

The seals on the cover represent the two sides of the Congressional Award Medal. The Capitol Dome is surrounded by 50 stars, representing the states of the Union, and is bordered by the words, "Congressional Award." Bordering the eagle are the words that best define the qualities found in those who have earned this Award, "Initiative – Service – Achievement."

The Congressional Award



Public Law 96-114, The Congressional Award Act

2017 Gold Medal Award Ceremony

*The Congress of the United States
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C.*

National Board of Directors

It is my honor and privilege to applaud the achievements of the recipients of the 2017 Congressional Award Gold Medal. These outstanding 373 young Americans have challenged themselves and made lasting contributions to local communities across this great nation. This is our largest class of Gold Medalists to date!

The Gold Medal Ceremony is the culmination of a long journey for our awardees. For each participant the journey was unique, but one that likely included many highs and lows. The Congressional Award program was designed to instill a wide range of life skills and attributes that are necessary to navigate and overcome obstacles on the path to success - both in the classroom and beyond. And now that each young person has met these challenges and attained their goals, we hope they will continue to amaze and inspire us by pursuing their passions, utilizing their talents, and demonstrating an unwavering commitment to making the world a better place.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we would like to extend our great appreciation to our partner organizations and sponsors for their continued support. Each organization plays a vital role in our ability to deliver this program, especially in this time of tremendous growth and development. Without your sincere commitment to our mission, this opportunity for our youth would not be possible.

And finally, we thank the teachers, parents, community leaders, and loved ones for sharing their resources and personal time. You have made an incredible difference in the lives of these young people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paxton K. Baker', with a stylized, overlapping flourish at the end.

Paxton K. Baker
Chairman
National Board of Directors

Earning the Congressional Award



Voluntary Public Service- serving others and the community. (Examples: volunteer work at nursing homes, libraries, or parks)



Personal Development- developing interests, social and/or employment skills. (Examples: dance, public speaking or part-time jobs)



Physical Fitness- improving quality of life through fitness activities. (Examples: basketball, running or exercise with appropriate modifications)



Expedition/ Exploration- undertaking a wilderness or venture experience. (Examples: primitive camping, biking tour or studying in a foreign country)

Bronze, Silver, and Gold Certificates and Medals are presented to all eligible young people. The Bronze and Silver Medals are presented by Members of Congress at the local level. The Gold Medal Award Ceremony is held annually in the U.S. Capitol.

No limits are placed on the number of Congressional Awards presented each year. Any young person, age 14-23, can earn the Award. There are no deadlines, scholastic requirements, or nominating processes, and participants work entirely at their own pace. The Congressional Award Gold Medal is the pinnacle of achievement.

Complete details on age of entry and required hours are available from the National Office at www.congressionalaward.org

Gold Medal Program



2017 Gold Medal Award Ceremony I

June 21, 2017
U.S. Capitol Visitor Center
Congressional Auditorium | 10:00 a.m.

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies

Mr. Wolf Blitzer
CNN

Presentation of the Colors and National Anthem

U.S. Capitol Police

Invocation

Fr. Patrick J. Conroy
United States House of Representatives Chaplain

Welcoming Remarks

Mr. Paxton Baker
Chairman of the Board

Presentation of The Congressional Award Gold Medals

Members of the United States Congress

Closing Remarks

Master of Ceremonies – Mr. Wolf Blitzer



Wolf Blitzer is CNN's lead political anchor and the anchor of *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, which airs weekdays at 5 p.m. ET, providing viewers with in-depth reports about the political, international, and breaking news stories of the day. In addition, he anchors "*Wolf*," airing weekdays at 1 p.m. ET, focusing on the most important

news from Washington and around the world. Blitzer has been with the network for more than two decades.

Blitzer earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the State University of New York at Buffalo and a Master of Arts degree in international relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C.

In addition, Blitzer has numerous honorary degrees from educational institutions across the country, including The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.; State University of New York at Buffalo; The Catholic University in Washington, D.C. and The Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pa.

2017 Gold Medal Award Ceremony II

June 21, 2017

**U.S. Capitol Visitor Center
Congressional Auditorium | 2:30 p.m.**

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies

Mr. Mateo Raul Magdaleno

Presentation of the Colors and National Anthem

U.S. Capitol Police

Invocation

Admiral Barry Black
United States Senate Chaplain

Welcoming Remarks

Mr. Paxton Baker
Chairman of the Board

**Presentation of the Inspiration Award
to Dr. Wiley Dobbs**

Idaho Congressional Delegation

**Presentation of
The Congressional Award Gold Medals**

Members of the United States Congress

Closing Remarks

Master of Ceremonies – Mr. Mateo Magdaleno



Mateo Raul Magdaleno is an author and Chief Education Officer for the IDQ Group Inc., providing innovative education strategies to corporations, non-profit, government agencies, universities and school districts who are committed to reducing the dropout rate and increasing college enrollment among underserved students.

Magdaleno is also the Founder and Chairman of The Magdaleno Leadership Institute, a non-profit organization devoted to building high school student servant leaders. Magdaleno was appointed to serve on the U.S. Congressional Award National Board of Directors, who present Congress's highest award for youth. He also serves on the Texas Advisory Council for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and serves on the National Advisory Board of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. In addition, to managing his own business and philanthropic work,

Magdaleno serves as the caregiver of his elderly mother, Maria and in the process of adopting his older sister, Sylvia Magdaleno, who is gifted with down syndrome. Furthermore, Magdaleno is currently working with Reconciliation Outreach on creating a safe house for homeless college students, to be completed by spring 2018.

Inspiration Award – Dr. Wiley Dobbs



Dr. Wiley Dobbs is a native of Twin Falls, Idaho. He graduated from Twin Falls High School, participating in wrestling, judo, and baseball. In college he competed in the sport of judo and, in 1980, he was invited to the United States Olympic Center in Colorado Springs as an Olympic judo team hopeful.

Wiley was a social studies and English teacher at Bear Lake High School, O’Leary Junior High and Twin Falls High School. He has coached wrestling, judo, volleyball, baseball and track. He was the head wrestling coach at Twin Falls High School from 1987-91.

He is the former principal at Magic Valley Alternative High School (1990-92) and the former principal of O’Leary Junior High School in Twin Falls (1992-2000). In 1999, he received the Idaho Secondary Principal of the Year Award.

In July of 2003, Wiley was hired to be the TFSD #411 Superintendent of Schools. Since that time, the TFSD #411 has passed 7 successful levies to the tune of \$190 million, added four new schools and he was awarded the Idaho Superintendent of the Year Award in 2013 by the Association of School Administrators.

In December of 1993, Wiley Dobbs was the principal at O’Leary Junior High School, a school of around 950 students, in Twin Falls, Idaho.

A parent came to him and asked him if he would be interested in a program called “The Congressional Award.” Wiley told her he would look at it, and unenthusiastically threw it in his pile of programs to look at.

The parent was Linda Norris, an aide to then-U.S. Representative Mike Crapo. As promised, he reviewed the information she gave him, and fell in love on the spot with The Congressional Award!

What's not to love? The Congressional Award is voluntary, individual, and non-competitive. Whether academically gifted or challenged; affluent or impoverished; physically fit or disabled; enthusiastic about school or bored - anyone ages 13½ to 24 can participate. The program is universal. Students do not win the award; they earn it. Most of all, he liked the idea that it accentuated the positive things that so many of the young people in our nation are doing. He was delighted to become involved in a program that recognizes the good things young people do.

In 2009, after 16 years serving on the Board of Directors of Idaho's Council, Dr. Wiley Dobbs was appointed to the national United States Congressional Award Foundation Board of Directors by U.S. Senate Minority Leader, Senator Mitch McConnell. For nearly a quarter of a century, Wiley has served as advisor to hundreds of students, and has recruited other educators in the school district to do the same. The Twin Falls School District has one of the highest percentages of involvement in the nation, and Idaho is a leading state.

In addition, The Congressional Award is a family affair for Dr. Dobbs. All three of Wiley's sons, Dylan, Austin, and Marcus, are involved in the Program. Marcus is in high school and currently working toward his Bronze Award. Austin earned his Silver Medal. Dylan earned his Gold Medal in 2012 and Dr. Dobbs had the pleasure to attend the annual Gold Congressional Award Ceremony in Washington, D.C. to see him receive his honor.

Wiley also had the opportunity to help chaperone over 70 Gold Medal recipients, including Dylan, who participated in the Gold Nation Program (a wonderful program allowing them to tour Washington, D.C. together and participate in a service project for our troops).

*Congratulations to all of the
2017 Congressional Award Gold Medalists*

*2017 Congressional Award Gold Medalists
are listed by last name*



*Autobiographies submitted by 2017 Congressional Award Gold
Medalists are listed by Congressional District and then last name.*

2017 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Samia Abdul-Qadir, Illinois
Hannah Addington, Ohio
Ayesha Absan, Arizona
Alan Ai, Ohio
Funda Akilli, New Jersey
Indra Alagar, Pennsylvania
Jaya Alagar, Pennsylvania
Krishnan Alagar, Pennsylvania
Rajan Alagar, Pennsylvania
Mamie Albritton, Mississippi
Susan Alverio, Iowa
Srikar Anantha, Texas
Bailey Anderson, Wyoming
Grace Anderson, Wyoming
Irfan Ansari, Kansas
Madison Arriaza, Utah
Nisha Arya, Pennsylvania
Felicia Aschettino, New Jersey
Monica Attaway, Texas
Emily Baer, Minnesota
Matthew Baer, Minnesota
Jung Hyo Baik, California
David Bao, California
Kayleigh Barnes, Delaware
Megan Baumhardt, Oregon
Lexi Bedard, Wyoming
Alexis Behne Sharma, Florida
Elizabeth Belka, Pennsylvania
Victoria Belka, Pennsylvania
Satchel Bell, New Jersey
Noah Berkowitz, Pennsylvania
Seth Berkowitz, Pennsylvania
Julie Bicknell, Florida
Elena Boal, New Jersey
Maxwell Bockmann, Wyoming
Edwin Bodoni, Colorado
Margaret Bowyer, South Carolina
Hannah Brau, Utah
Sara Brennecke, Wyoming
Ryan Briscoe, Maryland
Stephanie Brookshire, Florida
Genevieve Bruen, New York
Molly Burns, Wyoming
Snghyun Byon, California
Natalie Carter, Ohio
Madeline Carwile, Maryland
Edward Cen, Texas

Gordon Chan, California
Katrina Chan, California
Katherine Chen, Washington
Nathan Chen, Washington
Nathaniel Chien, California
Andrew Chin, Washington
Piyaporn Chivatanaporn, Arizona
Minyoung Cho, California
Daniel Jewon Choi, California
William Choi, California
Arihant Chordia, Ohio
Abhiraj Chowdhury, California
Spencer Christensen, Colorado
Tanner Laurence Christensen, Wyoming
Conrad Chu, California
Jaeyub Chung, Washington
Lauren Ciulla, Indiana
Jarrod Clark, Texas
Dean Colarossi, California
Jesse Cole, Idaho
Nicholas Coleburn, New Jersey
David Crain III, New Jersey
Christian Cropp, Florida
Jacob Cryder, Arizona
Samuel Cuentas, Idaho
Gabriel Curcione, New York
Natalia Czachorowski, Illinois
Clara da Silva, Maryland
YuYing (Elaine) Dai, California
Cristina Dalton, Georgia
Natalie Dameron, Missouri
Tejna Dasari, Texas
Ashish Dave, Texas
Bennett David, North Carolina
Annabelle Day, Idaho
Emily Deese, Michigan
Rachel Demaree, Washington
Darrel Dennis, Texas
Shrey Derasari, Texas
Riya Dholia, California
Michael Doliszny, New Jersey
Thomas Hill Douglas, North Carolina
James Dowling, Florida
Capri D'Souza, North Carolina
Fiona Dubrosa, New York
Delaney Dunlap, North Carolina
Alexandra Duplin, Massachusetts

2017 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Kathryn Ellis, North Carolina
Kaitlyn Erramouspe, Wyoming
Dominic Esposito, New Jersey
Jordan Feldman, North Carolina
Nicole Ferruggia, Florida
Connor Fiddler, California
John Finelli, Florida
Kai Fisher, California
Caroline Fitzgerald, North Carolina
Kendall Fleshman, Oregon
Joshua Florkowski, Florida
Ronald Florkowski, Florida
Lindsey Fogel, New Jersey
Elexis Forgey, Wyoming
Matthew Frye, Indiana
Lindsay Fullerton, Pennsylvania
Reed Funder, California
Samantha Gable, Pennsylvania
Benjamin Gallagher, Wyoming
Grant Gammon, Tennessee
Madison Gandy, New Jersey
Daniel Garcia, Wyoming
Vasavi Garimella, Kansas
John Garland, Kentucky
Steven Gi, California
Jared Gillen, Kansas
Rachel Goldstein, Connecticut
Briana Gonzalez, Texas
Laurel Grae, Ohio
William Gregson, New York
Lauton Gresham, North Carolina
Nicholas Grosinger, Washington
Liam Guille, Wyoming
Lauraleigh Guthrie, North Carolina
Emily Ha, California
Jemin Ha, California
Reece Haire, Florida
Heejin Han, New York
Ellen Haney, Ohio
Madison Haney, Alabama
Jillian Hanley, Florida
Mabika Hari, New York
Emily Hartzler, Arizona
Saja Hassoun, Utah
Charlotte Hecht, Wyoming
James Hefner, Texas
Maura Herberston, New Jersey

