

Nicole Nobles' Gold Award Project: Reading Progress with Therapy Dogs

Nicole's Take Action Project brought together elementary school students who were struggling in reading with a patient, kind, and nonjudgmental listener -- a dog named Hoss. This positive, encouraging (and fun) environment helped these students improve their reading scores by up to 50%.

Nicole has been a Girl Scout for 13 years, and has gone from attending programs and events to organizing several for her sister Girl Scouts. She has earned her Bronze and Silver Awards.



Nicole will graduate from Spanish Fort High School. She plans on attending Auburn University to study Microbiology, and then on to veterinary school, with the ultimate goal of opening her own small animal clinic. Her proud parents are John and Vicki Nobles of Daphne.

How did you come up with your idea? I am very passionate about reading and animals so I wanted to come up with a creative way to combine the two. I came up with the idea to start this reading program after a great deal of research on illiteracy in our area. I also began to realize that even students in my classes had problems reading out loud because they were uncomfortable. I decided that making a reading program for elementary school students would be the most beneficial way to encourage students and improve their reading abilities while they are still impressionable.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? I was initially intimidated by this project, but as I began I realized that the people I was working with would help through all of the challenges.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? I kept the momentum by getting new people involved with my project and teaching others about the mission of my project.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? I was not really discouraged through the project, but just challenged.

Can you tell us a little story about some part of your project that was special to you? The best part of my project was seeing the kids' faces each week when they found out that Hoss was there. Each week they would run down the hallways to see who could get to him first. The first graders were also extremely funny because they would always rush to see who could say "The End" first when they finished their stories. All of the kids were so cute and smart; I had so much fun with them each week.

How will people benefit from this? The students will benefit because their confidence will be boosted and their reading abilities will be improved. Their increased confidence in their reading abilities will also help them succeed in their other subjects in school.

How did you feel after you finished? After I finished my project I felt very accomplished, because I had created a program that will be sustained in SFES and is spreading around the

county. I am also exhilarated that this project has helped the students so much and will continue to help other students.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold? I would suggest that they begin thinking about it early and make sure that they work on something they are passionate about. If you are not passionate about this project it will not be as successful and it will not mean as much to you. It is also important that you find people to work with that are also passionate about your project because that will also ensure that your project is successful and long lasting.

Your Gold Project made a change for the better in your community. Did it change you? If so, how? This project did change me, not only did it teach me how to stick with a project this big, but the kids also taught me how to be happy with the little things in life. The students each week had a new story to tell and something they had to share with Hoss. This taught me that sometimes the most important things in life are the small, everyday activities that go unrecognized.