

Jeralynn Servos's Gold Project: Providing Children's Books through Food Pantry

Jeralynn has been a Girl Scout for 10 years, beginning as a Brownie. She earned her Bronze Award, evaluating the effects of plastic bags on the environment. Jeralynn will graduate from Spanish Fort High School in 2016, and will attend University of Southern Mississippi, studying business and dance. Her proud parents are Mark and Deann Servos of Spanish Fort.



Jeralynn researched the effects of reading to young children. Her Gold Award Take Action Project, "Give a Book, Build a Future!" was created to provide books to children and families who cannot afford them and to promote early reading. While the parents are being interviewed about their situation at Prodissee Pantry, a volunteer reads to the children. The children are able to take the books home with them along with the food they received. She contacted all her local public, school, and church libraries to see if they would help by donating books. The support was overwhelming. Over 2000 gently used books were donated.

How did you come up with your idea? I can remember always being read to before bed by my parents, babysitters, or friends. I loved spending time with them while hearing a good story or while looking at the pictures in a book. I still enjoy reading and want other children to be able to have these same memories. After researching the effects of reading to young children and seeing all the positive outcomes, I decided this would be the perfect project for me to do.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? At first, I wasn't sure how much work this project would actually take. Getting into it, I did feel some intimidation from the scale of it. However, it taught me how to work harder and how to balance my time more.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? I set goals and dates that I wanted parts of my project to be finished by. Having groups come in every few weeks to help kept me motivated to keep going. I think seeing the children's smiles every week was the biggest factor in keeping the momentum going.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? There were points that became pretty tough, but I never really felt discouraged. I had so much support from the community that I could tell that my project would be successful and be carried on by some great individuals in my community.

Can you tell us a little story about some part of your project that was special to you? Something funny, or touching, or that went terribly wrong and how you fixed it? When I think about my project, I always think about one of the little boys that was read to. He chose a book filled with pictures of animals. I watched as one of the volunteers read to him. He had the biggest smile on his face while he pointed at the silly pictures. After his mother received food assistance, she came and watched her son continuously laugh. She told the volunteer reader thank you over and over again after she found out he could keep the book along with others he chose. This moment made me feel proud because I could see my project making a difference.

How will people benefit from this? Many statistics show that children who are read to at a young age will have better grades in school. The low income children who are read to while their parents are receiving food assistance, will be exposed to books and develop a love of reading thus building a brighter future!

How did you feel after you finished? I was really proud when I finished the project. "Give a Book, Build a Future!" was more successful than I had originally planned. It was great to see all the support I received from the community.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold Award? Find something you feel strongly about! Find something you are passionate about! Find something that impacts something you love! It will make it easier for you to stay motivated and will make the process more enjoyable. Also, don't wait until last minute to do your project. Start before your Senior year of high school if possible. This way you won't be as busy and will have more time just in case you run into any bumps in the road.

Your Gold Project made a change for the better in your community. Did it change you? What will you take away from this experience? My project helped me to remain humble and helped to remind me to not take the small things for granted. Seeing the way the children's faces and even their parent's faces would light up when they were told they could keep the books made it all worth it. I used to see it as just a simple book, but now I know that something so simple can mean so much to someone else.