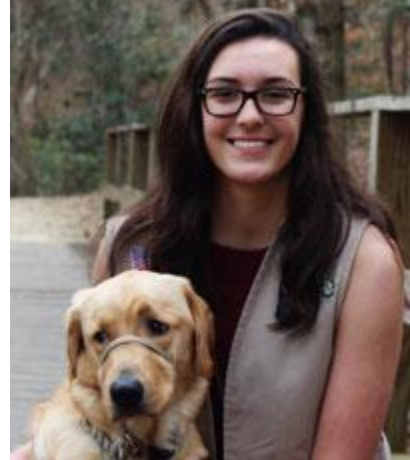


Maya Harlow's Gold Project: Service Dog Awareness

Maya 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. Maya will graduate from Carroll High School in 2019, and plans to attend Auburn University to major in pre-veterinary studies, followed by Veterinary school. Her proud parents are Leah and Jason Harlow.



Maya's Gold Award Take Action Project was one she lived with almost every moment – she helped to raise a future service dog named Adobe V. She also raised awareness about service dogs, their functions, and how to interact with them through presentations and events.

How did you come up with your idea? I was interested in a project that was related to animals. I researched topics that needed more attention, and service dogs really caught my attention. Service dogs are everywhere, and people need to know how to respond to them.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? At first, I was a little intimidated. My project was going to require lots of public speaking – something that (before the project) I was not entirely confident about.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? Training Adobe made me fall in love with my project's cause, because every day I knew I was making a difference. This helped keep up my momentum.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? Sometimes it was discouraging when people would make rude comments while I was out in public training Adobe. I saw this as an education opportunity, and it made me feel better to know that I was teaching those people something.

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? There is a girl in my troop who has special needs. Every time Adobe would come to troop meetings, her face would light up and her behavior would completely change from shy and solitary to bubbly and open. Seeing Adobe change her life in just a few minutes made me realize just how much service dogs make a difference.

How will people benefit from this? I was able to reach 35,000+ people through various media outlets – they now know service dog etiquette, as well as the dogs' role in their communities.

How did you feel after you finished? After reaching all those people, and seeing success in my project both firsthand and from afar, I felt extremely accomplished when the council told me that my award was approved.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold Award? Start planning early, and find a project that genuinely interests you. You will be spending lots of time with your project, so having a passion for it will make it seem more like fun and less like work.

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 Gold Award changed me, just as it changed my community. The look on somebody's face when they see and learn firsthand what a huge impact service dogs make is priceless. I learned public speaking, organization, and time management skills through this project. After this experience, I took away the feeling that, if you work hard, you can accomplish anything you set your mind to.