



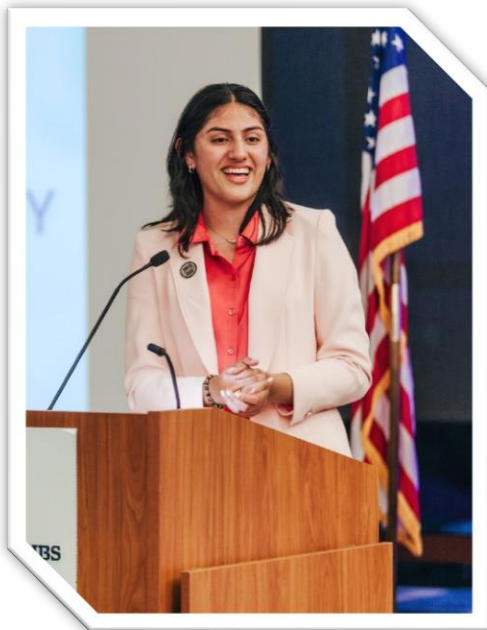
# 2025 NEW JERSEY Youth OF THE Year MAY 13, 2025

5:30pm Reception & 7pm Award Ceremony + Montclair State University



## Alexandra Pereira

### 2024 New Jersey State Youth of the Year *Boys & Girls Clubs of Lower Bergen County*



#### **Alexandra Pereira's extracurricular schedule isn't slowing down one bit.**

In an exclusive interview, the 2024 New Jersey Youth of the Year winner Alex P. spoke with the Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey about her busy school curriculum and what she's learned from the Boys & Girls Club in Lodi since joining it three years ago. "I came to Boys & Girls Club when I was about 13 because I needed volunteer hours for the National Junior Honor Society," Pereira shared. However, she ended up staying with the program "because I really enjoyed working with children and surrounding myself with fellow teens that I did end up meeting. And so I found a sense of community, which really helped me grow into who I am today."

This schedule, Alex added, extends to her role as President of the Keystone Club, an outreach program dedicated to career growth and community outreach for teenagers considering their futures. Such a job comes with its list of unexpected hurdles, with Alex admitting "my advisor had a lot of stuff going on, so I had to step up and I always ran the meetings. I always

made sure that everybody was on top of things." Yet she also touted the list of climate-focused events she and the Keystone Club organized, from teaching kids about protecting the environment to the importance of bees and pollination on ecosystems. Her adviser, Natalie, additionally praised a garden Alex helped create in Hackensack whose produce, surprisingly, is still growing.

For Alex, a core lesson she took away from Boys & Girls Club and Keystone Club – which greatly contributed to her Youth of the Year award – was learning the value of leadership. Being a part of this program, she explained, helped her grow in confidence and develop a set of values leaders must exhibit on the job to better the world around them. Some of these values included honesty and accountability, values she further applied to her tenures in Marching and Jazz Band and performance on the school varsity basketball team.

As for her future? Alex cited social work as a possible career path – specifically, an interest in child protective services – recognizing parallels between what those government offices can do for kids and what Boys & Girls Club offered her in terms of charting a better path forward. "I didn't feel like I had a voice when I came to the club. And working with children and giving them that voice is something that I really strive for, and I want to advocate for," she said. "I feel like that field, I'd primarily be successful at that."

## Ifesade Olowe

### 2024 New Jersey Military Youth of the Year *Fort Dix Youth Center*



**To understand what drives Sade Olowe, look to her drive to explore other cultures and philosophies.**

"I've been learning Korean since I was 13 -- kind of passively on and off, probably the most serious about it in the last three years. I've written some English-Korean and bilingual poetry since I was maybe about 15. But when I was in Korea last summer with my NJ Youth of the Year scholarship, it was my first time trying to write poetry completely in Korean," the 2024 New Jersey Military Youth of the Year winner told the Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey during an exclusive interview. Indeed, it has been a busy few months for Sade, going from the NJ Youth of the Year competition in May to the Northeast regional competition in New York City in June, then departing three days later for South Korea's Yonsei International Summer School program. For six weeks, she immersed herself in subjects like Korean Studies: Globalization, and Multiculturalism, all while growing closer to ideas that drive her as a Boys & Girls Club leader.

For Sade, an aspiring writer since childhood, it was her mother's teachings and immigrant family upbringing that instilled in her an interest in connecting "with people from a different world culture and kind of just expand my perspective." This was supercharged by her first contact with a BTS soundtrack at 12 years old, sparking a lifelong affair with the culture's language. Originally raised in Georgia, Sade later moved to the Dix Youth Center at Fort Dix with her mom, stepdad, and sister at 18, at one point being the only teenager consistently attending her youth center. Despite meeting a few 13 and 14-year-olds, it was the base's staff she ended up gravitating toward in terms of companionship and leadership.

As Sade recalled, "It happened that the three primary staff members, Linochska, Lauren, and Ms. Damaris – who served as my advisor for the New Jersey Military Youth of the Year – my dynamic relationship with her was actually the most important part of my time at the Youth Center." She found herself in awe of the staff's empathy, specifically recalling how several members stayed an hour past their shifts to help her overcome a panic attack. "I think that was a lot more impactful than anything because it would have still been nice to make friends my age, and it's something I've been working on because it's hard to make those connections in this area. But to have the mentorship and the familiar bond that was facilitated by those staff members, and being able to have their attention ended up being very transformative," she reflected.

Most importantly, Sade wants to be a leader. A leader who can recognize the strengths of people they work with to accomplish goals, inspire cooperation, and even know when to step aside so their collaborators can grow as leaders themselves.