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Green Difference Scholarship Essay

"We respect the earth, we do our best to keep it healthy, we're the green team", my nine-year-old self sang loud and proud dressed in a sparkly neon green outfit. When asked, I jumped up and down at the opportunity to combine two of my passions: performing and environmental sustainability. I had spent days scribbling down lyrics that would both--make an impact on the minds of my audience, and fit the beat of *Paparazzi* by Lady Gaga. At that moment, I was Lady Gaga and I was going to perform that song as only she could. Microphone in one hand and using the fingers of my other to snap along to the beat, the audience cheered; there were smiles, and to this day I cannot get that earworm out of my head.

Project Green Schools (PGS) has made a profound impact on my life. The student-led model it employs shaped me into the young leader I am today and has contributed greatly to the concern and respect I have for our planet. Starting at the tender age of nine PGS provided opportunities for me to learn and lead among like-minded students. From as far back as I can remember, I've been fascinated by the planet and its varying functions. "Miss Robin" visited the Pinecroft School when I was in kindergarten as a classmate of her daughter, Haley. Miss Robin read us stories, played games, and explained to my class the importance of protecting our planet. The lesson began with the emphasis on the simple, like remembering to turn off lights, and continued with information about the importance of recycling and ways to reduce our carbon footprint at home. "You can do this very easily by making small changes in everyday habits", Miss Robin repeated. I went home that evening promptly instructing my family they needed to turn off the lights, and do their part. I was the newly-appointed "Environmental Sheriff".

Through my experiences with PGS, I was taught to appreciate and respect the environment. I began spreading my newfound knowledge to others--starting with my family. From statewide field trips to school assemblies, PGS offered me the opportunity to learn about sustainability from every perspective imaginable. I saw a sustainable fashion show with student-designed garments made out of recycled materials. I was entertained by a "Bag Monster" mascot, constructed from the average number of plastic bags a consumer disposes of daily. I worked with other student leaders at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Museum of Science, and other area landmarks. I was able to organize an art show at my school, prompting my classmates to create music and art celebrating sustainability, while donating gently used books to our local library. I had the unique opportunity to engage with numerous local celebrities: Former New England Patriot Joe Andruzzi, Miss Massachusetts, The Boston Celtics, chief elected officials on the local, state, and federal levels, and more. Ultimately, my years as a "Green Schools Ambassador" for PGS culminated in my receiving a prestigious Presidential Award from then-President Barack Obama.

Project Green Schools differs from other organizations principally because it is entirely comprised of student-led initiatives and leadership councils. As a small child, I felt like I was a part of something that mattered and making a genuine impact in my community. Not many kids

have experienced the myriad of leadership opportunities provided by PGS for seven straight years of my young life. I am so grateful for this unique distinction that PGS has offered me and countless other like-minded students.

After spending hours on numerous projects year after year for PGS, one project in particular “clicked” with me, and became a gateway to my future ambitions. Spending time backstage during the “Sustainable Fashion Show” at age 9, I picked out scarves that would drape perfectly while matching my bright blue eye shadow. I was uniting my love of the environment with my love of fashion. It was during that time I decided to consider a career in fashion. Years later, this experience eventually led me to look at colleges that provided opportunities in Business and Fashion. As I applied to Marist College last year as a Fashion Merchandising major, I recalled with great fondness that PGS fashion show where I strutted down the runway with other “models” showing off sustainable fashions to the sound of applause from the appreciative audience. That experience inspired me to start my own upcycling business “2nd Take”. In this venture, I obtained gently used clothing from thrift stores and repurposed or “upcycled” them for interested consumers. I now a committed student to Marist College, and I am eager to integrate fashion and sustainability as one of its newest Fashion Merchandising majors. I have already formed connections with club members and faculty who can guide me in this journey.

I am more than thankful that the lessons I learned from my participation in PGS will become a part of my future aspirations. I am grateful for those who stimulated in me an appreciation and understanding of the environment at a young age, and I believe this unique model is important to replicate for future generations of students. Action is the touchstone for any global movement. Rather than being a bystander witnessing the mistreatment of our planet, I am proud of being a leader in demonstrating to others the importance of protecting it. The world isn't going to get better on its own. It needs attention and concern from all members of society from all areas of the world. This isn't a personal issue; it's a global one that impacts every individual daily. *“We respect the earth, we do our best to keep it healthy, were the green team, and were ready for a change to be made.”* Thank you so much to Miss Robin and Project Green Schools for providing such a myriad of opportunities and experiences that molded me into the leader I am today who is now well-equipped to change the world.