



Santa Maria Girl Scout earns Gold Award
Full S.T.E.A.M. Ahead!

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Ventura, CA —

Isabella Blanco noticed that there were not many free and accessible opportunities for youth to become engaged in science and engineering in her hometown of Santa Maria. Although she had always been interested in STEM fields, growing up she often felt that there was little room for educational enrichment outside of school. In conjunction with the City of Santa Maria Recreation and Parks Department, she sought out to create the program Full STEAM Ahead.

Since 2015, the Santa Maria Bonita School District has had an average of 79.9% of students falling below the standards for state testing in mathematics. In comparison, the nearby predominantly middle class neighborhood of Orcutt has a much lower average of 50.1%. This revelation became Isabella's inspiration for her Gold Award project.

"My community does not have access to local science fairs or engineering programs for youth that are present in other surrounding cities. Due to the fact that a majority of Santa Maria youth are low income, many cannot financially afford to seek out STEAM opportunities. These are the root causes as to why Latino youth lose interest in science and math at a young age and do not go into those fields once they get to college." – Isabella Blanco

Isabella serves as Program Director, where she coordinates logistics with the city, schedules events, creates interactive program manuals, trains teen volunteers to lead STEAM activities, and oversees outreach events with program volunteers.

So far, this project has served over 700+ youth in Santa Maria, primarily Latino and economically disadvantaged communities, by delivering free educational services that would have otherwise not been available during the summer months.

Isabella also created a Full STEAM Ahead Leadership Board composed of 15 teens to lead events and create activities for local youth. These board members are responsible for continuing outreach at community events and planning activities for the local Newlove Community Center. In combination with a program manual that has detailed instruction sheets



for each program activity, the Student Leadership Board will be able to sustain the program long after Isabella's graduation.

When the program launched in June, Isabella assembled a team of 13 junior high and high school Girl Scout volunteers who would help to lead the challenges at local parks. They received an all-day training prior to the launch that included workshops on how to lead a station, teach activities, and help children understand the STEAM principles. Through training and volunteering of over 20 hours at eight parks, the volunteers developed various leadership skills such as public speaking, multitasking, and communicating effectively.

The youth participants are also directly benefitted from this program. Through each challenge led by the volunteers, children ranging from seven to twelve years old were able to learn about important STEAM principles such as buoyancy laws, architectural design, projectile motion, coding, and volume. In addition, the participants were able to develop confidence by asking questions in an encouraging environment and taking ownership of their individual creations and ideas.

"Minority disadvantages in the science, math, and engineering fields are not just issues in Santa Maria, but across the country. A 2015 study by the National Science Foundation finds that only 3.1% of minorities participate in engineering studies at the collegiate level as well as only 5.4% participation in mathematical studies. My project ties into national concerns as it addresses the issue of promoting minority interest and confidence in STEAM at a young age. By working directly with our low income and disenfranchised communities, I am working to rewrite the narrative in the United States by inspiring Latino youth to pursue higher education in science and engineering. STEAM is a way to educate youth and minorities about what these fields are and more importantly, the paths they provide." – Isabella Blanco

As a City of Santa Maria program, the project was able to be continued past the summer months and is incorporated at various community events including monthly food distributions, park openings, and cultural events throughout the year. Isabella's group of volunteers continues to work for the program.

Isabella learned that in order to create long-lasting change in her community and beyond, one has to be their own independent advocate. From pitching her idea to the Parks and Recreation Department to training a team of volunteers, she was able to make a lasting difference for the members of her neighborhood.

You can follow the Instagram account that Isabella created for the program at @full_steam_ahead_sm.

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 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, and Math (STEM) 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>.

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