Bethlehem resident Jennifer Rodriguez is only 18 years old but her life is already notable. She beat cancer at age 8. When her mother died of the disease when Rodriguez was 16, she didn't let it lead her astray like some other teens might have. Instead, Rodriguez continued achieving in school and actively volunteering as a tutor, at her church and with Relay for Life.

For her efforts, the Bethlehem Housing Authority on Wednesday honored Rodriguez with its annual Josefina A. Berrios Community Service Award. Not only is Rodriguez the award's youngest winner, she's also among the most deserving, authority Deputy Executive Director Mark Iampietro said. "Despite her personal setbacks and struggles, she remains optimistic," Iampietro said. "She maintained her status on the honor roll and continued to volunteer. She's an amazing girl, she really is."

The annual award is named after a former housing authority resident who spent most of her free time picking up litter and sprucing up her Lynfield neighborhood. Berrios died in 2000, and the authority started a community service award in her honor the year after. The award is presented every year on her birthday. Berrios family members attend every ceremony, and daughters Migdalia Berrios and Victoria Matos appeared especially moved this year.

Migdalia Berrios, who embraced Rodriguez in a long hug, said not only was she impressed with Rodriguez’s accomplishments but she felt connected because their mother also died of cancer. "This year's recipient is amazing. She's part of our future," Berrios said.

Harrison Bailey, principal of Liberty High School, where Rodriguez graduated in June, attended the award ceremony to help attest to Rodriguez's accomplishments. He said teachers repeatedly recommended Rodriguez when student leaders were needed. "When you hear her story, you're blown away by what a leader she is, what she's been able to accomplish," Bailey said. "Even in the face of great adversity, you can become something, you can make good decisions."

Rodriguez is currently a freshman at Kutztown University, where she is studying business management with a goal of owning her own business one day. She also was named a Bethlehem YWCA Teen of the Year in 2014. "I'm truly blessed to receive this award," she said Wednesday.