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Most influential: Amber Lin, a Tarbut V'Torah leader, aspires to end Alzheimer's



High school student Amber Lin, 16, traveled with a group of Taiwanese physicians to Nepal, where she helped to provide free health checkups for Nepali citizens who lacked access to healthcare. Through this work, Amber noticed the prevalence of senior-aged patients and vowed to focus time and energy on helping this population in her local community. She founded the Anti-Aging Research Group, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to teach seniors how to reduce the negative effects of aging. She poses next to a picture taken while she was working with seniors in Nepal. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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She might not be a household name, but, down the road, she aspires to become one of Orange County's leading scientists. Amber Lin is a bright 16-year-old who wants to end Alzheimer's disease.

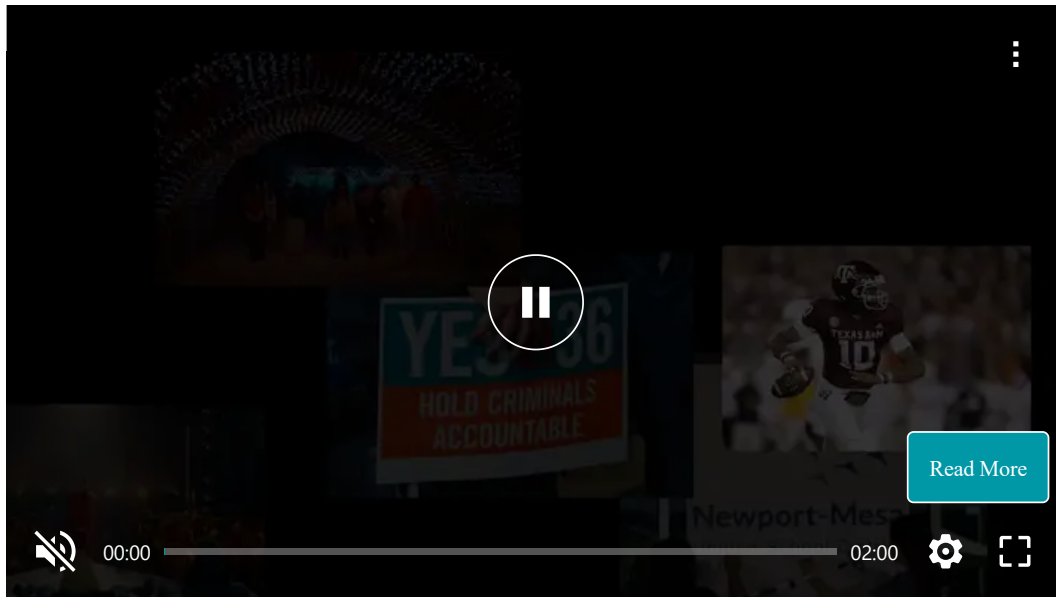
Her resume speaks for itself, but, after all, she is only a teenager. Her greatest accomplishments likely lie ahead.

Lin, a junior at Tarbut V'Torah in Irvine, has already performed piano at Carnegie Hall multiple times. She's won national literary awards for her poetry. And, she's conducted university-level lab research on Alzheimer's disease.

She's also made an impact in Orange County, playing piano at senior homes and founding a club committed to helping older adults learn healthy habits to slow the effects of aging. On campus, Lin helms TVT's literary club and started the school's first annual writing contest. Rabbi Stuart Light says Lin has elevated the school's academic and community service profiles.

"She's a shining light here," he said.

She also is, quietly, one of the hardest workers he knows. The two of them have bonded because Light's office is next to the TVT library, where, naturally, Lin is a frequent visitor.



"She comes in here, and she'll study in my office," Light said. "And through that time of studying, I've come to know her. I just love how her mind thinks. She is so curious, and we have great discussions all the time."

"Really, what I see is her love of doing things with excellence," Stuart added. "I just see a persistent ethic of not just getting the job done, but showing all of her colors through every



Amber Lin with the Anti-Aging Research Group at a senior center in Rancho Santa Margarita. They just finished giving a presentation on the benefits of a Mediterranean diet and played bingo with the seniors to review the presentation information. (Photo courtesy of Amber Lin)

One of those endeavors is the Anti-Aging Research Group, a community organization Lin founded with other teenagers to raise awareness among seniors about healthy aging habits.

