

Gateway to the Future 2025-2026 National Youth Activities Ambassador Shannon Stanley

I just want to say how honored I am to represent the VFW Auxiliary in the Program that ignited my inner flame in this organization. The Youth Activities Program is a way to reach our younger families, not only in our Posts, but outside of our Posts. I am a firm believer that our youth is the gateway to increasing our Membership for the future, ensuring our Flag and patriotic holidays will be preserved for the future, continuing respect for our veterans and military and with the bonus that, the Youth Activities Program is one of our Programs that can be tied into almost every other Program in this organization.

My focal points for this year are as follows:

- **Reading Buddies:** Reading Buddies is a little different than previous years because we changed the rules. Any Auxiliary member can be a Reading Buddy, which is you listening to our children read. Please continue to promote and use the book lists available on MALTA, as well as donating books to local schools and libraries. Don't forget to talk to the librarian or principal when you make the donation to see if you can lend a hand to some of our struggling readers. I also encourage hosting a Reading Buddy event at the Post on a cold day. What goes better together than a hot chocolate and a good book on a cold day. Just remember to get all the proper waivers signed; this is also a way to show our community that we are more than a canteen.
- **Youth Groups:** Working with our youth brings me an immense amount of joy and I know that we can make a difference in the life of a child. We can show them what it means to be a good person and how to give back to the community, and we can guarantee that one day they will remember the VFW Auxiliary and will want to be a part of something special. Start calling your local schools or after school program leaders to see where you can give an assist for the win.
- **Illustrating America:** The Illustrating America Contest is once again a gateway to our communities. Through our youth we can show their parents and families what we do for our veterans, military, community and families. This is also a terrific way to introduce our artists to our Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest, just another way to tie two great initiatives together. Please make sure that the student's information is on the back of the artwork and to read and follow the rules. All the information can be found on the Member Resources page in MALTA.
- **Youth Acts of Kindness Certificates:** Please use the NEW Youth Acts of Kindness Certificate to show our youth that good deeds do not go unnoticed. Once again reach out to your local schools or after school youth leaders and let them know that you are looking for students that go out of their way to be kind and helpful, and ask if you can present the new citation at the school/after school awards program. Each child is like a seashell, beautiful and unique and we have the ability to help them see that their kindness does matter.

Today's youth is the future of our Auxiliary and will be the ones that will keep what we stand for alive for our future military and veterans. Let's get out there and make our mark for the future and always, *"Be Excellent to one another."*