Jarom Herring, Wyoming
Allison Herskovitz, New York
Jordan Hibbs, Virginia
Emma Hicks, Michigan
Caitlin Hiscock, Florida
Adam Hoffman, Texas
Olivia Hoijarvi, Missouri
Garrett Holmes, Florida
Daniel Hong, California
Lisa Huang, Virginia
Emily Huff, Indiana
David Hub, California
Holly Hutcheson, North Carolina
Aalisha Jaisinghani, Florida
Ashley Jamison, North Carolina
Jasna Janikic, Pennsylvania
Jordan Jennison, California
Woo Jihyun, California
Siri Jois, Texas
Lily Joslin, Wyoming
Emily Jue, Texas
Edward Jung, California
Hee Won Jung, California
Amir Kamrani, Florida
Alexander Kang, California
Ruveyda Karaca, Texas
Pakrush Katragadda, Ohio
Jesse Katzeff, Florida
Taimur Khalid, Nevada
Almaas Khan, Texas
Beom Kim, California
Byungjun (BJ) Kim, Texas
Christopher Kim, New York
Katherine Kim, California
Kylie Kim, California
Lina Kim, California
Naomi Kim, California
Naomy Kim, California
Sonia Kim, California
Suzie Kim, California
Tiffany Kim, California
Yena Kim, California
Yoo Jin Kim, California
Zachariah Kiser, Kentucky
Carli Knight, Wyoming
Konnar Knotwell, Wyoming
Ha Young Kong, California

2017 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Adam Koszyk, Illinois
Pavan Krishnan, Virginia
Pranit Kumaran, California
Zachary Kunow, New York
Mary Kuprianczyk, Illinois
Andrew Laberee, New Jersey
Evan Ladd, Tennessee
Sarah Laible, Pennsylvania
Kimberly Laker, Virginia
Christopher Lauria, New Jersey
Mitchell Lauria, New Jersey
Alice Lee, California
Brandon Lee, California
Connie Lee, California
Danielle Lee, California
Eric Lee, California
Hannah Lee, California
Hyeun Lee, California
Lucy Lee, Maryland
Max Lee, Ohio
Jake Leung, California
Rebecca Levi, Idaho
Eric Li, Texas
Thomas Libcke, Michigan
Allison Licavoli, Missouri
Harris Liou, California
Hasan Liou, California
Cassidy Little, Wyoming
Jonathan Liu, California
Rachael Liu, Georgia
Thomas Lubnau III, Wyoming
Alix Jordan MacKillop, Maryland
Isabella Maehl, Washington
Jack Maginnes, North Carolina
Arjun Mahajan, Kansas
Marta Majewski, New Jersey
Gregory Marchal, Wyoming
Patrick Marchal, Wyoming
Erin Markham, Pennsylvania
Alexandra Marsh, Washington
Conner Martin, Wyoming
Jacob Matsumoto, Arizona
Emily Matthews, Pennsylvania
Rachel Maunus, Florida
Animate Mazurek, Texas
Edward John McCabe, New York
Jack McGinley, Florida

Luke McIlvain, Wyoming
John (Jack) McManis, Washington
Ben Meyerson, Florida
Lane Mitchell, Mississippi
Emma Morris, North Carolina
Hansel Motiram, Maryland
Ryan Robert Murphy, New Jersey
Colleen Murray, Florida
Srijith Nair, Florida
Jacob Nam, California
Terese Navarra, Nebraska
Ethan Nelson, Nebraska
Nicholas Nelson, Wyoming
Joseph Nemec, Texas
Michael Ngan, California
Tyler Nguyen, California
Austin Noll, California
Annika Solveig, Norton, Idaho
Braden O'Connor, Minnesota
McKenna O'Connor, Utah
Amanda Olivio, New Jersey
Jamie Ostmann, California
Megan Pachniak, Wyoming
Janice Park, California
Chelsea Parrott, Texas
Urvi Patel, New Jersey
Mariah Pay, Utah
Olivia Perez, Florida
Sofia Perez, Florida
Micah Petersen, Delaware
Diana Pinkham, Florida
Cameron Pirozzi, Florida
Abby Pitts, Mississippi
Giovanni Pizzato, Wyoming
Teja Polisetty, Pennsylvania
Megan Pollon, California
Rahul Popat, Texas
Clayton Pope, Illinois
DeAnna Pope, Illinois
McKenzie Powell, Wyoming
Swathi Prakash, Pennsylvania
Vaed Prasad, New Jersey
Vidur Prasad, Ohio
Emily Prokop, Michigan
Jonathan Prokos, Florida
Payton Puerzer, Minnesota
Anthony Radcliffe, Pennsylvania

2017 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Gopal Raman, Texas
Maya Ravichandran, New Jersey
Jean-Paul Recht, Florida
WeiAnne Reidy, Maryland
Lauren Rennecker, California
Dusstyn Reynolds, Ohio
Mackenzie Rigney, Kentucky
Carmen Ross, Tennessee
Jacob Rowe, North Carolina
Luisamaria Rubio, Oklahoma
Alannah Elyse Ruiz, California
Devrae Russell, Wyoming
Karen Russell, Wyoming
Shelby Russo, Florida
Ryan Mohamadi, New York
Naome Sajnani, New York
Kayla Samimi, California
Luis Sanchez-Romo, Nebraska
Sofia Santa-Cruz, Florida
Thiago Santos, New Jersey
Kathleen Schofield, New York
Alexander Scott, California
Kayla Sears, Kentucky
Mary Grace Shannon, South Carolina
Jaidev Sharma, Ohio
Brenden Shipley, Florida
Ishan Shukla, Massachusetts
Payam Shwani, Utah
Margaret Silliman, Georgia
David Singleton, Washington
Charles Siragusa, New York
Katherine Skelly, Ohio
Meagan Skolnick, Wyoming
Madilyn Somers, New Jersey
Miki Somosot, Texas
Angelica Song, California
Aidan Sowa, Rhode Island
Ryan Sowa, Rhode Island
Kristen Sparhawk, Pennsylvania
Katherine Speece, Kentucky
Mikayla Steele, Massachusetts
Brianna Seidle, Florida
Benjamin Stewart, Washington
Peter Stewart, California
Christiana Stone, Idaho
Shan Su, Texas
Nikhil Swaminathan, Maryland

Sydney Tabor, Connecticut
Jeremy Tang, Michigan
David Tegtmeyer, Nevada
Sara Tegtmeyer, Nevada
Ethan Teo, California
John Paul Terneus, Nebraska
Harrison Theodore, Massachusetts
Maria Theodore, Massachusetts
Sean Thomas, Louisiana
Santo Tiralosi, New York
Sofia Tiratto, Utah
Sara Trojanowski, Michigan
Sabrina Uvanile, Florida
Anthony Uzzolina, New Jersey
Joshita Varshney, Pennsylvania
Cali Vaughn, Florida
Jenna Viveiros, North Carolina
Priya Vulchi, New Jersey
Stephanie Waldstein, Pennsylvania
Jessica Waller, Washington
William Waller, Washington
Katherine Walsworth, Kansas
Charles Wang, Texas
Jeremy Ward, South Carolina
Alonzo Webb, West Virginia
Ann Wechsler, Connecticut
Jaycie Wells, Wyoming
Allison Wetherell, New Jersey
Ben Wetzels, Wyoming
Kaitlin Wong, California
Sung Ho Woo, California
Erica Wu, New Jersey
Daniel Minsug Yang, California
Jason Yang, Illinois
Lauren Yang, Texas
Rahul Yerrabelli, Maryland
Sanjana Yerubandi, Ohio
Caroline Yi, Virginia
Jennifer Yi, California
Christian Yon, Connecticut
Neha Zafar, Nevada
Elizabeth Zhang, Texas
Yan Zhang, California
Lucas Zhao, New York

Madison Haney

Killen, Alabama

Advisor: Jennifer Jones

Affiliations: Girls State, HOBY, Key Club, National Honor Society, People to People International

I completed 427 hours serving through several service organizations including founding two service projects which benefited disadvantaged children of the Shoals area. “Remember the only justification we have to occupy God’s green earth is to serve.”-Ian Fleming. I completed 313 hours of Leadership training, by attending conferences & seminars through various organizations in which I held leadership positions. These conferences were through: AL Student Council, FBLA, UA Capstone Leadership, HOBY, ALA AL Girls State, AL Governor’s School, Key Club, & Auburn. I have always considered myself to be healthy however my family’s history of health problems concerned me and I wanted to insure that I did not repeat history. I completed a total of 338.88 hours of fitness through cardio, dance, & swimming as a weekly workout, while lowering my carbohydrate intake. The Exploration was my favorite area of the program due to my passion to explore and celebrate different cultures while traveling the world. I spent 61 days & 60 nights in 12 countries as a U.S. Student Ambassador through the People to People International Program, earning a total of 650 Ambassadorial hours. This award personally means so much to me because of the huge honor to myself, my family, and my community, as well as representing Alabama. I would love to see more youth wear this gold medal; it is not just an award – it is a lifestyle that we should all live in order to progress physically, mentally, and educationally.

Piyaporn Chivatanaporn

Tucson, Arizona

Advisor: Aichurek Zhalilova

Affiliations: National Honor Society

My first volunteering activity was at the Friends of Oro Valley Public Library, where I shelved and helped sell second hand books for a non-profit for four hours a week for three years. Another service I loved was going to Rocky Point every year to build houses with my youth group for those in need. With a goal in mind, I was able to learn Japanese, spending at least 30 minutes a day doing workbooks and going to club once a week. I will test out my fluency in Japan this summer. For Physical Fitness, I went back to train in the basics of soccer and volleyball, by practicing juggling and serving, respectively. I spent a few hours a week working on these until I was able to juggle at least 20 times and serve with 90% accuracy. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Seattle to learn about its background and to train myself to navigate and take public transportation without getting lost. During the five days, I was able to walk with a map, take the bus, learn about the Klondike Gold Rush, and visit the modern museums. The Congressional Award really motivated and pushed me to get up and explore myself and the cultures around me.

Ayesha Ahsan

Chandler, Arizona

Advisor: Ayse Kolo

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

In order to earn my Gold Medal, I volunteered at my local hospital. I volunteered in Outpatient Services and was responsible for registering patients who needed tests done. I also assisted visitors to the hospital in reaching their appropriate destinations. For the Personal Development portion, I participated in weekly study groups with my friends in order to prepare for the SAT exam. We would tutor each other on specific topics that we found difficult. For Physical Fitness, my friends and I would go to our local gym and work out with the various equipment available to us. By working out together, we were able to motivate each other to really push ourselves physically. Last, but not least, for my Expedition/Exploration, I planned a trip to Sedona, Arizona with my friends. While there, we engaged in hiking and explored the beautiful town. We also had the opportunity to see and appreciate a lot of traditional art. Overall, my experience was truly amazing as I was able to push myself physically and academically and was motivated to involve myself in my community.

Jacob Cryder

Mesa, Arizona

Advisor: Karin Moffitt/Kim Massie

To earn my Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of service for two main entities: the Maricopa County Animal Care and Mesa Mayor's Youth Summer of Service. I walked dogs and cleaned cages for MCACC, and MYSOS exposed me to other needs within our community, like Helen's Hope Chest for foster children. For Personal Development, I increased my shooting accuracy with my 12-gauge shotgun and my 45-lb draw strength bow by practicing at an archery range and clay pigeon release course. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to increase my track and soccer running speed. I attended additional training sessions for speed and conditioning and qualified for the Arizona State Track meet. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a two-week trip covering over 3,000 miles of camping in different National Parks in the Pacific Northwest. We hiked, white-water rafted, and swam in Crater Lake, the deepest Lake in the U.S. I had an amazing experience throughout my Gold Medal journey and I am very proud of all I was able to accomplish.

Alannah Ruiz
Vallejo, California
Advisor: Verna King
Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Volunteer Public Service as a liaison and teen mentor at Kaiser Permanente Surgery Department, tutoring children and youth in foster care, as well as volunteering at a local soup kitchen serving Solano County. For Personal Development, I spent over 400 hours on practicing and improving my volleyball skills and court performance allowing me to compete at the local, regional, and national levels. For my Physical Fitness, I completed 200 hours on training for my first 5k run that started with 20 minutes walking and slowly built up to run-walk and eventually running 30 minutes, 4-5 times a week. For my Expedition, I planned and organized a week trip to Aruba. I immersed myself in the culture, speaking with the locals in Papiamentu and indulged in their culinary delights during my stay. The journey earning the Congressional Award was an amazing experience. It has provided me with endless lessons and has positively influenced my life.

