



IN PRESS RELEASES

TAGS NAA SAA TOP WINNER

VALERIA PARADISO WINS LEARNING ALLY NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Woodside resident and Hunter College student
proves blindness is no obstacle to educational
SUCCESS

PRINCETON, NJ – Learning Ally, a 66-year-old nonprofit serving individuals with learning and visual disabilities, has bestowed its highest award to **Valeria Paradiso** of Woodside, NY.

Paradiso is one of six students from across the U.S. who will receive cash awards and travel with their families to be honored at Learning Ally’s National Gala celebration in Washington, DC next April.

At a young age, Paradiso lost her sight due to retinal blastoma. She had always possessed a love of reading and found herself suddenly unable to access printed books. To her relief, she discovered that she could continue to enjoy literature by listening to audiobooks from Learning Ally. “As I struggled to gain my independence after losing my sight, the books I read enabled me to travel all over the world without ever leaving my house.”

Fourteen years later, Paradiso is an ambitious senior at Hunter College in New York City with a double major in psychology and honors studies. After completing a dual program in

general and special education, she plans to become a teacher of the blind and visually impaired. She hopes to pass on her love of books to fellow students with disabilities. "I'm excited to enter a field where I'll be in a position to help individuals in circumstances similar to my own," she says.

Although blindness has certainly been an obstacle, Paradiso believes it has made her a more motivated person. "Instead of slowing me down, my blindness has made me work that much harder. As a cancer survivor and member of the blind community, my goal is to show students that it can be a mere inconvenience."

About the National Achievement Awards

Since 1959, Learning Ally has honored exceptional students who are blind or visually impaired through its privately endowed Mary P. Oenslager Scholastic Achievement Awards (SAA) for college seniors and beyond. Hundreds of students apply for these prestigious awards each year and are selected by committees of Learning Ally volunteers, board members, parents, educators, donors and staff. Students are recognized for their academic excellence, leadership, and service to others; each award winner has a long list of honors and accomplishments, and has graduated with a GPA above 3.0, with most near the 4.0 mark; and they have thrived on their education paths thanks in part to their use of accessible educational content and assistive technology provided by Learning Ally. **For information about applying for Learning Ally's National Achievement awards, visit <http://NAA.LearningAlly.org/apply>.**

About Learning Ally

Founded in 1948, Learning Ally helps K-12, college and graduate students, veterans and lifelong learners – all of whom read and learn differently due to blindness, visual impairment, dyslexia, or other learning disabilities. Through its support programs and audiobooks, Learning Ally enables families and teachers to help students thrive and succeed. The organization provides support to parents and students through events, webinars, personal consultations and other tools; and integrated learning management systems and professional development for teachers. In addition, Learning Ally's collection of more than 80,000 human-narrated audio textbooks and literature titles can be downloaded on mainstream smartphones and tablets, and is the largest of its kind in the world. Several thousand volunteers help to produce the educational materials, which students rely on to achieve academic and professional success. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, Learning Ally is partially funded by grants from state and local education programs, and the generous contributions of individuals, foundations and corporations. For more information, visit <http://LearningAlly.org>.