

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 27, 2018

CONTACTS: Katie Jordahl - GSCCC  
(805) 232-3977  
[Kjordahl@girlscoutsgccc.org](mailto:Kjordahl@girlscoutsgccc.org)

## **Camarillo Girl Scout Earns Gold Award**

*Abby Michalak created Puppet Pals: Speech Therapy for  
children born with cleft lips and palates*

**Ventura, CA** – Abby Michalak from Troop 60261 in Camarillo completed her nearly year-long Gold Award project. As the highest honor in Girl Scouting, the Gold Award recognizes girls in high school who demonstrate extraordinary leadership through projects that have both a local and global impact. By making speech therapy puppets, a bilingual blog, and brochures, Abby was able to raise awareness surrounding the lack of medical care in developing countries.

Her project, Puppet Pals: Speech Therapy, addresses children born with cleft lips and palates, and the difficulties imposed by language barriers between health professionals, patients, and their families. Abby recognized that “children all over the globe suffer from maxillofacial deformations, imposing great speech difficulties on them [that] resulting in social shaming and low confidence.” Traveling all the way to Bolivia with Operation Smile, she interacted with patients, viewed operations, and volunteered time in pre- and post-op surgery.

The lack of access to speech therapy resources in underdeveloped nations inspired Abby to create material that ensured both equal opportunity and availability of information. Her blog and brochure, which are available in both English and Spanish, are currently being utilized by two international speech therapists to communicate with patients. Additionally, she created 100 sock puppets as a tool for patients to practice proper speech habits with.

Individuals born with cleft lips and palates typically do not attend school, and many have never spoken before their surgeries. “The resources that I have created will enable patients to gain speech skills and shortly after, confidence. My blog enables speech therapists to communicate with families long after they are gone to ensure ongoing rehabilitation,” says Abby.

Abby created the Adolfo Camarillo High School Operation Smile Student Club in order to activate action within her community. Through social media and school presentations, she inspired her peers to continue the club even after her graduation next Fall.

Following her quest to “go for the gold,” Abby strongly encourages other individuals to advocate for what they believe in. “I learned that I can set big goals and achieve them, as well as work with all levels and ages of people to create a strong team. This project further inspired me to pursue a career in medicine and influenced my decision to earn a bi-literacy certificate and degree in neurology.”

### **About GSCCC**

Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast serves over 10,200 girls across six counties and is committed to making the Girl Scout Leadership Experience available to girls in ways that impact

MORE



their lives both in the moment and into the future. Girls participate in troops, individual projects, council events, day camps, resident camps and more. A variety of leadership, outdoor skills, and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) based programs and events provide girls with opportunities to learn and explore in fun and informative ways. To join or volunteer in Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara or Ventura County, visit: <http://www.girlscoutscoc.org>.

###