Edward Jung
Folsom, California
Advisor: Benjamin Koh

To complete my 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, I served as the Vice President of my city's Teen Council. I served through both events and programs for youth and adults in my city. Apart from the council, I organized and performed music recitals for the different elderly homes in my community. For Personal Development, I extensively improved my public speaking skills through competitive speaking as a high schooler. By attending weekly practices, I studied speaking methodologies and improved greatly as a speaker, and I am now a nationally-ranked speech competitor as a result of my efforts. For Physical Fitness, I decided to unify my organization and fitness skills together by creating an exercise routine and plan to lower my mile time down by 33%. Over the period of two years, I practiced through solo runs and marathons to eventually succeed in this improvement. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned and completed a four night camping trip to a lake campground in Folsom, California. On this trip I went kayaking, hiking, and bike riding and overall trained my endurance skills with exercise and life in the natural world. Earning the Congressional Award has phenomenally expanded my world view - never before had I ever known the importance of extensive time and date planning for seemingly simple but significant tasks, or even of keeping tents nailed down at all times so that they don't fly away during the night, all important lessons I learned from the Award that I will never forget.

Nathaniel Chien
Stockton, California
Advisor: Jaya Mokkaapati

I completed my Voluntary Public Service at The Lord's Closet (which helps people re-enter the work force) and Row All Scholarship Fund (which provides scholarships so that teens in California's Central Valley can participate in the sport of Rowing). For Personal Development, I strengthened my skills as a saxophonist by joining my school's Marching Band and Wind Ensemble. Through practice and lessons, I became 1st chair at the San Joaquin County Honor Band and was accepted to the California All-Northern Honor Band. For Physical Fitness, I concentrated on the sport of Archery. I competed in Junior Archery Olympic Development (JOAD), became a Level 1 Coach, and volunteered at Archery Summer Camp. I planned and executed a five-day Expedition to Lassen Volcanic National Park, where I camped, hiked, studied the geology, and embraced the wonders of nature. Through my quest to earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I've learned to set and accomplish goals, and to push myself outside of my comfort zone. I now fully understand the importance of giving back to my community.

Kaitlin Wong
Redwood City, California
Advisor: Ann Ohsawa

Through my journey with the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service; creating my school's first ever Principal's Service Award, helping at a Japanese cultural camp, working with the LifeMoves organization, and volunteering with the Global Leadership Academy in Canada. To achieve my goals in Personal Development, I took extracurricular writing classes to improve my skills. I also discovered a creative outlet by teaching myself how to play the guitar and ukulele (shout out to YouTube). I dedicated over 600 hours to Volleyball--across both school and club teams, which contributed towards my Physical Fitness goal. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned an international trip for 8 nights in Paris and London for my grandmother, uncle, and me. During my trip, I learned the value of flexibility while navigating in a foreign country. My experience with the Congressional Award helped me discover my interest in community service, which has since led me to new opportunities - most recently being selected to serve as a member of Harvard University's Making Caring Common Youth Advisory Board.

Abhiraj Chowdhury

Pleasanton, California

Advisor: Mr. Manoj Punamia

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I have completed over 400 hours of voluntary public service. Part of this includes serving disadvantaged people, learning different cultures, and serving the needs of orphaned children in India. This helped me develop a passion to give back to our society. For my Personal Development, I negotiated copyright usage with animation companies on behalf of my animation club, raised money for the Japanese earthquake and tsunami disaster, and was a member of UCLA's kendo club sport. Through this I have learned how to be a great leader. In order to improve my Physical Fitness, I stayed active in sports, playing football, basketball, and tennis regularly. I also worked out at my local gym, following a routine that focused on muscle-building and burning fat. Finally, I monitored my calorie intake to improve my daily diet. For my Expedition, I planned a six-day trip to Italy (Rome, Florence, and Venice) with my family. Having studied ancient Rome, exploring the great architecture, artifacts, and wonderful museums was a truly rewarding experience. I also dealt with obstacles (language, labor strikes and reservations). The path to earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was rewarding to me, rich in experience and volunteerism, and in the process I learned a lot about how to be a great leader.

Hannah Lee

San Jose, California

Advisor: Leslie Carmichael

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, most of which I completed at the local therapeutic riding center. Using my experience with horses, I led and helped teach special needs children through equestrian therapy. For Personal Development, I made it my goal to improve my own riding ability. I took more lessons and joined the local Pony Club, and I now compete at a higher level and achieved my C-1 horse management certification. For the Physical Fitness portion, I decided to work on a long-wanted goal of mine, my flexibility. I increased the number of dance classes I took and stretched every other day for around 15 minutes until I achieved my splits on all sides. Finally, for my Expedition I planned an immersive week-long trip to South Korea. There, I explored both traditional and modern landmarks and culture, revisiting my heritage. Overall, I had a wonderful experience while completing the Congressional Award, strengthening skills in leadership, self-management and especially service.

Conrad Chu

Palo Alto, California
Advisor: Jason Bernas
Affiliations: YMCA

I volunteered over 400 hours at my local YMCA Kidszone supervising and interacting with kids. I helped promote a safe and fun environment. I spent time once a week learning woodworking and how to build things by hand. I particularly loved building airplanes and flying them after completion. I was happy to go to tennis clinics 3 times a week which was physically challenging, but so much fun. I was also able to enter tournaments to improve my game. I retraced my grandfather's entry into the United States over 75 years ago through Angel Island. I was really humbled by his and other immigrants' struggles upon their arrival. The process of achieving this award has brought so many opportunities and life lessons to me.

Riya Dholia

San Jose, California
Advisor: Jigna Khetani

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the local hospital by working on-site helping patients get discharged, make lab runs, and many other tasks. My goal was to help the patients and doctors lives become a little less hectic with my help. For Personal Development, I took art class lessons for 90 minutes a week. I improved my art skills in drawing, acrylic painting, oil painting, charcoal, and many other mediums. Working with teachers and mentors, I started on level 1 and I am now on level 8. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided I would take spinning classes and improve the number of miles I biked in 40 minutes. In the beginning, I was only able to bike 5 miles, but with my trainer and the encouragement of the other people, in the end I was able to go all the way to 10 miles. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a five-night sight-seeing trip to London with my family. While in London we went to popular and unconventional places in London. Learning and being able to experience a new culture was probably the best part of the trip. I had an unforgettable experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and am so grateful that I was able to learn about setting and earning my goals through this program!

Ethan Teo

Palo Alto, California

Advisor: Mimi Park

In spending over 400 hours doing Voluntary Public Service, I worked to provide “educational aid” to other children of all ages. These activities ranged from directing our school team’s annual Speech and Debate summer camp to coaching basketball at our district’s local middle school. My Personal Development goal was to increase my involvement in Speech and Debate; I attended weekly practices, participated in over 35 tournaments throughout high school, and attended debate summer camps as well. For my Physical Fitness aspect of the award, I aimed to improve my shot consistency in tennis, measuring my progress by documenting the consistency of my shots against a wall. In doing so, I participated on my school’s tennis team, attended local tournaments, and took private lessons. Finally, to fulfill the Expedition requirement, I spent five consecutive nights at and around Mount Whitney, ultimately reaching the highest mountain peak in the contiguous United States at 14,505 feet. The Congressional Award has given me reason to explore new activities and pursue them relentlessly, and as a result, I have found passion in leadership and service.

Kai Fisher

Santa Barbara, California

Advisor: John Ritchie

Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC

To earn my Congressional Award, I spent more than 400 hours giving back to my community. The majority of my hours were spent at The Friendship Center, a daycare center for Alzheimer’s patients. For my Personal Development goal, I studied the Bible and Jesus’ healings. This opened the way for me to serve as an assistant chaplain in the local jail. For my Physical Fitness goal, I ran hurdles on my high school track team. I improved my personal record, and secured a spot on the Varsity team for three years. For Expedition/Exploration, I planned a 5-night expedition, canoeing through Lake Superior, Canada. This was challenging to me; however, with thorough planning, I was prepared to help lead and delegate what my group needed to do, both in preparation as well as during the trip. My participation in this program helped me learn to budget my time, set and accomplish goals, and see the value in volunteering my time.

Megan Pollon

Arroyo Grande, California

Advisor: Camille DeBruin

To earn the Congressional Award, I provided 400 hours of service delivering food donations from local grocery stores to the community Food Bank. I also promoted music education through outreach events and coaching novice violinists in the San Luis Obispo Youth Symphony. My Personal Development goal was to perform the third movement of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto. After many extra lessons with a master teacher, I performed this piece in the San Luis Obispo Youth Symphony's annual Concerto Competition. For Physical Fitness I learned to play tennis through weekly lessons and summer camp and eventually participated in several local tournaments. For the Expedition portion of the award, I planned and carried out an RV journey to major sites in Arizona including the Grand Canyon, Sedona, and the Hoover Dam. This activity pushed me to take on more responsibility and leadership. In addition, I learned a great deal about Recreational Vehicles. Overall, earning the Congressional Award taught me that by setting concrete goals that push me beyond my comfort zone, I can not only improve my skills in different areas of life I but can accomplish big things through diligent sustained effort.

Minyoung Cho

Valencia, California

Advisor: Luis Esparza

Affiliations: National Honor Society

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered in the Emergency Department and the behavioral unit of Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital. I also volunteered to collect recyclable materials and raise funds for children in Zambia to support their education. I took viola lessons and increased my skill level by signing up for various competitions and practicing for many hours. Tennis lessons were also part of my Personal Development. I attended a boot camp during the summer break for the past 3 years. At the camp, we ran about 5 miles a day and did cardiovascular exercises to increase our stamina. I also ran on my own at the school track with my neighbor. For my Expedition, I organized and planned our family trip to Sedona, Arizona. Our primary goal was to hike at least 15 miles during our trip, and we succeeded.

Michael Ngan
Stevenson Ranch, California
Advisor: Colleen Daly

To fulfill my Voluntary Public Service obligations, I made a weekly commitment to work at my local hospital. Through my years of service there I developed my values of integrity, trustworthiness, and compassion, which I continue to practice in my personal life. For Personal Development, my goal was to cultivate organizational, leadership and social skills while learning about different careers in the medical field. Progressing through three officer positions, I learned to be a more outgoing leader and better communicator. I attained my Physical Fitness goals of mastering an advanced dance technique and developing as a performer through lessons and participation in competitions. To fulfill the goal of Exploration, I went on a 5-day excursion in the Northwest. Traveling the length of the West Coast and seeing so much has planted the seed of the joys of exploration and discovery. Through the program, I have grown into an intelligent, confident and compassionate young man with a great sense of pride.

Reed Fundter
Pasadena, California
Advisor: Allison Dalbeck
Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at various organizations, mainly the Sierra Madre Rose Float Association where I assisted in decorating multiple Rose Floats and at Huntington Memorial Hospital where I helped visitors, staff, and patients. I completed my Personal Development with over 200 hours of various hobbies such as photography, guitar, career searching, Confirmation peer leading, and my personal favorite, card magic. To complete my Physical Fitness, I bettered both my mile time for running from 9 minutes 47 seconds to 7 minutes 53 seconds and my 100 meter swim time from 1 minute 21 seconds to 1 minute 3 seconds. The Expedition/Exploration was one of my favorite program areas. Each trip took hours of planning but the pay-off was bountiful as each location we visited was both beautiful and historic. My favorite trip was the Gold Medal Expedition to Yosemite National Park where we enjoyed nature scenes and historic locations. Overall, the Congressional Award has taught me to be involved with my community, better myself through hobby and physical development, experience life through excursions and ultimately, taught me that anything in life is possible with proper goals.

Suzie Kim

Pasadena, California

Advisor: Sue Byun

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I tutored elementary school students weekly at the Boys and Girls Club of Pasadena as part of my Voluntary Public Service. I worked with children primarily to increase their interests in academics. For Personal Development, I took two-hour violin lessons weekly, practiced daily, and participated in the Certificate of Merit program (Levels 8, Advanced 10, and Panel Regional). I was able to improve many performance skills by strengthening techniques and my musical interpretation. For Physical Fitness, I played tennis, which included taking private lessons, playing weekly practice matches, and competing in the USTA Junior Team Tennis league. Practice helped me serve and hit consistently as well as improve my agility on the court. Lastly, I planned a trip to Chalco, Mexico for my Expedition and stayed at an all-girls school, Villa de Las Niñas. I interacted with the students in Spanish but taught them how to speak English too. I am so grateful for my experience in Chalco and the three activities that developed my character and helped me become an active member in my community.

