

Pass It On®...

The Smallest Stars Shine the Brightest.

In a world seemingly crowded with adults, young people are doing amazing things to save our planet, our communities and our individual health. The 2025 Barron Prize for Young Heroes features a remarkable cast of overachievers, including Aadi Kulkarni from New Hampshire. Aadi pairs tech-savvy young people with senior citizens in his community to foster intergenerational relationships that build connections to benefit both.

Technology has been the great divider in many communities. Innovations have happened so fast that the “old way” of doing things from 20 years ago now feels like a centuries-wide gap.

As a result, senior citizens sometimes become sequestered because of disparities in technology and the language around how it is used. Daily banking, neighborhood communication and shopping have become more difficult for those who grew up relying on a checkbook and a postal address. Even entertainment is complicated with subscriptions and services.

To some octogenarians, it feels like the planet has been taken over by space aliens who speak a completely different language. And many youths haven’t realized that what’s missing from their life experience is a rich connection to the past.

During the pandemic, young Aadi Kulkarni watched his grandmother struggle to join family Zoom calls, open attachments and fill out online medical forms. It was more than staying connected in an online world; Kulkarni realized an entire generation struggled with diminishing dignity and confidence, becoming increasingly isolated. He also wanted his own generation to have the same type of respectful relationship he had with his grandmother.

“What if,” he thought, “students like me, who grew up with technology, could help seniors like her feel less left behind?”

So he founded TechPals.

Kulkarni began with a few friends and a handful of seniors at the local library. They started by teaching the basics of smartphones. What he thought would be a few sessions blossomed into regularly

scheduled events. Seniors brought their friends. Kulkarni recruited more friends. He coded a central website to manage volunteer signups.

Classes expanded to help seniors develop texting skills, use FaceTime, and, most importantly, recognize online scams. To date, Kulkarni and TechPals have held over 150 hands-on workshops at libraries, senior centers and retirement homes, in addition to offering online training sessions. More than 5,000 seniors have benefited.

“I’ve learned that social impact doesn’t have to require millions of dollars or a massive platform,” says Kulkarni. “Sometimes, it starts with a few students, a library room and the courage to show up.”

Digital literacy crosses the divide to help every generation access the amazing new world technology has delivered to our living rooms. But technology is best when added to face-to-face relationships — like that created when a seasoned grandmother connects with a young grandson and both are eager to learn from each other.

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