

Change Your World

For hundreds of deserving girls, home is where **TROOP 6000** is.



From left: Scouts setting up their cookie shop in Manhattan's Union Square; Sanaa, an original Troop 6000 member, no longer lives in a shelter, but she's elected to stick with her squad; displaying a collection of hard-won badges.

IN MOST WAYS, New York City's Troop 6000 is like any group of Girl Scouts—they earn badges, take field trips, sell Do-si-dos and Thin Mints. But when their weekly sessions of bracelet-making and birdhouse building are over, the Scouts of Troop 6000 don't pile in a minivan to carpool home. These girls, some as young as 5, are or have been homeless.

As hard as it is for adults not to have a permanent home, the situation can be even rougher on kids: They can't invite classmates over; fearing ridicule, they shy away from new pals; in the shuffle between shelters, they don't have a shelf for books or toys. Scouting is a rare chance to focus on friends and fun, and brings a much-needed sense of normalcy

and stability. "The troop is the thing they know will always be there," says Meridith Maskara, CEO of Girl Scouts of Greater New York (GSGNY), "even if they carry all their belongings in a backpack or get moved in the middle of the night."

Troop 6000 was born in 2017, the happy outcome of a not-so-happy time for Giselle Burgess, a GSGNY employee who'd found herself homeless when her rental home was sold. She and her five children moved into a shelter where whole families squeezed into one-bedroom units and there were no common spaces for kids to just hang out. At the time, GSGNY wanted to do more to help the homeless; Burgess volunteered to lead a special chapter for them.



Today the group has served more than 700 members in 15 locations. They've learned coding, met lawyers and journalists at career day, and camped in upstate New York, where "trumpets woke us up every morning!" says Sanaa, 11. When other troops disband for summer vacation, the girls of 6000 keep on Scouting. ("There's no break from the shelter—if they're still there, we're still there," says Burgess, now settled in a permanent residence.) And they've proved themselves cookie-selling champs—to the tune of 32,569 boxes last year.

"Selling cookies taught me how to be an entrepreneur and talk to customers," says 13-year-old Leilani. "And it taught other people that we're not just homeless—we're making a difference in the world." Leilani's mom, and troop leader, Ebony, loves that difference: "My daughter used to be ashamed of living in a shelter. She'd walk around with her hood pulled down. After a while, I did, too. But being part of Troop 6000? That's something to be proud of." —M.G.

CALL TO ACTION!

How Sweet It Is

There's no time like the present to score some Girl Scout Cookies. To locate a troop and sale near you (the baked goods are generally sold through April), use the Find Cookies! tool at girlscouts.org. And after you've finished your Samoas, if you want to help the inspiring members of Troop 6000, make a direct donation at girlscoutsnyc.org.