Yoo Jin Kim

Arcadia, California

Advisor: Albert Lee

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I volunteered with my dance studio through performances and teaching dance. We performed for people who would not be able to watch a show otherwise, and I volunteered to teach for students who are underprivileged and are not able to afford expensive dance classes. I completed my Personal Development goals by serving as an assistant in a small business to learn about how a business functions because I plan to start a business in the future. I also decided to enroll in speech and debate classes to help me improve my speaking and communication skills. I completed my Physical Fitness goals of being able to complete a difficult ballet step by attending many dance classes and working on my core strength to improve my stability. I also took yoga and pilates classes to achieve my goal. To complete my Exploration goal, I planned a family trip on the East Coast. We visited many historical and famous landmarks in New York and Washington D.C. and I learned many things about America's history as well as my planning skills. Overall, my experience in earning the Congressional Award was enlightening and allowed me to discover my ability to achieve goals independently.

Jonathan Liu

San Marino, California
Advisor: Sharon Thompson

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at Jefferson Head Start and inspired an interest in science in elementary school students. For Personal Development, I joined my school's speech and debate team and learned about rhetoric and communication. I have since qualified to the National Championships in Alabama. I trained myself to run races and joined my school's cross country team for Physical Fitness. I improved from being clinically obese to being a competitive runner who runs everyday. For my Expedition, I went on a solo backpacking trip through Ecuador and immersed myself in Ecuadorian culture and cuisine. The Congressional Award has truly inspired me to become a better person. In chasing the green light at the end of the dock while earning the award, I have improved myself substantially.

William Choi

La Canada, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

To completely my Voluntary Public Service, I traveled to Mexico with the Global Youth Mission group. There, we worked with an orphanage by providing relief goods and other services to better the lives of these children. I practiced and spent many hours developing my skills on the cello. With these skills, I went on to perform at many venues alongside multiple symphonic and charity groups. For my own health, I ran three miles every day and committed to physical training alongside a fitness instructor. In that time, I managed to lose 60 pounds and continue to retain the same healthy lifestyle today. For my Expedition, I traveled to Dublin, Ireland to visit great monuments of literary merit. Upon visiting, I learned more about Dublin's culture and educational policies all the while studying the great works of Irish authors like James Joyce. The Congressional Award process has taught me not only how to take care of my body, but how do be a better volunteer.

Naomy Kim

Montrose, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

I volunteered at the Self-Help Clinics with Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles to help litigants fill out their court documents and understand the steps they must take in order to make progress on their cases. I also participated with local clubs to pick up trash and clean the environment. For my Personal Development, I practiced piano pieces from different time periods for at least an hour and at least two times a week. I received personal lessons from my piano teacher to learn more about music theory and pass the Certificate of Merit levels 8 and 9. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I practiced my golf skills weekly on the range for my swing and aim for two hours with a personal golf coach. I would practice on the golf course 2 times a month with experienced golfers to learn golf etiquette and different shots, like bunker shots. Planning my entire trip from the start to finish, I went on a 5 day trip to Valley of Fire, Death Valley, and Red Rock Canyon for my Expedition. Immersing myself in an environment full of surprises and hardships, I abandoned technology and many comforts to challenge my limits. Without Congressional Award, I would not have learned the imperative skills such as independence and discipline and the unforgettable memories I made on my expedition to the deserts in Nevada.

Austin Noll

Van Nuys, California
Advisor: Billy Kangas

For my Voluntary Public Service, I served over 575 hours at The Family Rescue Center, a non-profit organization that provides low income and homeless families with food, clothing, and medical care. My goal for Personal Development was to write and direct my first professional short film. In November, I was able to shoot my SAG (Screen Actors Guild) film, and am now in post production. For my Physical Fitness, I was able to do two different things. I began doing parkour, which I enjoyed for two years, and now, I commit to a daily workout intensive routine. Many different factors went in to my Expedition and Exploration. I was able to fully coordinate a trip to New York City. Overall, the many different elements required of me in order to successfully complete and earn The Congressional Award Gold Medal allowed me to develop and strengthen my personal capabilities, and persevere through set-backs - all while having a blast!

Hyeun Woo Lee

Beverly Hills, California

Advisor: Wonnie Pak

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

In earning the Congressional Award, I co-founded a non-profit organization called To Infinity and Beyond. Through the organization, I was able to teach Hmong students through video conferencing. For Personal Development, I practiced and developed as a violinist and for Physical Fitness, I practiced fencing, competing in multiple competitions and having better results. To complete my Expedition, I traveled alone to Oregon, traveling around in nature and hiking through trails.

Kayla Samimi

Manhattan Beach, California

Advisor: Ernesto Nodado

I worked closely with Children of War Foundation to help fundraise for and raise awareness about children in war torn countries such as Syria. In addition, I shared the gift of music with local community members living in elderly homes through concerts. For Personal Development, I prepared for the University of California, Los Angeles Farsi Literacy Exam every week in hopes of passing one level of college level Farsi. I also practiced my flute privately and practiced individual solos and songs for my own self-improvement. I have played tennis for much of my life and the Congressional Award helped me prioritize my goals and focus more specifically on improving myself as a player. To accomplish my Physical Fitness goal, I worked with my private instructor and with other players to improve my game. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Yosemite National Park in California where I challenged myself with various hikes throughout the week. I also learned much about the plantlife and scenery at the park.

Alexander Kang
Los Angeles, California
Advisor: Soomi Lee
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered through the Boy Scouts in activities such as Eagle Scout projects. I combined my love for science and teaching at the California Science Center by being an educator at different “stations.” I also used my skills as a cellist to play in a group that performs at charitable events. I continued playing cello and studying music. I took theory lessons as well as practicing and going to lessons. I participated in the Boy Scout National Youth Leadership Training course to further development leadership and team skills. I trained in Tae Kwon Do with sparring exercises and executing forms, which are sets of certain moves. Additionally, I trained to run half-marathons and other running events. I have so far participated in five half-marathons, and five 10k races. I wanted to explore Native American land while also looking at the history of the development of western America. I traveled along Route 66 from Santa Monica to Nevada then traveled north to visit National Parks and Native reservations and lands. The Congressional Award helped me broaden my view of the world. I saw more in what I was doing and saw where all my experiences could take me. It was a major undertaking and I could not have done it without the help of my friends and my family.

Lina Kim
Cerritos, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

I completed my service goals by dedicating my time to providing my community with Korean books for Korean-American children to enjoy and to learn more about their culture and roots. I also started fundraisers to raise money to help the homeless community and foster care homes. I spent hours dedicated to improving my skills on the violin. I did this through private tutoring, practicing on my own time, and performing with the local youth orchestra, the Southern California Youth Philharmonic. I completed my Physical Fitness goals by regularly practicing to improve my score in golf. I did this by practicing at the range, training with a coach, and playing matches with my team at school. In order to complete my Expedition/Exploration goal, I traveled to Paraguay in South America. In Paraguay, I learned so much about the rich culture and history as well as improved my skills in speaking and understanding Spanish.

Pranit Kumaran
Cerritos, California
Advisor: James Baek

I worked in a variety of environments in my community for my Voluntary Public Service. I am most proud of my time with Schools on Wheels by tutoring underprivileged and homeless children so that they can achieve as much as they can for their futures. I committed time twice a week for my Personal Development in soccer. I felt accomplished with the time I spent because it led me to join my school Varsity Soccer team and become captain of my club soccer team. I decided to cut my mile time by a third to improve my Physical Fitness. I made weekly visits to the gym and worked gradually on my legs, abs, and cardio to achieve that goal. I visited North Cascades National Park and British Columbia for my Expedition/ Exploration. I explored activities and places that I have never been before. These experiences taught me the importance of leadership and organization when planning a large project; the Congressional Award helped me break my barriers and achieve important lifetime skills.

Danielle Lee
Cerritos, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer
Affiliations: Key Club

To serve my community, I volunteered with Key Club International at various service projects such as city festivals, youth education programs, and marathons. I also assisted a local food bank and taught preschool students every weekend. For my Personal Development, I learned how to work behind the scenes in theater and musical productions as a member of stage crew. Taking on responsibilities of a stage manager and stage set designer, I mastered all functions of stage crew and am able to help smoothly direct an entire show. To improve my Physical Fitness, I spent hours practicing volleyball to improve my playing skills. I advanced from not being able to “short serve” at all to being able to “short serve” 70% of the time and have also increased my ability to accurately set the ball, receive the ball, and spike. In my desire to learn more about marine life and the ocean in general, I explored the Monterey Bay. Through this experience I was able to gain self-confidence where all my planning skills/leadership/responsibility came together and executed a memorable and insightful 7 day Exploration trip. I am proud to say that, while earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I have developed into a driven, well-rounded individual with positive goals and ambitions.

Jihyun Woo
Cerritos, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

I was able to serve our community by serving and helping provide care for the elderly. I was also able to go beyond our community to serve locals in developing areas of Mexico. For Personal Development, I learned to think creatively as I created and implemented ideas for art pieces and graphic design projects. I also learned self-discipline as I pushed myself to practice and enhance my skills every day. As I improved my cardiovascular endurance, my running time improved. By engaging in several activities to improve my running skill I also improved my running technique, which also improved my time. One of my main accomplishments on my Expedition was learning to enjoy outdoor activities. I had never considered myself an outdoorsy person but going on various hiking trips and learning how to water-raft taught me that I enjoy engaging in outdoors activities.

Sung Ho Woo
Cerritos, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

For Voluntary Public Service, I created a volunteering program called YLOC, where I tutored math to elementary children for free. I wrote articles for the Korea Times to better myself at writing and achieve my Personal Development goal. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I played soccer for several years. For my Exploration, I visited Korea to learn more about my culture by exploring the historical landmarks and castles.

Jung Hyo Baik
Yorba Linda, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I volunteered under the direction of Future Young Leaders of America (FYLA), a non-profit organization. I actively participated in clean-ups held in my community, and I communicated with my club members to create a cleaner location for everyone else. For Personal Development, I spent time improving my drawing and painting skills. I used acrylic paint, watercolor, and other different art supplies to complete my artworks. Finally, I learned how to put my voice in my artworks, and I was able to communicate with other people with my art. For my Physical Fitness portion, I spent time improving my golf game by playing on the varsity golf team. Along with more experiences in field, my putting game got more precise and my average score in 18-hole golf course decreased by five strokes. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned 6 days 5 nights trip to Japan - Ureshino/Nagasaki. By planning the trip by myself and I was able to build independence and new experiences. Through this trip, I learned the importance of planning as well as developing my skills.

Sngyun Byon
La Habra, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer
Affiliations: Key Club

Voluntary Public Service has been a major part of my life for as long as I can remember. I fell in love with volunteering, both in my community and in organizations that reach far and wide. Key Club in particular has had a major impact on me, and I would not trade these experiences for anything! I have grown so much as a person in these two years. I have further cultivated my passion for visual arts, and I have learned the importance of compassion through leadership roles. I have experimented in balancing my health with every other aspect of my life. I have had the opportunity to work with incredible instructors in kickboxing, archery, and yoga! I had the wonderful opportunity to plan a trip to my parents' home country--Korea. I had a fantastic experience and I plan to attain fluency in the language and return! This award has pushed me to accomplish some incredible achievements that I will never forget!

Gordon Chan
Walnut, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

To earn my Congressional Gold Award, I committed over 200 hours of Voluntary Public Service to the non-profit organization Global Youth Mission, where I helped tutor little children and made blankets with them. I also set aside time to improve my writing skills by writing articles for Korea times in order to get a more global understanding of the current news setting. Through this Personal Development experience, I hope to expand my vocabulary usage and my ability to interpret different writing styles. For my Physical Fitness goals, I decided to improve my fitness by running a mile in seven minutes instead of nine minutes. Doing so would help me partake in cardiovascular activities such as dragon boat and running endurance. Lastly for my Expedition, I traveled to China for three weeks where I discovered the different cultures of America and China. Through this journey, I have realized that anything is possible if you put your soul into it.

David Huh
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Ara Cho
Affiliations: National Honor Society

As the president and founder of a chapter of a community-oriented volunteer organization, I completed over 400 hours in a program based on assisting underprivileged students. I taught many younger students to play musical instruments so that they would be able to benefit and experience in the future. My Personal Development goal was to enhance my violin playing, and I did this by dedicating hours to practice certain musical pieces and participated in several musical competitions in order to gain experience from the other participants, as well as test my current abilities. In order to achieve my goal in having a lower score for my overall golf games, I practiced every day, or several days in a week, working on the consistency of my swing and how I could change to get the optimum distance, direction, etc. After hundreds of hours of practice, I greatly improved my score. For my Expedition, I created an itinerary for five days and four nights with the transportation log for my adventure in San Diego. The purpose of my Expedition was to discover the hidden culture that San Diego was surprisingly filled with. One of my many experiences includes hiking Mt. Woodson Trail. In retrospect, I realize that I was actually very dedicated to earn the Congressional Award, and I am able to appreciate the fact that I have attained a memorable experience which is undoubtedly going to prepare me for my future, whatever that may be.

