



**Girl Scout Builds Structure for Farm Healing Sanctuary**  
*Jessica Knight earns Gold Award for project, "Goat Topia"*

**Press Contact:**

Kathryn Nielsen

(805) 232-3977

[knielsen@girlscoutscoc.org](mailto:knielsen@girlscoutscoc.org)

**Article By:** Kaylie Luedke

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 10, 2019

**Ventura, CA —**

Jessica Knight is a recent Thousand Oaks High School graduate and avid animal lover. She's spent the last six summers volunteering at the [Helping Hands Healing Sanctuary](#) farm in Newberg, Oregon, which specializes in farm animal therapy. Individuals that come to the farm for healing and equine therapy cover every walk of life, including veterans, addiction recovery groups, foster children, troubled youth, and those seeking treatment for anxiety and depression.

The farm's residents include an impressive collection of horses, miniature horses, foals, ponies, llamas, sheep, bunnies and special birds, many of which were abused and neglected animals who have been adopted into their rescue program. Rose Sullivan, the farm's owner, expressed the need for a play structure in their goat pen so that guests could have a better place to interact with them, rather than standing in the middle of an empty pen. It was then that Jessica settled on her Gold Award project.

Play structures give goats the space for behavioral enrichment and exercise, as they love to climb and jump. The farm made quite the impact on Jessica's life throughout the years, and she wanted to contribute something long lasting back to Helping Hands. "Animal therapy is gaining recognition worldwide as having a positive effect in helping people deal with stress, anxiety, and PTSD," she said. "Stress continues to be a global concern with all walks of life. Animal therapy in general helps calm us humans. The goats are in-tune with our internal rhythms and have a unique way of understanding what we need."

Jessica began planning her project by researching goat structures online and visiting local farms. She created an outline which included a main structure, jumping areas, and interactive stations. Previously, the goat pen had only a three-sided food shelter to protect the animals from the Oregon rain. Jessica received support and donations from her family, friends, community, Girl Scout troop, and through fundraising, which allowed her to purchase over \$3000 worth of supplies. She was able to use her resources wisely during the process, such as utilizing tires donated by a family friend that races cars for the goats to jump on, and barrels donated by a local winery to add to the structure.



The building process began in California, where the wood was sanded. At the end of June, Jessica and her family rented a truck in order to transport the wood and tires to Oregon. She began the building process soon after with the help of her family, friends, and volunteers, where she quickly learned a lesson in leadership. "Leading a team is not about being a boss," she said. "It is about execution and keeping the project moving forward. I listened to my parents, I listened to my sister and peers, and I listened to family friend helpers. One by one, we continued to work together and improve on what we were building, and how we were building it."

Through thunderstorms, redesigns, and modifications due to animal behaviors, Jessica and her team were able to finish building the structure, weatherproofing, mucking the hay, and repairing the feed trough and benches. During Helping Hand's Annual Farm Day, where neighboring communities are invited to visit the farm and learn about animal therapy, Jessica was able to explain her Gold Award project to over 100 guests who attended the event.

Rose Sullivan is very appreciative of the new environment for her goats and is excited for its future. "The experience has been amazing and I have continued to learn more about behavior enrichment, which blends with my passion for animals – I am currently on a track to take me into the world of animal training," she said. "My experiences at Helping Hands have added to my growing maturity and confidence around animals. Volunteering on the farm and learning how it runs has helped form my desire to work with animals in the future, possibly running my own animal therapy environment."

You can read the full timeline and details of Jessica's project, along with additional photos and a [video](#) of her progress, on the blog she created at [goatopia.blog](http://goatopia.blog).

### **About Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast**

Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast serves over 8,800 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>.

###