

Morgan Mitchell's Gold Project: Bereavement Gowns for Newborns

Morgan's project involved making bereavement gowns for a local hospital and creating a sustainable process to provide gowns on an ongoing basis.

Morgan has been a Girl Scout since fourth grade, and credits activities with her troop for introducing her to many new experiences. She will graduate from Spanish Fort High School in 2016 and plans to major in Library and Information Sciences at Southern Miss. Her parents are Ricky and Amy Mitchell.



Please give an overview of your Gold Award Project and the steps you took to complete it. My program, Delicate Embrace Angel Gowns, provides bereavement gowns made from recycled wedding dresses to infants that do not make it out of the hospital.

Often, there is nothing small enough to fit these tiny babies except for a washcloth or a hospital gown. Through providing parents with this small gift, I wanted to show them that their baby's life was important to and acknowledged by others. No child deserves to die so early, and no parent should have to go through losing his or her baby.

How did you come up with your idea? After hearing about a similar program in Houston, Texas, I did a little research and discovered that there was nothing like this in my community. The idea of making these little angel gowns seemed like a really special project, and it is a subject that is close to my heart since I was born with birth defects myself, and I know that not every baby is born healthy.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? I think the Gold Award is meant to be intimidating; it's supposed to push a girl scout to do her very best to help her community and it's supposed to teach her about herself along the way. So yes, I was intimidated, not only in the beginning but as I was orchestrating the whole project as well. It is a daunting task to undertake; however, it is completely worth it to know that you stuck with it and made a big impact in your community.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? Making plans and sticking to them is a great way to make sure that something gets done. It is certainly challenging to juggle the workload of senior year, college applications, and a Gold Award, but I was motivated to complete this project because I wanted to see these finished gowns at the hospitals so they could help mourning parents.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? Whenever I was faced with a problem, I knew I had to fix it to be able to complete the project. While I did become discouraged, I knew I could not let any obstacle deter me from my goal of making a positive impact on the community. It helped to know that other girls were experiencing this daunting task and having trouble as well because it let me know that I was not alone.

Can you tell us a little story about some part of your project that was special to you? When I delivered my first set of gowns to USA Women's and Children's Hospital, the NICU

supervisor gave me a tour of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, and it was so interesting (and sad) to learn about this unit. They care for around 75 babies a day, and sometimes there are 100 babies to care for. USA has the only NICU in the area and they have the technology to help babies as small as two pounds gain enough strength to brave the world. They lose about twenty-four babies a year. These facts lit a fire in me to double my efforts because I could see that what I was doing was needed.

How will people benefit from this? Parents will always miss the child they should have had, but I hope the knowledge that someone cared about them and their loss will at least ease their pain a little. They will get to say their final goodbyes to a baby dressed in this delicate embrace rather than the hospital gown provided, and that is something that will stay with them forever.

How did you feel after you finished? Because I have never been very outgoing, seeing all that I had accomplished made me feel proud of myself. I became more of a leader throughout this project after all of the planning, meetings, and presentations. I also felt relieved that the paperwork was behind me, but I was also excited for what the future held because I know I will try to stay connected with this program.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold Award? I think the most important advice I can give is to keep a notebook that contains dates of when you worked on the project and updates on the progress. When it comes time for the final paperwork, a notebook like this will be immensely beneficial. I kept a detailed account of dates, notes, ideas, and scribbles, and I am glad I did. Not only was it great for paperwork, it is a wonderful keepsake that will remind me of the things I did during my project.

Also, if you are ever feeling overwhelmed or discouraged, just know that it is completely okay and normal. A Gold Award requires a lot of time and effort, and it is not a simple task. I actually had to take a break for a few months because of AP classes, band, and other service clubs, but I eventually jumped right back into the project with enthusiasm, and I am thrilled that I did. You are not alone in embarking on this intimidating journey. Just know that it will get easier once you adjust, and you will be grateful for the experience as it instills in you valuable skills and, of course, makes the world a better place.

Your Gold Project made a change for the better in your community. Did it change you? This project has built my leadership skills, and I am more confident speaking in front of a crowd. My newfound confidence was put to the test when I had to give a speech for the new Mu Alpha Theta inductees as President of the honor society. Any project, whether it is for high school or college, will not seem as daunting after all of the details and planning that was required for the Gold Award. I will take away a love for helping others and a desire to make a difference in the future.