Jordan Jennison
Yorba Linda, California
Advisor: Margie Pierce
Affiliations: HOBY, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked with Project Linus to make 100+ blankets for children in the hospital. Moreover, I volunteered at the Ocean Institute educating the public on ocean ecosystems, marine organisms, and environmental issues through hands-on activities. In terms of Personal Development, I pursued my interest in robotics by building an underwater robot for the Ocean Institute as well as creating a system for our school's robotics team. I'm now able to design a robot using the CAD software program, Solidworks, and use tools to create it. For my Physical Fitness portion, I trained to complete 32 fouette turns on pointe for ballet. Through practice and training with Boston Ballet, I can execute these turns easily with proper technique. Finally, I traveled to England and stayed with a British family to explore British history and culture. I visited castles, historic windmills, etc., and I attended an English school. The Congressional Award has truly impacted my life, as it has given me the tools and confidence to overcome challenges and succeed.

Kylie Kim
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

It felt nice to help my community by assisting the elderly who could not support themselves. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to do so. For Personal Development, I improved my reading, writing, and speaking skills in Spanish. In order to complete my Physical Fitness goals, I practiced almost everyday and continued to play in tournaments. I had to be responsible and plan things out for myself. I am glad that I worked for this award, because it helped me to grow so much as a person.

Ha Young Kong
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I worked over 100 hours at the Discovery Cube Center, teaching children using science experiments and models. To complete my Personal Development goals, I practiced playing piano for over 100 hours with the help of Youtube Videos and a piano teacher. In order to complete my Physical Fitness goals, I practiced tennis with my friends and tennis coach. In the end, I improved my serve and my sprinting speed through this practice. In order to complete my Expedition/Exploration goal, I planned a trip for several days and I was forced to think of possible problems during the trip.

Brandon Lee
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To earn the Congressional Gold Award, I surpassed the 400 hours required pertaining Voluntary Public Service. Some things I would do were cleaning parks/beaches, donating money to charities earned by recycling, and assisting people with physical and/or mental disabilities in playing sports. I fulfilled the 200 hours required under Personal Development by building my own desktop computer from scratch. I did so by first learning about how computers worked online, then researching compatibility between various parts, and finally building the device. I obtained the 200 hours in Physical Fitness by participating in my high school wrestling team. I would practice Monday to Friday for four hours each day and compete in tournaments on Saturdays in addition to the league matches during season. I traveled on a self-coordinated 5 day Expedition. I planned weeks before the actual day of the trip on what supplies to bring, resources needed, money costs, and activities to do. During the trip, I had to take care of everything while keeping everyone safe. Beginning the Congressional Award, I really did not know what to expect, but as time went on it proved to be a rather enjoyable experience and I am proud of my achievement.

Connie Lee

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

For Voluntary Public Service, I helped fundraise surgeries for children with cleft lip and cleft palate for Operation Smile. In addition, I was a member in Simply Savant, where I engaged in activities and events that promote educational equality and serve the local youth. For Personal Development, my goal was to learn how to cook. To achieve this, I developed my cooking skills through practice and online videos. For my Physical Fitness portion, my goal was to increase my running time and live a healthy lifestyle overall. To achieve this, I purchased a treadmill and ran every week. For my Expedition, I planned an eight-day excursion trip to Cuba. On this incredible trip, I interacted with the locals through interviews and learned about Cuban's social and political culture.

Eric Lee

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I have served in the Hwarang Leo Club and in the 4 years, I helped clean up the environment. Through these works, I have been encouraged to stand up and become the club President of Environmental. Through these works, I expanded my ways to help clean and improve the Earth. I spent much time over the weekends to improve my readiness for the AP European Test. I diligently studied for the class that I struggled the most in and in doing so have learned many ways and skills to improve my chance of doing well on the AP test. For Physical Fitness, I spent much of my free time in practicing Kendo. I have almost achieved my goal of obtaining the second degree in Kendo. I have trained hard with my masters and peers to improve my skills and my physical strength. For my Exploration, I traveled to San Diego and San Jose with my own planning and abilities. I learned how to plan my own day efficiently and it helped me become more responsible in my own daily activities. Earning the Congressional Award was a unique experience where I felt free and independent. I had a splendid time in learning, struggling, and improving myself so that I could become a strong independent leader for the future generations.

Harris Liou

Rowland Heights, California

Advisor: Carolyn Wang

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered with my Boy Scout troop, helping out with service projects and conducting my own Eagle project. To complete my Personal Development hours, I learned the 300 most frequently-used characters in the Chinese language. For Physical Fitness, I did weight training for 9 months along with other activities. For my Expedition, I went on a camping trip at Crystal Lake in California.

Jacob Nam

Brea, California

Advisor: Genii Ahn

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered at IEDU Times, which is a non-profit, student-run organization. I wrote many articles on a wide-range of topics, and those articles were then published in the K-Herald newspaper. I also cooperated with my peers and gained the skill of teamwork and communication. In order to achieve my goal of an ACT score of 35 or higher, I purchased ACT practice test books and took practice tests on my own. I wrote down the incorrect questions and solved them again until I fully understood the reason for the correct answer. I spent a total of 250 hours improving my basketball skills. On weekends, I went to the gym or nearby park to practice my shooting, dribbling, defending, and basketball IQ. Practicing my basketball skills helped me improve, as I am now much better when I play basketball with my friends. I spent five days and four nights camping at O'Neill Regional Park. I was responsible for planning the entire camping trip, and this experience was really interesting. I had the opportunity to discover the beauty of nature and breathe the fresh air. During my journey towards The Congressional Award, I gained numerous traits, such as responsibility and time management, and I had the chance to truly find who I was.

Angelica Song

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliations: Key Club, National Honor Society

I dedicated my time tutoring elementary kids and helping teachers craft project ideas for the school year. Ranging from making copies to grading, I enjoyed my time being an aide for my favorite teachers growing up. I wanted to improve my math skills, and I did so by practicing many tests and doing a variety of problems for the ACT and AP Calculus BC test. Doing so, I was able to earn a 35 and a 5 on each test, respectively. For Physical Fitness, I invested many hours training at the ice rink to make it to the Los Angeles Ice Theater senior team for world and national competitions. I went out of my comfort zone to explore a nearby gem: Sequoia. Through hikes and listening to park rangers, I learned the importance of environmental sustainability, and how pollution is impacting our National Parks. I will cherish this process of growing as a holistic and intellectual individual.

Daniel Yang

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Eric Shim

For my Voluntary Public Service, I helped out at a local library and nursing home. I taught origami to the children who visited the library and the seniors at the nursing home. For my Personal Development, I practiced the piano and prepared for the CM level 10 exam and managed to pass. For my Physical Fitness, I learned kendo and practiced every week to compete in tournaments and participated in promotion ceremonies. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to the East Coast where I booked plans for different tourist attractions and hotels. My overall experience in earning the Congressional Award was positive because I was able to grow into a balanced person.

Daniel Choi

Laguna Hills, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

For Voluntary Public Service, I extended my music to senior citizens in my local community and have even taught less fortunate students, in Mexico. I contributed to students within my school and interacted with the seniors. I have tremendously improved as a trumpet player over the past months. Not only did I grow in my overall playing, I had the pleasure of experiencing a multitude of musical events where I truly showcased my abilities. I realized that my potential as a trumpet player is unlimited if I work hard enough. Physical Fitness was without a doubt one of my most enjoyable moments, at least in my high school career so far. I lost 15 pounds, slowly, and greatly improved in my skill set as a volleyball player because I noticed how much faster I got, especially reflexes, and how my passing and hitting improved. My Expedition to the DMZ located in South Korea was a momentous event in my life. I visited many memorials, historic locations, and even got inside confidential military bases to see for myself what really happened inside the war zone; I realized the importance of international diplomacy. It was a long run and my mind was not exactly all too focused on getting the Gold Medal Award, rather trying to witness change within myself and my community. I grew a lot from every single aspect, big and small.

Dean Colarossi

Dove Canyon, California

Advisor: George S. Birdsong

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Discovery Bound

For Voluntary Public Service, I served in the Boy Scouts of America, where I coordinated, planned, and led my troop in a wide variety of service work in my community. My service focused mainly on the outdoors, where projects encompassed both regional parks and national forests alike. In Personal Development, I challenged myself to learn to SCUBA dive, and became certified as an Advanced Open Water Diver. In addition, I trained to become a certified whitewater rafting guide on the Arkansas River. As a Track & Field athlete, I set goals for myself when I began the award--I wanted to run a 50 second 400 meters, and a 23 second 200 meters. Working with the Tesoro Track Team and Tachyon Track Club, I achieved both goals in my senior season, and plan to continue running in college. My adventures in Exploration/Expedition have taken me to Canada, on a 7-day self-contained canoeing/kayaking trip exploring Lake Superior. With a group of around twenty teenagers and two guides, we set off to be immersed in the wilderness and learn about ourselves. The Congressional Award gave me an opportunity to think outwardly and serve others, while growing as an athlete, as an intellect, and as a person.

Connor Fiddler

Mission Viejo, California

Advisor: Richard Collarossi

Affiliations: Discovery Bound

I volunteered at the Dana Point Institute in Dana Point, California for four years. While there I helped usher tours and provided assistance for different aspects of the guest services department. I made a commitment to read the Christian Science Weekly Lesson. Within these are designed passages from the Bible and The Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy. I started my morning with these readings and helped provide a foundation for my day. I made an effort to take a certain amount of time out of my week to be physically active. I did many trips during my years working towards the Gold Medal. I white water rafted down the Grand Canyon for one and for another I went to Peru and helped build a school house in a small village outside of Cusco. My time working towards the award was made exceptionally better due to the comradery developed in my National Leadership Council group, which I spent four years with.

Emily Ha

Irvine, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

For the Voluntary Public Service portion, I volunteered at the Saddleback Memorial Hospital as a Cardiac Patient Care Volunteer, where I provided aid to patients and nurses. I also worked with Global Youth Mission, where I volunteered at local orphanages and medical centers. For the Personal Development section, I continued my percussion instruction, focusing specifically on marimba performance. I participated in my school's percussion ensemble, where we placed 1st in Regional Championships and 2nd at World Championships, and expanded my marimba repertoire. For Physical Fitness, I decided to improve my mile time and my endurance while running. I reached this goal by hiking almost every weekend and finding new trails in which to exercise. For my Expedition, I planned a five-night camping trip to the Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon National Parks. I learned to create an itinerary for our trip there, including hiking numerous trails, observing wildlife, and cooking outdoors.

Jemin Ha

Laguna Hills High School, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

I completed My Voluntary Public Service goal through Global Youth Mission, where I volunteered in various places from orphanages to rehab centers in Mexico. For Personal Development, I practiced, took classes in, and performed clarinet music for all throughout high school. To achieve my Physical Fitness goal, I participated in varsity athletics and also trained outside of school in order to fight diabetes. In completing my Exploration, I was able to explore different areas of South Korea by myself. It was a good experience being able to find more out about my roots.

Sonia Kim

Anaheim, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliations: American Red Cross, National Honor Society

As a leadership member of the Orange County Red Cross chapter, I participated in annual volunteer events, such as the Children's Safety Festival and Home Fire Preparedness Campaigns. Not only this but I was also involved in other volunteer clubs such as the Evergreen Club. I completed a significant portion of my Personal Development by taking art classes in the realms of graphic design, acrylic painting, and charcoal sketches. I furthered my Personal Development by focusing on creating works that echoed my interest in global issues, such as global warming. Every single day, I trained both in the neighborhood and at the local gym in order to prepare for a half marathon. I also took up taekwondo in the efforts to learn self defense. I traveled to Washington, D.C. for several days, with a set itinerary that was independently planned. With the goal of exploring the country that I was born and raised in, I explored the United States' most famous landmarks. In doing so, I gained a new found appreciation for our foundation. I was motivated to become more involved in the community and develop my character in order to become a better part of the community as well.

Yena Kim

Irvine, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

For Voluntary Public Service, I worked mainly with the Global Youth Mission organization to participate in a variety of community service activities. The activities included small local events such as helping homeless communities to larger events such as a community service trip to South Korea. I focused on improving my musical skills and talent with the cello. By actively researching better techniques and constantly utilizing practice to further development, I was able to reach the goals that I set for myself for the Personal Development section. As someone who is not actively involved in a specialized sport, my Physical Fitness goal was focused around improving personal fitness. With a goal to reduce my mile time, I researched breathing and formation techniques and also went to my school track to apply such techniques for a better mile running time. For my Expedition, I organized an extensive camping trip for my family. We visited the city of Shaver Lake in Fresno County, California. I was in charge of organizing all accommodations and activities for the duration of the trip, and the trip was very successful and enjoyable. The Congressional Award was a great opportunity to put in an active effort to not only improve my own talents and gifts, but to also positively influence different communities of various backgrounds.

