

Amerie Gramelspacher's Gold Award Project: Suicide Prevention

Amerie Gramelspacher is our latest Gold Award recipient, whose very important topic is suicide prevention. Amerie joined Girl Scouts in the 2nd grade, and feels that helped her to develop her leadership skills. Through her Gold award process, she has discovered a love for psychology, and plans to pursue it in college.



She graciously answered our questions about her Gold Award process:

Please give an overview of your Gold Award Project and the steps you took to complete it.

My project was to advocate for suicide awareness and prevention. I spoke at several churches, runs and events about the topic of suicide. I conducted a suicide prevention and awareness 5k in my community to raise money for advocacy in my community and to teach people in the community more about suicide. There were about 100 people at my event. I raised \$1,100 from the run with \$500 left over after expenses. With that money, I purchased a suicide prevention curriculum for all of the health classes at my school to use. I also purchased suicide prevention and awareness signage that is now hanging in the halls of my middle and high school. Throughout my project, I was in communication with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). They are a nation-wide organization dedicated to the awareness of suicide prevention. My elementary, middle, and high school teachers are now engaged in an annual suicide prevention and awareness training. This training is hosted by the AFSP.

How did you come up with your idea? The topic of suicide is one that touches close to my heart. My aunt committed suicide as well as a fellow classmate. I knew that suicide was a problem however I wasn't sure how to effectively address it. My cousin introduced me to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. They conduct annual walks in order to raise awareness about suicide. That's where I got the idea to host a suicide prevention run to raise awareness in my community. The funds from the run would also be used to further the advocacy in a more sustainable way.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? I was at first very intimidated. There was a lot of work to be done to begin advocating for suicide prevention in a town that's never had that type of advocacy. I wasn't sure how to begin or if my efforts would be successful.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? The process of the Gold Award is very long and tedious. However I picked a topic for my project that I feel strongly and passionate about. My desire for my project to succeed and help others is what kept me going.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? All of the follow up work and waiting for people to respond. Sometimes people took forever to respond and when they finally did it wasn't always the response you expected or were hoping for.

Can you tell us a little story about some part of your project that was special to you? Throughout the course of my project, I have heard many people's stories of how suicide has affected them. People I didn't know personally would share with me their own struggle with suicide or a story of someone close to them. I hold all of these stories close to my heart now.

How will people benefit from this? People will continue to learn about suicide from my project sustainability. They will realize that suicide is not an issue that should stay in the dark; in order for it to get better it must come out into the light.

How did you feel after you finished? I felt relieved that it was over and happy that I had succeeded. My project meant so much to me, so when it was finally complete I felt relief and satisfaction.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold Award? I would tell them to make sure you pick a project you're passionate about. Having a connection to the issue you're addressing makes it easy to come up with ideas to advocate.

Your Gold Project made a change for the better in your community. How did it change you? I learned a lot more about suicide through my suicide prevention and awareness project. From now on I will always consider myself a suicide prevention advocate. Throughout my project I have sparked an interest in the field of psychology.