



Girl Scout Teaches English to Blind Students in Thailand
Jessica Shiflett from Camarillo, CA, earns her Girl Scout Gold Award

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Jessica Shiflett, a current senior at Adolfo Camarillo High School, is half Thai and has had the privilege of visiting family in Thailand every summer. Year after year, she was shocked to see the number of visually impaired individuals on the streets in each city she went to. While Thai students in traditional primary schools have been taught English for years, visually impaired students don't always have the necessary resources to gain full comprehension of the language. Armed with inspiration, Jessica set off to begin her nearly two-year-long journey to complete her Gold Award.

"My goal was to expose underprivileged blind students to English through songs, to build their confidence in speaking and comprehending the language," Jessica said. "Blind students in Thailand don't have the opportunity to fully learn English to the extent where they can actually use it. By completing this project, their English will improve and they'll be more likely to succeed later in life."

To begin her project, Jessica got in touch with The Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand to discuss project details and plans for her summer visits. She began searching for nursery rhyme books, typing out song lyrics, and recording audio files of herself singing the songs in English. In August of 2018, she visited a school for the blind in Bangkok to teach English and music to students. The head director, who was also the director of ten other blind schools across Thailand, would later aid Jessica in distributing her project to even more students.

After her trip, Jessica received an in-kind donation of CDs from Fry's Electronics in Oxnard for her audio library project. She put in hours of work compiling and typing lyrics, singing and recording mp3 files, organizing songs onto CDs, binding together songbooks, and labeling her necessary materials. Her songbooks would later be translated into Braille for the student's use. It was in this timeframe that Jessica also began contacting the principal of Santa Rosa Technology Magnet School to discuss setting up a Pen Pal project with the Thai students.

"Through the basic English-learning songs, the blind students are able to practice their pronunciation and gain confidence in speaking English aloud, which they do not normally get to



do,” Jessica said. “The booklets also help them follow along and read the lyrics, exposing them to more words and phrases.”

Upon her return to Thailand in July of 2019, Jessica brought ten CDs with over 50 self-recorded songs in English as well as the accompanying lyric booklets to donate to the schools. She visited additional schools to spend more time with the students, learning about their way of life and teaching them English through songs and reading. In total, Jessica was able to donate her songbooks and CDs to ten schools for the blind in Thailand.

Jessica then returned to Santa Rosa Technology Magnet School to continue her project. “After I came back from Thailand, I was able to set up a Pen Pal email system where blind students in Thailand could connect and communicate with a third-grade class in America,” she said. “The third-grade students would then offer corrections for the Thai students’ grammar with the help of my old third-grade teacher and reply about their day.” Jessica believes that the regular correspondence, even with the challenging fourteen-hour time difference between the countries, will continue to help improve the Thai students’ English skills. Additionally, she hopes that the experience gives the American students a chance to immerse themselves in new cultures and learn what life is like in different parts of the world.

Finally, Jessica worked on creating 25 sets of digital flashcards with a variety of grammar topics. These flashcards, along with the booklets of song lyrics, were translated to Braille and posted on e-libraries exclusive to blind individuals in Thailand for anyone to access.

“When I went to Thailand, I was able to witness [the students] using the audio library while following along in their books,” Jessica said. “I also saw them dancing and shouting along to the music using new English words that they had not used the previous years.”

On her project’s completion, Jessica said, “The most successful part of my project was all of it. Singing over fifty songs and typing all the lyrics, [making] the flashcards, and seeing the emails back and forth between students. All of this, including seeing the kids dance and sing to my songs, I felt like I had given hope to kids that would’ve never had this opportunity in their life.”

Gold Award Girl Scouts channel their leadership, passion, work ethic, and creativity toward developing innovative solutions to challenges both in their communities and around the world. To learn more about the highest award in Girl Scouts, visit [here](#).

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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>.