Alice Lee

Irvine, CA

Advisor: Michael Kim

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

I completed over 700 hours of Voluntary Public Service by planning and working the Short Term Mexico Missions as well as creating story books for a local library. I helped form a team, plan activities, and create materials to create a nurturing and educational environment for children. For Personal Development, I spent over 600 hours to further improve my art techniques and increase my familiarity with various media. I won various competitions and displayed my artwork in more galleries. For Physical Fitness, I spend over 500 hours taking fitness classes and running in my own time to improve my physical endurance and cardiac strength. I not only shortened my mile time but grew less tired throughout the process. For my Expedition, I planned a four night and five day camping trip in Mammoth Lake. During this trip, I had to engage in new activities such as setting up a campfire, hiking, and fishing while also adjusting daily schedules to sudden changes. By participating in the Congressional Award, I was able to step out of my comfort zones and develop into a well-rounded individual by achieving every goal that I set for myself.

Tyler Nguyen
Orange, California
Advisor: Karen Ketterer

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a non-profit thrift store. I cleaned, refurbished, and sold furniture at a highly discounted price to people that are less fortunate; all proceeds funded scholarships for high-school students. For Personal Development, I learned how to surf. I now go surfing every weekend and see it as a part of me for the rest of my life. For my Physical Fitness portion, I went on weekly runs and workouts to improve my strength and endurance for the Water Polo and Swim team. Since then, I have earned a varsity position in both sports. Finally, I planned a five-night road trip with my family from California to Colorado for my Expedition. We stopped in Las Vegas, Grand Canyon, and Antelope Valley along the way. Working toward the Congressional Gold Medal has helped me to become a compassionate and more well-rounded person. It also helped me overcome difficult challenges and taught me that hard work and perseverance pays off as I surpassed my expectations working as a lifeguard at Laguna Beach, CA.

Peter Stewart
Santa Ana, California
Advisor: Lawrence Budner
Affiliations: AmeriCorps NCCC

Throughout my undergraduate journey, the winding path that it was, I consistently sought out direct service opportunities lending practical skills where I could. I cleared fire brush, cleaned abused animals' pens, tutored at risk youth, and engaged dozens of communities across the United States. Completing my Personal Development goals meant unlocking a new way of communicating, as I focused primarily on improving my Spanish language skills. I engaged innumerable persons in as wide a swath of conversational topics as can be imagined. Keeping the legacy of my XC Junior Olympic competitions alive, I ran, climbed, and slacklined my way towards my completion of my Physical Fitness goals. Building upon my Personal Development goals, I immersed myself in the foreign culture of Mexico as my Expedition. I met many wonderful people, and was challenged in ways that continue to shape who I am to this day. I was challenged to learn what the privilege of being a U.S. Citizen really means, I will not soon forget my experiences undertaken in pursuit of the Congressional Award.

Jennifer Yi

Anaheim, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

In earning the Congressional Award, I volunteered at the Orange County Food Bank on a weekly basis for Voluntary Public Service. Additionally, I went on multiple trips to Mexico in order to assist young children at an orphanage through the organization Global Youth Mission. For Personal Development, I practiced musical technique and theory to develop my flute playing skills. I learned to improve my musical performance through practicing with my teacher and my local orchestra, the Southern California Youth Philharmonic. For Physical Fitness, I have practiced and improved my shooting skills in archery. I participated in many state and national competitions, as well as practiced at various shooting ranges with my coach. For my Exploration, I planned a five-day trip to the Hawaiian island of Oahu. While there, I explored the history and culture of the Hawaiian Islands by visiting many different institutions and natural landscapes that the island had to offer. Through my experience with the Congressional Award, I have developed a sense of independence and introspection that I will surely keep with me for the rest of my life.

Yan Zhang

Irvine, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

I embarked on countless service trips to Tijuana, Mexico to aid a rehabilitation center and an orphanage there. I worked with Global Youth Mission (GYM) to deliver food and other necessities. Along with that, I connected GYM with Labdoo, an NPO to bring laptops and an education for the kids. From burning my chocolate chip cookies to completing a full 5-course meal for my family, my culinary improvement has been quite a journey. I created a goal to make an international dish for my friends and family every single month. I also participated in various cooking activities in my community. For Physical Fitness, I clearly remember sitting down with my coach and having a meeting about my future aspirations in swimming. At the time, our league prelims was coming up and the team needed as many swimmers in finals as possible. I successfully made finals and dropped more than five seconds in my 200 IM event. My family members have always been a suckers for adventure. When the opportunity came for us to travel to Hawaii, I immediately took initiative to plan out our itinerary. We went volcano hiking, scuba diving, zip-lining, parasailing, and much more! It was a great learning experience for me and I believe that with these past two years, setting these goals for myself, I grew and matured physically and mentally.

Hee Won Jung
Cypress, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley
Affiliations: Key Club, National Honor Society

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by going to elementary schools to teach students the essentials of coding. I developed my personal speaking skills through speech & debate, honing them down to be concise and effective. For Physical Fitness, I worked on pushing myself to go beyond my limits. I trained through workouts to improve my mile time. For my Exploration, I planned and went on a trip to the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico through which I explored the different culture and society the Navajo lived in in comparison to mine.

Jamie Ostmann
Los Alamitos, California
Advisor: Lori Olson
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

To earn the Congressional Gold Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to teach kids about social and environmental activism. I was peer advisor for Algalita Marine Research and Education, where I taught students the importance of environmental protection and stewardship. For Personal Development, I spent over twenty hours a week in filmmaking and acting conservatory programs. I performed in multiple professional productions and had my films shown at nationally ranked film festivals. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I began riding, working on my equestrian skills and technique. In addition to increasing my Physical Fitness, I also learned about horse care and keeping, and bonded with the horse I rode. To accomplish my Expedition, I went on a trip to Belize, where I volunteered in a school in a Mayan village and helped build a playground from reusable materials. I also learned about the environmental crisis threatening coral reefs in the Belize Cayes.

Janice Park

Buena Park, California

Advisor: Romin Babk

Affiliations: Key Club

I have served the community by joining the community service program and the 'Be a Mentor-Tutor' program by Pace Academy Foundation I founded in 2014. The service included beach cleanup, public park cleanup, serving the poor, mentoring the students in need, and many other community centered service I have learned the art at Yeda Art Learning Center since 2014. I also worked as a intern at several construction companies. Through these activities, I learned a diverse blend of creative and strategic thinking and how to develop design skills and drawing skills to be a Architect. I built activities including jogging, fitness, swimming, badminton, and walking on a treadmill into my daily and weekly routine. I planned to include different activities of walking and strength training. I allowed time for recovery and put the process on paper. I planned a venture experience in Istanbul to learn about a different culture and to study the historical architecture there. I visited many historical places including Hagia Sophia, the Basilica Cistern, and the Topkapi Palace through 6 days' travel. I have gained a lot through the pursuit of the Award and been blessed with rare leadership skill and community and global mindedness.

Katrina Chan

Laguna Niguel, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliations: National Honor Society, People to People International

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service goal, I provided a minimum of 400 hours of service under the Mandalorian Mercs Costuming Club and the Tharasri Foundation. I also raised more than \$3,000 through my high school Cosplay Club for the past few years to benefit the at-risk youths in my community. I achieved 200 hours of Personal Development goals through practicing piano to prepare myself for various piano competitions, the Certificate of Merit examinations, and performing at nursing facilities and school functions. As for my Physical Fitness, I swam daily for 2 hours under the supervision of my club swim coach. I also underwent intense anaerobic and aerobic conditioning, along with a military conditioning to prepare myself for the College ROTC program. For my Expedition/Exploration, I organized a 7 days trip to Hong Kong. My main reason to visit Hong Kong was because it was my paternal grandparents' hometown. I wanted to learn about its unique culture, its language, and the Hong Kongers' way of life. While participating in the Congressional Award, I have learned more about the different cultures outside of the United States, achieved an intrinsic motivation that pushed my physical limit through physical training, gained a more compassionate heart toward helping the at-risk youths in my community, and guided me to achieve success in my piano skills.

Jaeyub Chung
Laguna Niguel, California
Advisor: Lori Tarwater

I became president of a non-profit organization known as the Global Youth Mission. Our activities ranged from making blankets for cancer patients to organizing trips to an orphanage in the impoverished city of Tijuana, Mexico. For Personal Development, I decided to further my skills as a musician. I began taking private lessons for the saxophone and rediscovered my affinity for the piano. I joined the High School Wind Ensemble, of which I became the Tenor Sax Section Leader. I began training myself to strengthen both my physical and mental strength. I joined the track team during my sophomore and junior years of high school, where I was awarded the MVP award for my event and was able to make varsity. For my Expedition, I spent a week exploring Palomar Mountains. Despite never having gone camping before, I decided to step outside my comfort zone and delve into the wilderness. I spent my time hiking, swimming, and exploring while also instilling myself with a newfound love for nature

Alexander Scott
Fountain Valley, California
Advisor: Beth Hindraker

My volunteering achievement on the SS Lane victory has shaped me. I have learned seamanship, navigation, been a leader for the Sea Cadet program, worked with law enforcement and the Armed Forces, created museum pieces, coordinated Hollywood filming events and helped prolong the legacy of the ship. For the Personal Development portion of my project, I strengthened my videography and photography skills. In the process I created two historical documentaries, made video blogs for school announcements, and chronicled the adventures of my family. My ambition for Physical Fitness was to become a better basketball player by increasing my jump vertical by 5 inches and improving my jumpshot. To accomplish this I put together a leg workout schedule, spent tireless hours on the court and would also run the occasional City 10K. Through my Expedition I wanted to encompass critical planning, adventure, and a test of survival skill. My father and I backpacked a 37 mile trail across the Catalina Island landscape. Everything needed to survive was packed in and we counted on the ocean to supply our food for the trip. The Congressional Award experience has taught me to be independent, goal oriented, and driven.

David Bao

Ladera Ranch, California

Advisor: Hao Jiang

Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America, National Honor Society

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to my local community through the organization Lion's Heart. I worked on an education initiative by promoting math education in an under-served school district, tutored, and volunteered for the Boys and Girls Club. For Personal Development, I chose to focus on honing my second (of three) languages, Mandarin Chinese. To achieve greater fluency, I studied Chinese history, language, and culture in addition to continued practice of speaking and listening. My Physical Fitness portion involved my attempting track after having been a swimmer for many years. I practiced daily and toward the end of the season got into great shape. Finally, for my Expedition, I visited and learned about Japan, a country I knew little about. I learned about its history and culture through its museums, restaurants, religious sites, heritage sites, and more during an exploration the cities of Kyoto and Tokyo, its past and current capital. The Congressional Award was a valuable experience and I thoroughly enjoyed rising to the challenge that it presented.

Jake Leung

Del Mar, California

Advisor: Henry Chiu

For Voluntary Public Service, I assisted medical staff at my neighborhood hospital in caring for patients. Outside of my local community, I contributed to the preservation of the global marine ecosystem through green sea turtle conservation in Costa Rica. For Personal Development, I improved my understanding of music through weekly piano lessons and learned to play a variety of compositions by composers such as Bach and Mozart. For Physical Fitness, I trained three days a week in Taekwondo and learned self-discipline and leadership on my journey to earn my black belt. Lastly, for my Expedition I completed a seven-night trek through the Andean Mountains of Peru, ascending to over fifteen thousand feet before finally arriving at the Sun Gate of Machu Picchu. From visiting Machu Picchu and the city of Cusco, I learned about the unique culture and history of the Inca. My experiences within these four categories have broadened my horizons and inspired me to continue to serve and explore.

Lauren Rennecker
San Diego, California
Advisor: Devora Garrison
Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of volunteer work at my local hospital in the emergency room. I worked with the physician and nursing staff, assisting with patient care and recovery. For Personal Development, I explored various forms of art, including drawing, painting, and mixed media. For my Physical Fitness portion, I trained for and ran a half marathon, training everyday to increase my endurance and the distance I could run. Finally, for Exploration, I planned a one and a half week trip to multiple countries in Europe, which included France, England, Germany and Belgium. While there, I focused on the gothic architecture of the French buildings and churches in Paris and the unique cuisine of each country. My experience earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was rewarding and I learned many new things about myself and what I can accomplish.

