



Girl Scout Advocates for Teen Mental Health

Kylah Kennedy earns Gold Award for project, "The Sunlight Project: Shedding Light on Mental Health"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 29, 2019

Ventura, CA —

Kylah Kennedy, a current senior at Westlake High School, has a passion for mental health advocacy. When she took notice of the social stigma surrounding teen depression and anxiety, she wanted to create a safe space where individuals could have an open conversation about mental health and receive the proper education. As a result, she embarked on her Gold Award journey with "The Sunlight Project: Shedding Light on Mental Health."

"As teen mental health declines, education on mental health continues to lack the information and resources needed to provide for the growing group," she said. "My project targeted high school teenagers to educate them on mental health disorders and how to have an open and healthy conversation about them, so as to reduce the impact of the disorders."

Kylah planned a ninety-minute workshop with a panel of three speakers to educate audience members on mental health in teens, how to recognize symptoms of anxiety and depression, how to have an open, supportive discussion about mental health issues, and when to reach out for help beyond peers. She was able to advertise the event by passing out flyers and through social media. Over 50 individuals were in attendance on June 2, 2019, consisting of primarily high school students. Among the panelists were social workers Denise Burke and Emily Cannon, and a local college student who spoke to her personal struggles with mental illness.

After the panel, audience members broke out into sessions of 6-8 people to discuss topics in a more intimate setting. Participants then signed a "No Stigma" pledge to commit to stopping the negativity surrounding these issues and received a button. At the end of the event, Kylah surveyed the attendees on how much they knew about mental health before the event, how much they learned, and how likely they were to openly talk about those topics after the event. The results revealed that not only did the participants gain knowledge surrounding mental health disorders and their causes, but they were also more confident in how to take care of their own



mental health. Additionally, they felt they were better able to help others following the discussion.

Kylah fundraised over \$350 for her event by sewing Girl Scout patches onto vests and sashes for other troops, which helped her purchase stickers, flyers, food for the event, and flowers for her guest speakers.

“There are now 50+ more people in the world who can help others who struggle [with mental health] and start a conversation, spreading their knowledge and creating a ripple effect that will travel throughout the country,” she said. “My [website](#) also provides resources and other materials to help teens with mental illnesses, which allows for many people to find access to help both nationally and globally.”

Kylah’s website details her project’s background and how to recreate the project in other communities. In the hope that others will be inspired to hold similar events in the future, she also outlined sample questions for panelists, an example event agenda, and the survey she provided to audience members.

To learn more about the Girl Scout Gold Award, visit [here!](#) To read about additional Gold Award projects and the differences Girl Scouts are making in communities near you, visit [here](#).

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>.

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