

For immediate release

Maren Johnson, of Watertown, SD, has been named the winner of the N.O.W. Youth Leadership Award awarded by the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN).

Johnson, who is the Student Ambassador for the Global Soap Project, will be given the award at the CEHN 2013 Annual Child Health Advocate Award Reception in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 17.

The award was created in 2012 to identify "a young person who deserved to be recognized for their exceptional environmental health leadership."

During the past three years, Johnson has created a network of about 130 hotels and more than 500 volunteers in four Upper Midwest States and two Canadian Provinces to collect used hotel soap for recycling through the Global Soap Project, which is headquartered in Atlanta, GA.

Johnson's network has collected about 25,000 pounds of soap, enough to make 100,000 bars of new soap, all of which will help vulnerable populations around the world.

The Global Soap Project was started in 2009 by Derreck Kayongo, a former refugee from Uganda, who now lives in the Atlanta area. Upon learning of the project in 2010, and the fact that over 2.4 million children worldwide die annually from disease that could be prevented by access to soap and clean water, Johnson recruited six hotels in her hometown to begin collecting used soap. Her network of participating hotels expanded rapidly and in 2011 Parade Magazine named her to its 15-member All America Service Team.

The Global Soap Project Board of Directors also in 2011 named her its student ambassador, tasking her to work with young people and promoting the project. In 2012, Youth Service America named her one of the 25 Most Influential and Powerful Young People in the World.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to be recognized by the Children's Environmental Health Network," Johnson said. "I've discovered there are thousands of volunteers eagerly looking to improve the health of children throughout the world and the Global Soap Project is one way we can make a difference. Solutions can be as nearby as our trash cans."

Other award winners to be honored at the Oct. 17 are the Science Award – Dr. Linda, Birnbaum, the Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the National Toxicology Program and the Policy Award – Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter.

Johnson is an incoming freshman at Belmont University in Nashville, TN, where she plans to pursue a doctorate in physical therapy.

The Children's Environmental Health Network is a national multi-disciplinary organization whose mission is to protect the developing child from environmental health hazards and promote a healthier environment.