Naomi Kim
San Diego, California
Advisor: Seungwoo Ha

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I dedicated over 400 hours engaging in Voluntary Public Service. At a local sports program, I was a figure skating coach for athletes with developmental disabilities, while at a research-based Korean nonprofit, I was a bilingual proofreader and mediator. For Personal Development, I immersed myself in performing arts, taking two year-long dance classes at school and furthering my commitment to instrumental music by taking oboe lessons weekly and consistently practicing on my own. For my Physical Fitness portion, I continued training competitively in figure skating, completing my senior moves-in-the-field and advancing to silver solo dance tests. With both on and off-ice preparation, I became a stronger skater representing Team USA on Team del Sol. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a four-night trip to Athens and Meteora, Greece with an intent focus on Greek culture and history. The educational yet exciting trip included memorable visits to landmarks and hikes to famous monuments and monasteries, all of which tested my independence! Not only has participating in and earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal been a gratifying, humbling experience unlike any other, it has also provided me with innumerable opportunities to learn, grow, and ultimately achieve.

Edwin Bodoni
Centennial, Colorado
Advisor: Lisa Wiese

For Voluntary Public Service, I established a non-profit organization - the Colorado Wheelchair Fencing Foundation. This organization focuses on coaching wheelchair fencing to physically challenged children. For Personal Development, I worked on a variety of activities. The one that I enjoyed most was perfecting my technique in classical guitar and mastering the Spanish Guitar program. Ballroom dancing was my main activity for Physical Fitness. My goal in dancing was to improve my skills to the intermediate gold level for both American Rhythm (Cha-Cha, Rumba, Swing, Bolero, and Mambo) and American Smooth (Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, and Viennese Waltz). My Expedition/Exploration was a lot of fun- I travelled to the British Virgin Islands, where, on board a catamaran, I visited and explored sites from the Golden Age of Piracy. It was an honor and a pleasure to be part of the Congressional Award Program, which was a great way to learn to set goals, to work to achieve those goals, and to take my activities to the next level.

Spencer Christensen
Centennial, Colorado
Advisor: Kirk Holliman
Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC

I volunteered at my local library, mostly shelving books and movies throughout the year. In the summers I would help out with the Youth Summer Reading Program and encourage kids to become involved with the library through reading and participating in other programs held there. My main goal over the last few years has been to gain a deeper understanding of The Bible and Science & Health and have a better relationship with God. I strived to achieve these goals through reading the bible lesson each week and talking with my Sunday School teacher about questions I had. My goals in Physical Fitness have been to lower my 5K time for Cross Country Running, striving for certain times each year as well as different places in the races I ran in. I would train mainly in the fall, spring, and summer in order to achieve my goals in the sport. First, I completed a 3-day biking Expedition that totaled over 120 miles. Next, I explored a different culture in South Dakota where I learned about farming and working on a ranch. And lastly, I led a week-long hiking trip in the Rocky Mountains where we explored different hiking trails and peaked 3 14ers. The Congressional Award was a challenging, yet rewarding experience that ultimately helped me grow to be a better person and future leader.

Rachel Goldstein

East Lyme, Connecticut

Advisor: Susan Stritar

Affiliations: American Red Cross

For the Voluntary Public Service component, I focused on volunteering in children's sports and fitness activities. This included teaching children how to swim, play lacrosse, and dance. My volunteer activities led to my pursuing lifeguard certification, and mastering CPR. For Personal Development, I choreographed dances for a school fine arts performance and studied dance at the pre-professional level at the Joffrey Ballet School. For Physical Fitness, I played sports at my school in all three seasons. I have enjoyed being a member of my school's cross-country, swimming, and lacrosse teams. I am especially proud that my teammates selected me to serve as Girls' Varsity Swim Team Captain both my junior and senior years. Finally, I researched and planned a family hiking and outdoor exploration vacation to Iceland. I appreciate the opportunities that earning the Congressional Gold Award gave me to contribute to my community and grow as a person in so many ways; thank you to all who played a part.

Sydney Tabor

Waterford, Connecticut

Advisor: Cassondra Rodriguez

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

In order to complete my service goals I mentored young girls in my community to become healthy inside and out through fitness, teaching them the art of knitting, and helping to provide the local Women's shelter with needed supplies. In order to complete my Personal Development goals, I worked for many months and hours in order to preform in a community show. It was a lot harder than I thought and I had to work really hard to perfect the right moves, but it is something I will never forget being apart of. In order to complete my fitness goals I went to the gym everyday to improve my vertical for volleyball. I talked to my coaches and a couple of trainers in order to figure out what I needed to do for a higher jump. When I went back the following season I made the varsity team. For my Exploration, I traced my family roots back to the 1800s on Ellis Island. I then traveled to New York City to visit the Ellis Island Museum and located some of the apartment buildings that my fourth great grandmother had lived in. I even enjoyed some of the places she could have enjoyed. The Congressional Gold Award was perfect for me because it gave me a focus of my past, present, and future in a project that took a few years time.

Ann Wechsler

Greenwich, Connecticut

Advisor: Tammy Livermore

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by collecting thousands of pairs of prescription eyeglasses for Lions Club International and truckloads of used books for children and veterans. I also executed and managed a year-long sports equipment drive for the Special Olympics. For Personal Development, I completed a Red Cross CPR/AFD Waterfront Life Guarding Certificate course and learned the complexities of home maintenance through interior and exterior house painting, deck staining, driveway re-surfacing, and garden planting. For my Physical Fitness program, I played Varsity Lacrosse and Squash which required a rigorous year-long after school commitment. Twice, I was chosen as co-captain of my squash team and achieved Most Improved Player. My lacrosse skills improved exponentially as well as my leadership skills. For my Exploration/Expedition goal, I planned a trip to Spain that entailed booking planes, trains, and hotels while also researching and scheduling sightseeing activities and eateries. In Spain, I learned to read difficult subway and bus maps and by practicing my Spanish, improved my proficiency. I am thankful to have engaged in such a thought provoking process that developed my skills exponentially while also providing me with substantial real world knowledge that will benefit me for the rest of my life.

Christian Yon

Cheshire, Connecticut

Advisor: Martha Shoemaker

I completed my Voluntary Public Service goals by working in the pediatric transplant wing of a hospital, where I played and read with young patients. I also taught guitar lessons to kids at a YMCA in Washington, D.C., who likely would not have otherwise experienced hands-on time with music. For Personal Development, I committed to the goal of improving my understanding of music theory and composition through practicing guitar. I saw my skills with sight reading, songwriting, and performing greatly increase as a result. For Physical Fitness, I set a goal of improving my cardio endurance through running, weight lifting, and playing and refereeing soccer. I ultimately exceeded my targeted time for a 5K run. For my Gold Medal level exploration, I traveled to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Canada, to explore the coast by foot, car, and kayak. I mastered new sea kayaking skills with an instructor, and I learned about the unique coastal ecosystems and ways of life from talking with the locals. The experience of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has made me more cognizant and intentional about setting long-term goals to better myself and the community around me.

Kayleigh Barnes
Bridgeville, Delaware
Advisor: Megan VanMeter
Affiliations: Red Cross

I am a member of the American Red Cross in Wilmington and a senior at Sussex Academy of Arts and Sciences. To fulfill my Voluntary Public Service I founded an organization dedicated to improving the lives of young women through mentoring and community service, an organization now made up of more than 120 young women in nine states. When I entered high school, I noticed that many female students wanted to get involved in community service, but didn't know how. To fill this gap I started by getting together with a few other girls periodically to undertake small projects such as packing kits for servicemen or baking for a local homeless shelter. As word spread, I began receiving inquiries from other young women – even some from other states. So I started teaching workshops on creating community service projects, and established a partnership with the local American Red Cross chapter. As more and more girls have joined, my group has conducted an increasing number of service projects, such as donating school supplies, helping kids in need celebrate Halloween, collecting food and clothing for the homeless, instigating random acts of kindness across the country, and volunteering at many Red Cross events. I spend a great deal of time not only supporting members' projects, but also mentoring and training new members and planning future initiatives. I also serve as a member of the Red Cross National Youth Council, work with my school drama program and advocate for individuals with special needs.

Micah Petersen
Newark, Delaware
Advisor: Juli Dalton
Affiliations: Boys State, United States Army, YMCA

In order to fulfill the Voluntary Public Service requirement, I decided to help bridge the civilian-military divide. My idea flourished into a 501c3 non-profit organization called Reviresco, which now operates in over five states and consults companies on how to build a more veteran inclusive culture. As a fashion connoisseur, I satisfied the Personal Development requirement through the founding of my online, custom bow-tie business, MDP Bowties. I hand-make each one of my ties and offer buyers the option of transforming old neckties into fashionable bow-ties. As a future Army Officer, physical fitness is of the utmost importance to me. I set the goal of running two miles in under 11 minutes. My desire to run faster grew into a passion for long-distance running, and over the past four years, I have completed three runs across the United States. I was given the unique opportunity of growing up with one American parent, and one Zimbabwean parent. In order to better understand my heritage, I traveled to Zimbabwe where I interacted with my mother's childhood friends and gained a personal understanding of her first 18 years of life in Africa. The Congressional Award inculcated within me the importance of perseverance, empathy, and humility, all of which impact my life on a daily basis as a student, founder of a non-profit, and future US Army Infantry officer.

John Finelli

Gulf Breeze, Florida

Advisor: Paul Bruha

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals throughout the Congressional Award Program, I contributed countless hours through the Boy Scouts of America (I am a current Eagle Scout) and various honor societies. These hours served both my school and my community as a whole. I credit my accomplishments in Personal Development greatly to the Boy Scouts of America and the large number of friends and advisors that have aided me along the way. I completed my Physical Fitness goals by exercising on a consistent basis throughout my time in high school. I firmly believe exercise is very important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. My Expedition/ Exploration goals were completed through various camp outs and high adventure bases affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America. These high adventure bases include Northern Tier, Florida Sea base, and Philmont. These adventures were challenging, but very rewarding after their completion. The Congressional Award Program has helped me develop into the person I am today; It has aided me in becoming a model citizen and contributing member to society, so I am forever grateful to the program for leading me through every step of this exciting journey.

Jean-Paul Recht

Tallahassee, Florida

Advisor: Malinda Bennett

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Boys State, National Honor Society

I volunteered around my community through the Boy Scouts of America. I participated in projects ranging from Coastal Cleanups to building ramps for the handicapped. Along with this, I tutored my peers through the National Honors Society Tutor Program. As a part of this program, I decided to focus my Personal Development goals on dedicating myself to the practice and rehearsal of my various instruments through programs such as the Tallahassee Youth Symphony Orchestra and Mickey Abraham's Tallahassee Acoustic Ensemble. I have always used sports as a way to maintain my overall physical fitness. My freshman year I participated in the Varsity football program at my high school. In my sophomore year I joined my high school lacrosse team where I became the Varsity goalie for my junior and senior years. Having lived most of my life in the Northwest United States, I was curious about the ecosystems of Southern Florida, especially the Everglades and Keys. I researched the environment and explored Everglades National Park, as well as snorkeling and SCUBA diving in the Keys and at Dry Tortugas National Park. I have become a more active, involved person due to this program and the experience itself was worth all effort spent.

Joshua Florkowski
Brooksville, Florida
Advisor: Mary Hedglin
Affiliations: United States Air Force

Working to achieve my 400 hours Voluntary Service goal, I worked alongside many compassionate individuals, I gained immense respect for those who dedicate their lives to helping others. One program I found especially rewarding was TOPS, where I helped children with disabilities learn to play soccer. To achieve my Personal Development goal, I took on playing the violin and running, though these two activities are completely different, I found both played hand and hand. I found the faster you get, the harder it is, breathing control is important and both are peaceful in their own way. Wrestling is a very intense sport and that is why I chose it as my Physical Fitness goal, it tested both my mental and physical capabilities. I pushed myself every minute through practice and real matches to achieve my goal of increasing my takedowns and pins. I enjoyed the 7 day/ 6 night Expedition goal quite a lot, though it was tough setting together a plan for this trip and executing it. Visiting the DuPont State Forest and the Pisgah National Forest was very rewarding, exploring the stunning nature all around me was enlightening. Completing the Congressional Award was challenging but also greatly rewarding, not just because of the certificates or medals I earned, but more so the experience I gained and the people I got to interact with as I improved myself and the lives of those around me to reach this goal.

Ronald Florkowski III
Brooksville, Florida
Advisor: Mary Hedglin
Affiliations: United States Air Force

Serving, integrity, leadership, compassion and humility are characteristics I developed completing more than 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I offered whatever comfort I could to those suffering from a terminal illness and their grieving families at a local Hospice Care Center. While working on my Personal Development I learned good sportsmanship, perseverance, and commitment. Joining my school track team running an average of 5-6 miles a day, 5 days a week I improved my 1 mile running average of 6:30 to a personal best of 4:57. By using vision, excellence and teamwork while training and playing offense for my competitive team and defense for my high school team. I achieved my Physical Fitness goal of becoming an effective player in every field position for soccer. Planning and executing a 7 day/ 6 night Expedition to the Pisgah National Forest proved to be a challenge not just physically, but also mentally. I learned to budget, plan, prepare, improvise and ultimately respect for nature and humanity both. I still maintain a sense of higher purpose than self, a duty to serve others, I now serve my country in the United States Air Force.

