

From the very first meeting I attended, my Girl Scout experience was always centered around learning. As a Daisy, my troop leaders planned out hands-on activities for every petal badge we earned, typically a craft involving a new tool we hadn't used before or going to various community events. The structure of our meetings taught us new skills monthly and to this day I credit my troop leader, Angie, with my obsessive use of hot glue when crafting.

Our troop has only ever consisted of girls from my elementary school, all of us in the same grade. Two of the moms have been our troop leaders for the past decade. All of this combined into an atmosphere of familiarity that has allowed our troop to be intentional about our structure. Starting when we bridged over to Brownies, the Troop Leaders informed us we would individually pick a badge to teach. Each month, we switched which girl was leading the badge, planning it out with help from our moms and Troop Leaders. This led to us going to a fire house, eating food from Zimbabwe, and going to help at a service dog school, getting to play with the puppies so they could get used to children. We took turns participating and teaching, both roles providing a unique perspective.

That meeting structure persisted until we were Cadettes, at which time we switched to teaching at our annual Summer Badge-Mania fundraiser and meeting for quick get-togethers every few months. While at the time I bemoaned having to teach the Daisies, I've come to realize the skills gained from teaching younger Girl Scouts have been invaluable to my development as a Girl Scout and as a person. Learning isn't about facts I can reiterate when needed, but rather the ability to think, analyze, do, and inform.

As I've planned meetings and earned badges from 1st grade to now, I've slowly gained those abilities, which are needed to be successful and create change in my community. Everything from navigating interpersonal relationships, to STEM projects, or community organizing, each part of the Girl Scout experience was a moment to learn.

In the past four years, I've earned two Higher Awards. I started with my Silver Award, centered around improving the efficiency of recycling in my town. The experience of the Silver Award showed me how to interact with the community and be confident in my professionalism as a young woman. While my advisors and the GSNEX council treated this like a big jump in responsibility and agency, it felt like a natural extension of my Girl Scout experience. As I moved into my final Gold Award project, I got to combine the two things that I learned about most as a Girl Scout, event planning and the importance of community support. As I decided what my Gold Project would work towards, I found myself at the intersection of two communities that supported me during my treatment for Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia from the ages of eleven to thirteen. It made sense that with my Girl Scout troop backing me yet again, I could give back to Camp iHope, a camp for pediatric cancer patients and their siblings. The amount of loss I felt post-diagnosis was tremendous, but I mostly felt a loss of normalcy. No day looked the same, my health was unstable, and I couldn't participate in nearly anything. So I designed my project to host a laser-tag event, something not typically accessible for those with increased medical needs, as well as creating activity bags for the camp. The entire project included activities not encouraged during treatment, modifying them so those with compromised immune

systems or physical limitations could join in. I aimed to help support those who were silently struggling with those losses, as well as the weight of a cancer diagnosis, support and care I once needed myself.

Throughout the Gold Award experience, I gained so much appreciation for my community, as I have for the past thirteen years of Girl Scouts. I'm beyond thankful I've been taught by so many strong and capable individuals, whether from my troop, leaders, or project mentors. That education instilled a sense of self-sufficiency, a desire to learn, and the drive to make the world a better place. While I've been reciting the promise for years, I strive to embody the words "help people at all times", carrying that refrain with me as I graduate from Girl Scouts and engage with new opportunities for service at college.