

Elizabeth Schloss's Gold Award Project: ESL Tutoring Program

Earning a Gold Award is not easy -- but the rewards, for yourself, your community, and your future are worth the effort.

We ask Gold Awardees to give other Girl Scouts who are considering a Gold Award Project a realistic idea of what is involved. Below, Elizabeth Schloss tells us about the challenges and rewards she encountered while implementing her project.



How did you come up with your idea? My mom is a teacher at Daniel Pratt Elementary School in Prattville, AL and she had some EL (English Learners) students in her class who were having trouble with basic English skills. I soon got in touch with Lori McCrory, the EL teacher in Autauga County at the time, and she told me how much trouble all of the students were having because they do not speak English in their homes. So, I decided to start tutoring sessions to help these students and their parents.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? Yes. At a first glance, all of the requirements and paperwork seem very intimidating but as I started, taking everything one step at a time, the project seemed to go smoothly and it became easier than it first seemed to be.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? Once I got everything figured out and all of the dates set up, everything ran very smoothly. A way that I kept the momentum going for my project was by keeping everyone (all of the people involved) informed and by continuing to advertise to new people and those already involved.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? There were some discouraging moments, including not having enough helpers at some sessions and not having any students at some other sessions. The only way to overcome this discouragement is to keep moving forward with the project and know that everyone has trouble sometimes but we all get through it. I kept the sessions going on the scheduled dates and continued to advertise the sessions to more and more people. The best way to overcome such discouragement is to never give up.

Can you tell us a little story about some part of your project that was special to you? At the largest tutoring session we had, there was a man who came in to be tutored and as the helpers were teaching him English, he was teaching them Spanish. It was very funny, but nice at the same time to see them having fun while learning how to communicate effectively with each other.

I scheduled the dates for my tutoring sessions before I found out my own schedule for the Prattville High School band and some of the dates ended up being the same. I was very worried about fixing this problem and I didn't want to change the dates because that would have

inconvenienced more people. I eventually got one of my friends who had been to a couple of the sessions already to run them on the days that I could not be there and everything worked out.

At the very end of my project, I donated \$150 to St. Joseph's Catholic Church for letting me use their facilities. The secretary there, Robin, whom I have gotten to know very well through this project, cried when I handed her the check. It was very touching to see that I had made such an impact on her and the church with the program and my donation.

How will people benefit from this? The people that came to my sessions now have more knowledge of the English language and can better participate in the American culture. As the language barrier between these communities is being broken down, we become closer and each other and can gradually combine the communities to become one instead of being separated.

How did you feel after you finished? Once I finished, I felt more confident in myself and my abilities. I have always heard that one person can make a huge change, and now I know that this is true. I feel that I have made a difference in my community by starting small and building up.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold Award? Don't give up, even if it seems like that is your only option. Plan for everything, even the small stuff. Learn from every mistake. Keep people informed (advertising, emails). Know that what you are doing is making a huge impact on you, the community, and the world. You can accomplish more than you think you can, so never give up on yourself.

Your Gold Project made a change for the better in your community. What will you take away from this experience? This project gave me a chance to find myself, in a way. I became more confident in myself and my abilities. I know that I can make a change and I have made a change to better my community. Before I started my project, I was unaware of the large population of non-English speakers in my community, and now I feel more connected because I know more people. This project increased my awareness of other people and their situations and feelings. I enjoyed tutoring a lot, which helped me to confirm my want to become a teacher. This experience has also taught me to lead by example. Being a leader is not about telling others what to do and not doing anything yourself; the best leaders are those who lead by example.