use of his typewriter,” said Jean O’Neill. “She ended her senior year as the third top graduate and the classmate she tutored came in second. My mother cared deeply about helping others overcome education barriers in her own way, just like

Tanya. And she did get to use that typewriter!”

In tenth grade, Tanya stumbled across RoundPier, a company that created a platform for students to connect and get support in achieving their post-high-school education goals. Drawn to RoundPier’s focus on supporting diverse students, she began an internship with them and worked closely with the company’s founders to reach high school students worldwide. What she discovered was that many high school students lacked access to business training and education, and she wanted to help. With her supervisor’s support she identified students in need of opportunities and launched the RoundPier Freelancer Initiative, a program that connects students to online learning experiences at nonprofits.

After her inspiring work with RoundPier and having experienced the power of using marketing technology to help students access educational opportunities, at age 16, Tanya founded Breaking Book Barriers—an education equity organization. Breaking Book Barriers’ mission is to provide students free SAT test prep books and other materials to ensure they have the resources to succeed on standardized testing. Tanya built a technology platform to source book donations, attract students in need of testing support, as well as build a team of student volunteers to help with graphic design, social media, and outreach.

At first, student book requests far outpaced book donations and Tanya nearly closed her business operation. Through dogged persistence and outreach, she slowly started to get more and more book donations. “One day, I received an email thanking me for developing the project and explaining how receiving a book helped the student,” said Tanya. “That was when I realized that beyond the number of books donated, the real value of Breaking Book Barriers lies in the fact that it impacts real people and is a sustainable system that can continue year after year. I’m excited to take this project with me to college and continue the book exchange.”

Tanya experienced another breakthrough that came through staying the course. At the start of her freshman year, she was looking for an extracurricular activity. She was on her way to her first student council meeting until she accidentally walked into the machine shop where the school’s robotics club had gathered...and was hooked. “No one thought I’d stick around for long, as my ineptitude with power tools and discomfort being one of only three female team members quickly showed,” said Tanya.



Tanya Manoj, rising freshman at Cornell University

Tanya stayed with the robotics team for three years. Rather than giving up, especially during those first months, she found a unique way to contribute using her business and team-building skills and served as Business President for the group. She helped the team win multiple awards for community service; led trainings on financial management, grant writing and QuickBooks accounting; and organized “venture style” pitches and secured funding from companies including Endeavor Robotics, Amazon Robotics, and Cloud Health Technologies. And she looked for ways that each team member could contribute using their talents. She leveraged the discomfort she had experienced when she first joined the club to ensure that everyone felt supported.

“Through my time on the robotics team, I learned to see past surface-level interests in favor of using shared values to evaluate my fit within a diverse group,” said Tanya. “Though my teammates and I were outwardly different, we were brought together by our passion for creation, whether it was robots or team bonding initiatives. And I learned the value of self-determination, and what you can create when you make it a priority.”

ABOUT...

Aspire2STEAM.org (formerly known as Mission Sisters Who Work) is a charitable 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We provide [scholarships](#) and mentoring to young women and girls who are working hard— aspiring—to achieve careers that require education in science, tech, engineering, the arts or math...and they could really use a hand up over the incredible barriers of student debt and rising education costs, and the real, ever-present opportunity barriers that still keep them out of most male-dominated industries. These young women are doing their part, let's help them by doing ours.

[Donate now](#). Your kindness is a catalyst for change and empowerment for the young women and girls we serve.

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