



Westlake Girl Scout Earns Gold Award
Caelyn Pender Starts Banyan Elementary Reading Club

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Ventura, CA —

Caelyn Pender from Westlake High School has recently earned her Gold Award. Caelyn's idea for her project stemmed from her volunteer experience with the Glenwood Elementary Study Buddies program, when she noticed that children were consistently behind in their reading skills. Seeking a way to help schools who didn't offer this kind of program for students, she started the Banyan Reading Club for first and second graders at Banyan Elementary School.

Caelyn found that students were most likely behind in their reading skills because of a lack of opportunity to read at home, lack of interest in reading, and speaking English as a second language. Her goal was to provide students a safe environment to strengthen their skills, especially those with working parents who may not have as much one-on-one time with an adult after school. The Banyan Reading Club would also serve as a place to practice reading in English for students that were not native English speakers.

Additionally, she created a Book Nook to provide students with extra reading materials so that they could find topics that interested them, compelling them to read more often. The Book Nook is a self-sustainable lending library, where students can pick out what interests them and return books once they are done. Enlisting the help of her grandfather, she constructed and painted the structure at Banyan Elementary. Caelyn plans on replenishing the books from time to time, and will pass it off to other students once she leaves for college next year.

She says, "If a student enjoys reading, he or she is much more likely to continue to read and improve their reading skills. Reading opens up many possibilities, including lifelong self-learning and self-improvement. It opens the door to education and makes learning easier, which creates stronger world citizens."

To inspire other interested students to start their own after-school programs, Caelyn set up a website (www.booknookinc.wordpress.com) with information about her project. Included on the site are the resources and tips she used to create her program, as well as information on how the Book Nook was built. She also used it as a way to recruit and sign up volunteers for the Banyan Reading Club.



On completing her project, she says, "I learned very valuable skills in working with children, including strengthening my patience, public speaking, communication, explanation, and coordination. Building the website helped me improve my graphic design abilities, as well as gave me the experience to make helpful resources for others to utilize. I strengthened my social skills as I recruited, trained, and worked with high school volunteers. I also improved my organization as I outlined program sessions, website resources, volunteers, and a book drive."

Overall, Caelyn had a rewarding experience working with the children of the Banyan Reading Club. The program ran from April 2018 until the end of the school year, and started back up in September. Provided a survey she administered on the first and last day of the program, she found that the students' enjoyment and enthusiasm towards reading had increased, with many of them even claiming that they had now found a favorite book.

"I learned that I enjoy integrating my hobbies (reading, in this case) with community service, and that community service is something I always want to make an effort to include in my life," Caelyn says. "This project was a wonderful experience, and it provided me with the foundation of many skills, such as perseverance and organization, that I will utilize in the future. Overall, completing this project was very rewarding and I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to create it."

About GSCCC

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