



**THE ANTI-BULLYING
ADVOCATE**
Valerie Weisler
17, New City, New York



When she was younger, Valerie never imagined that one day—last October 23, to be exact—she'd be standing in front of a roomful of people at the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) Respect Awards to share her coming-out story. "I was a nobody at school," she says of her early teen years. "I was really shy. I was bullied and called a mute. Girls would leave notes in my locker telling me to commit suicide." Then during her freshman year, after consoling a classmate who was being picked on, she had a big idea: to create The Validation Project (thevalidationproject.com), a network that connects bullied teens with mentors who have similar passions. Together they work on community projects, like cooking meals for a homeless shelter or teaching dance at an orphanage. Her organization now has over 3,000 mentors in the US and in over 100 countries. (All it took to start? Twenty-five dollars of babysitting money to buy a Web domain and six hours to build a site.) "Through helping other people, I was able to turn the self-hate I felt to self-love," Valerie says. "I feel proud of myself. Every single one of us has something special."



THE LIFESAVER
Claire Wineland
18, Venice Beach, California

At birth, Claire was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis (CF), a life-threatening disease that damages her lungs and other organs. "When you have been through over 30 surgeries, everyone assumes your life is miserable—and I just got tired of that," Claire says. So she started a YouTube channel, *The Clarity Project*, which she uses to connect with other chronically ill teens and to cope with her challenges in a funny way—like joking about the perks of hospital life. "Room service! You can call up for chocolate pudding whenever you want!" But she's got a serious side, too. In 2011, she created Claire's Place Foundation (clairesplacefoundation.org), a nonprofit that provides grants for families to use for travel and housing expenses while a loved one is in the hospital because of cystic fibrosis. "Starting a foundation is a lot of work," says the high school grad. "Still, it's pretty special to help support someone with CF and remind them they can live life. Not just a life—but a wonderful one."



THE SPEED DEMON
Candace Hill
17, Conyers, Georgia



After running the 100 meters last year in a record-breaking 10.98 seconds, the high school junior officially became the Fastest Girl in the World. (Yes, the world!) "I'm still in shock about that label," Candace says. "When the news ran a story about how fast I was and I saw it on TV, I was like, 'Oh, wow. That's me!'" Her fellow runners, it seems, never doubted it. "The boys are

THE ACTIVIST
Amara Majeed
18, Baltimore, Maryland

To flip the script on how Muslim women are perceived, Amara started The Hijab Project (thehijabproject.org), a global initiative that encourages women of different backgrounds to wear the hijab (a headscarf worn by some females) and share their experiences around the world. "One of the things I've received thousands of stories from is how a security guard followed me because of how she looked." It's a feeling shared by many. "I've had a lot of University freshman experiences on campus. People look at my skin color, my hijab, my name, and they have a million preconceived notions about me. It's suffocating. So to hear how a woman's perspective has been changed is the most rewarding experience in the world."