



Girl Scout Raises Awareness for Traumatic Brain Injuries

Alina Tong with project, "Learn, Prevent, Care: Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 16, 2019

Ventura, CA —

Girl Scout Alina Tong, 17, from Oak Park previously suffered a traumatic brain injury from which she experienced difficulty returning to her school system. Noticing the lack of awareness surrounding these types of injuries, Alina began her project, "Learn, Prevent, Care: Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness," to share her experience with students and teachers so that they could be more aware of the difficulties that come with returning to a school environment. She also took to Kaiser to educate physicians on how to best support patients utilizing their available resources.

Alina wanted to break the stigma that traumatic brain injuries are synonymous to "concussions" that individuals can easily recover from. Through presentations, she was able to explain to her high school community that each case of brain injuries is different and that additional support may be needed for some. She also spoke to 35 doctors in the pediatrics department at Kaiser Permanente, where she organized a presentation pointing out some of the resources they could use for referrals based on the types of therapy that are most useful in recovery.

"There is a lack of awareness with traumatic brain injuries," Alina says. "For the most part, people acknowledge that they happen, but people don't seem to grasp the severity of this injury, especially as there are often no physical signs. As a result, there may not be much action taken to support an individual post-injury, which means that it is harder for them to return to a normal lifestyle."

At Oak Park High School, Alina was able to speak with the athletic trainer and school psychologist about traumatic brain injuries and potential obstacles that students may experience as they return to a school environment. The school psychologist shared Alina's presentation with all of the psychologists and special education teachers in the school district, giving the faculty that directly assist students the knowledge they need to facilitate their transitions.

As a result of her presentation at Kaiser, the physicians updated part of their system with a new Return to Learn SmartSet. Additionally, they are adjusting the workflow for Kaiser Woodland



Hills, which means that post-concussion protocol and referrals are being reformed so that future patients have an easier time with recovery. Interns at Kaiser have created a study based on this presentation, tracking the amount of follow-up care given in the pediatrics department prior to this presentation compared to after the presentation, and they will be presenting the study to others to show the importance of education regarding traumatic brain injury awareness.

"My project, which sought to improve the local awareness about the impact that a traumatic brain injury may have on a person, addresses an issue with global implications because millions of people worldwide suffer from traumatic brain injuries each year and there is a lack of research surround them," Alina says. "The result is lack of proper care after the fact, which in a worst-case scenario, can result in life-long disabilities or even death. If there is more awareness, there may be more research done to prevent the injuries in the first place, and there will also be better care for the individuals post-injury, so that they may eventually return to their normal lives."

Alina was able to take a personal experience and turn it into a movement that will help others in her same predicament for years to come. She was able to learn a lot about herself in the process, too! "I have learned that being a leader does not mean that you have to do everything by yourself and it is okay to delegate tasks to your team, as they are there to support and help you. I was able to better collaborate with others, as even if you are in charge, the ideas and constructive criticism that you receive can help you create a better end-product or can simply help you to grow as a person. I learned to not only manage my time, but how to see the big picture so that I could give feedback and motivate my team to continue to work to reach our goals. Finally, I learned that sometimes things will not go as planned, but it does not mean that I cannot find another way to still be successful. It is important to still persevere with the things that you are passionate about."

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