The group, led by Lin, has started to lead workshops on that topic at Orange County senior homes.

"I get volunteers who call and want service hours from every high school and church around me," said Margie Nakanishi, a director at Park Terrace, a senior living community in Rancho Santa Margarita. "What made Amber's project extraordinary is that it was very interactive with our residents. She took it to the next level. She was very passionate."

At 16, Lin has already interned with a New York State University lab on aging, helping to conduct experiments on flies to measure how melatonin and estrogen might affect cognitive abilities. She's also done computational research, including 3D modeling, for related experiments. And, she's participated in a medical mission to Nepal.

Still, the mentors around Lin agree that it's not her scientific prowess that is most extraordinary but, rather, her sympathy.

Nakanishi noticed that quality when Lin interacted with Park Terrace residents.

"You can have a professional come in and talk about aging, but there's something about listening to younger kids that are in school who are studying this," Nakanishi said. "I feel like Amber's presentation was less of a lecture for our residents and more of an interaction with a younger generation. That's what made it special."

Of all her accomplishments, Lin said she is most proud of her community service.

Not coincidentally, the theme she came up with for her school's first annual writing competition is: "How does community shape people?"

Lin acknowledges that it's unusual for a teenager to impart advice on aging to a group of adults in the autumn of life. At least once, she said, a senior home resident has asked her why he should listen to her.

"Because I really do care," she said.

"Our group shares information with the elderly population, but, sometimes, just listening to their experiences is a very important part of the process," Lin said.

An only child, Lin was born in America to Taiwanese parents. Her mother, a banker, and her father, a businessman, raised her in Taiwan before moving the family to Orange County when Lin was in the third grade. English is her second language. She learned Mandarin first.

Lin's family is not religious, she said. Although she's enrolled at a Jewish high school, she attended an Episcopalian middle school, St. Margaret's in San Juan Capistrano.

"My parents put a lot of time, effort and money into moving to the United States for my education," Lin said.

Lin's family dynamics are the subject of her poetry. In various poems, Lin writes about her relationship with her mother with love and criticism and in profoundly emotional ways.

Lin says that, at times, she feels pressure from her parents, but also, that pressure comes from within her.

"I often look at other high schoolers' LinkedIn profiles," she said. "I look at all their competitions and all their perfect resumes. And, sometimes I am jealous, and I want to be like them."

"But, then, I feel like there's no need," she added. "Being perfect is not attainable, so you shouldn't strive for that. You should just strive for your personal goals, strive for your passions and listen to yourself."

Lin grounds herself at the piano bench, practicing for two hours a day after school.

"I use piano as a way to cope with the stress of daily life," she said.

Her favorite composer changes depending on what she's learning, she said. Recently, it has been Maurice Revel. Earlier this year, it might have been Johann Sebastian Bach. [Lin performed an excerpt from Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier" in the 2024 Charleston International Music Competition.](#)



High school student Amber Lin, 16, traveled with a group of Taiwanese physicians to Nepal, where she helped to provide free health checkups for Nepali citizens who lacked access to healthcare. Through this work, Amber noticed the prevalence of senior-aged patients and vowed to focus time and energy on helping this population in her local community. She founded the Anti-Aging Research Group, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to teach seniors how to reduce the negative effects of aging. With her Anti-Aging Research Group, Amber led the writing of the soon-to-be-published book "How Not to Grow Old," based on the latest scientific research on age-related diseases and how to prevent them. She holds a mock-up of the book in Irvine on Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

For all her literary and musical talents, Lin is steadfast in her commitment to becoming a doctor.

Even her devotion to science is rooted in empathy.

"My reason for becoming a doctor is to see people live happier and healthier," she said. "Besides that, I think, there's a problem in today's healthcare system in the United States. I think the healthcare system doesn't prioritize certain populations."

"For instance, I feel like Asian Americans sometimes don't get the most adequate care because maybe their doctors don't understand their backgrounds or diseases more targeted to that population," she added. "The same goes for Latinos and African Americans and other underprivileged populations. So, I think, one of my goals as a doctor in the future is to understand the background of my patients more and to use that information to treat them better and more accurately, so that they won't fall ill."

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