Amir Kamrani
Palm Harbor, Florida
Advisor: Navid Moshtagh

For Voluntary Public Service, I organized weekly activities for senior citizens in nursing homes. On a regular basis, I visited them and made plans to show them a good time. For Personal Development, I studied the contemporary American politics and its roots that go back two centuries. During my study, I developed an in-depth understanding of positivism, natural law theory, and free market supply side economics. That study helped me prepare for my current internships in the foreign policy field. For Physical Fitness, I pursued my interest in martial arts, in particular, Aikijutsu. I finally achieved my goal by receiving the third-degree black belt in Aikijutsu. To complete my Expedition, I went camping on the Cumberland plateau. For several days my friends and I hiked many miles and visited sites of once upon a time coal towns. I am truly honored to have completed the Congressional Award, for this is a once in a lifetime experience that is transforming.

Alexis Behne Sharma
Sarasota, Florida
Advisor: Harini Subrahmanyam Frederickson
Affiliations: National Honor Society

As the founder of A Chance to Run, a nonprofit organization, I have worked with middle school kids in my community promoting a healthy lifestyle through the sport of track and field. Sharing my love of running through this program has developed into a passion for public service. To complete the Physical Fitness component, I trained six days a week and participated in four varsity seasons of track and field running the 400 sprint and 800 mid distance races. When not on the track, I took part in Public Forum Debate completing the Personal Development component of the Gold Medal. Throughout high school I competed in national circuit tournaments such as Yale, Harvard, and CFL Nationals. Last, for my Exploration requirement, I planned a mother/daughter trip to my birth state of California. There we explored the capital of Sacramento as well as visited historic sites in San Francisco.

Stephanie Brookshire

Palm City, Florida

Advisor: Doris Daniel

I completed over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service by volunteering at the Humane Society of the Treasure Coast and at a local soup kitchen. I especially enjoyed my hours working at the soup kitchen where I was able to provide meals and a friendly face for needy families in my community. For Personal Development, I learned to make healthy meals for my family. I researched recipes, shopped for ingredients, made substitutions based on my family's preferences, and cooked at least 2-3 times a month. I am now an experienced cook and will be able to use my new skills in my future. For Physical Fitness, I worked on my cheerleading skills so that I could learn to base certain elite stunting skills. I attended practices and private lessons to build my strength and stamina and was able to reach my goal. For my Exploration, I planned a 7 day, 6 night trip to London, England with family members. I researched the area and choose activities that would allow me to immerse myself in the culture and history of London. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal is one of my proudest accomplishments and it taught me that I am capable of doing anything I set my mind to!

Christian Cropp

Tequesta, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: National Honor Society

Through Voluntary Public Service, I was able to improve the community around me. I achieved my hours by creating no-sew blankets for children in St. Mary's Hospital, painting houses for the less fortunate in my area, and serving as a youth lacrosse coach for a local recreational organization. For my own Personal Development, I spent countless hours working to improve my golf game. I spent my time practicing on the driving range and putting green in order to lower my handicap. I was also able to play some of the finest courses across the country. Achieving my Physical Fitness goal consisted of many training sessions, practices, and games for lacrosse. Through my dedication to staying on top of my game, I was able to achieve a dream of what many young athletes desire: to play at the collegiate level at a Division One program. My Expeditions to Key West, New York, and Colorado were eye-opening. My gold medal expedition, the Colorado Outward Bound School, was truly life changing. I spent 15 days hiking and conquering peaks in the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range with 15 strangers from across the world. The Congressional Award encouraged me in every way to improve the community around me, discover my inner-drive, and achieve my full potential in all that I set my mind to.

James Dowling
Jupiter, Florida
Advisor: Lynn Lyons
Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 500 hours over Voluntary Public Service, primarily at the Loggerhead Marine Life Center. I worked with children ages 6-12 for three weeks during the summer, educating them on sea turtles and marine life. For Personal Development, I took ACT and SAT lessons weekly. My ACT score increased overall by three. For my Physical Fitness, I attended daily cross country and track practice in hopes of running a 4 miles in 28 minutes. I was unable to complete my goal due to a foot injury; however, my 400 meter time improved. Lastly, I planned a five night Expedition/Exploration to Boston, Massachusetts. While on this trip I explored Boston's historical landmarks, went to a Celtic's game, and celebrated St. Patrick's Day!

Nicole Ferruggia
North Palm Beach, Florida
Advisor: Suzanne Ball

My Voluntary Public Service included collecting toys for critically ill children for the past 10 years. I would donate these toys each year and would gain such pleasure to see the joy it brought to these families inflicted with such a hardship. I have raised over \$25,000 worth of toys for the POST. My Personal Development was planning and cooking healthy meals for myself and my family. Each goal was to prepare a healthy meal within 45 minutes. To coincide with this healthy lifestyle for the Physical Fitness part of the award I began a vigorous workout schedule at Orangetheory and combined weight training with aerobics to increase my strength and endurance. For the Expedition/Exploration goal I planned a trip to Greece to study the culture, environment, food and lifestyle. Earning the Congressional Award was a truly rewarding experience and has made me a more culturally sensitive, committed, and accepting individual.

Reece Haire

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

I dedicated my free time to helping others. I ran a service project in my community and I did my best to improve the lives of others. For Personal Development, I worked hard to improve my skills in dance and photography. I spent countless hours perfecting turns and leaps and learning how to take the perfect picture. In Physical Fitness, I focused on my strength and flexibility as a dancer. I worked out and exercised almost daily in order to reach my goals. For my Congressional Award, I explored St. Augustine, New Orleans, and New Hampshire. I visited a diversity of areas and learned a lot about different cultures and ways of life.

Caitlin Hiscock

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

I volunteered at several organizations including Girl Scouts, the River Center, and Habitat for Humanity. I have written and decorated Cards of Kindness and Cards for the Military, made blankets for sick children at a children's hospital, and worked at Locks of Love. I have helped to run several Girl Scout badge programs and developed a Daisy journey which I lead at our Camporee. I am especially proud of the work that I put in to improve my SAT scores. I developed my hand and eye coordination by practicing archery. In addition, I have enjoyed learning and practicing yoga which has toned my muscles, improved my balance, and helped me to focus on school work. The planning and organizational skills I acquired during my expedition and explorations have increased exponentially. I am much more confident and able to handle unexpected situations and changes now. Overall I have grown mentally and physically and feel ready and able to handle my next journey through college thanks to the Congressional Award Program.

Garrett Holmes

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

For the Congressional Award Gold I volunteered at the Lighthouse Center of the Arts. It was rewarding working with elementary children and the different mediums of art such as clay, pottery and watercolor. For Personal Development, I spent over 300 hours weight training. I was able to increase my strength for football. For the Physical fitness my goal was to increase my skills as a long snapper. I spent the summer at camps and with a long snapping coach. In conclusion, I planned a five day and four night camping trip to Key Largo, Florida. I learned a lot about the ecosystem, ocean, and the area. Overall earning the Gold Congressional Award has given me a lot of confidence by setting goals and accomplishing them.

Aalisha Jaisinghani

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

For Voluntary Public Service, I worked on making blankets for the critically ill children at St. Mary's Hospital. I also created thank-you and holiday cards and care packages for soldiers as a part of the organization Support Our Troops. For Personal Development, I learned and performed the first movement of Alberto Ginastera's Sonata No. 1 for my senior concert. Since I was learning jazz in the same time period, this movement pushed me to stay focused on classical music simultaneously, and tested my technical abilities on piano. I worked towards earning my high red belt in Mixed Martial Arts for the Physical Fitness goal, which was challenging for me. I had to meet certain sparring and fitness requirements, along with running two miles under 19 minutes, which proved to be difficult for me to accomplish. For the expedition, I traveled to New Orleans, and spent the time completely immersed in the city's rich culture. It was especially exciting for me to explore New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, as I was learning to be a jazz musician. Working for the Congressional Award pushed me to be the best possible version of myself in multiple aspects, and I am grateful for the experience.

Rachel Maunus

Palm City, Florida

Advisor: Gayle Forster

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I shared my love of art with kids with special needs by running art classes for children with autism. I also accomplished my goal of supporting my local environment by leading my school's green club in many environmental initiatives such as oyster reef restoration projects and beach clean ups. To learn and grow as artist, I created art to submit to various art shows and contests. I participated in workshops in conventions to enhance my skills in diverse art forms, from sculpture to painting to photography. To build my stamina and personal health, I played on my school's lacrosse team. On the lacrosse team, I learned how to be a better athlete and team member. I planned and participated in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farmers program by working for five days on an organic farm in Central Florida. I worked six hours a day in exchange for access to the farm's food resources, which I used to cook meals with fellow WWOOFers.

Jack McGinley

Jupiter, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

In order to earn my Congressional Award, I dedicated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service as a counselor at the Tequesta Lighthouse Art Center and the Loggerhead Marine Life Center. I also made blankets for sick children hospitalized at St. Mary's Hospital. These volunteer experiences were incredibly rewarding. For Personal Development I was determined to significantly increase my SAT scores and I attended individual tutoring and testing to be accepted to the colleges I am interested in attending. I also picked up a new sport, golf, and took lessons that helped me play on my school's junior varsity team. My Physical Fitness goal was achieved primarily through high school and travel lacrosse teams. I also returned to playing soccer which I had enjoyed when I was very young. For my Exploration I planned a five day trip to North Carolina where I took my family white water rafting, hiking and biking in the mountains. The Congressional Award was definitely a lot of work but was so very helpful to learn how to set, and achieve goals, both short and long term, while helping my community.

Ben Meyerson

Stuart, Florida

Advisor: Joe Pistorio

Affiliations: American Red Cross

For my Public Service hours I volunteered in my community for the American Red Cross, Special Olympics, Jr Olympics, and other organizations. I learned leadership skills while helping others on emergency preparedness and helping others achieve their physical fitness goals through Special Olympics. For Personal Development goals I received my PADI Scuba Certification and took guitar lessons. I enjoy diving the coral reefs in the Florida Keys and playing my favorite songs on the guitar and ukulele. I tried a new sport for my Physical Fitness goal by joining the Treasure Coast Row Club. Since I live in Florida I planned a summer trip to Colorado to experience new activities in the Rocky Mountains. I had a lot of fun white water rafting, horseback riding on a working ranch on a cattle drive, going to a professional rodeo, and tubing down the Yampa River in Steamboat Springs. Earning the Gold Medal for the Congressional Award wasn't easy but I learned by sticking to commitments I can achieve the outcome I want while also learning the importance of helping others.

Olivia Perez

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To complete my Voluntary Public Service hours I participated in medical mission trips to Haiti, as well as spent time volunteering weekly at the local hospital and the Youth Court of the Palm Beaches organization. To complete my Personal Development hours, I am an continued my advancement as a violinist. I studied in violin performance through private lessons, orchestra concerts and rehearsals, and practicing. To complete my Physical Fitness hours I concentrated in volleyball and running. Playing on a competitive travel volleyball team while running on the side, I accomplished both my goal to lower my 5k time and to improve my skills as a defense volleyball player. To complete my Expedition for the gold metal, I planned and organized a family vacation to North Carolina. We went hiking, rock climbing, white water rafting, and swimming in the mountains of the Carolinas on a 5 day 4 night expedition. The Congressional Award provided me with an opportunity to challenge myself in each area and expand my level of activity across the fields.

Sofia Perez

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To complete my service goals I started an after school music program at a local pre school for children of minorities who perviously did not receive a music education. I also volunteered with Youth Court of Palm Beach County, Hands Together of the Palm Beaches, and Big Dog Ranch Rescue. To complete my Personal Development I studied harp performance and worked towards advancing in the Florida Federation Competition. I take weekly lessons, play in the my school orchestra, played in the Florida All State Orchestra, and have earned 6 first place awards at the Federation Competition. To complete my Physical Fitness goal I played volleyball both recreationally and on a travel team. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Boone, North Carolina to go hiking and white water rafting. I learned a lot from this award and it taught me the value of extra curricular activities and being a well rounded person.

Diana Pinkham

Tequesta, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I served over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I enjoyed working with migrant children at the Hope Rural School by assisting teachers during their summer program and adopting families in need to provide Christmas presents. My Personal Development goal was to improve vocally by attending weekly lessons and by participating in several choirs. My hard work was rewarded by having the opportunity to sing two solos at my local Congressional Award ceremony. I selected yoga as my Physical Fitness goal which included increasing my strength and flexibility by holding postures for up to a minute. I attended classes and practised at home by watching videos. I was able to plan and execute a 4 night 5 day Exploration to Nantucket Island and surrounding areas. My research led me to many interesting and beautiful sites and I learned about the dangers of the whaling industry and the history of Nantucket baskets. I feel so thankful for this opportunity because I learned so much about setting and reaching goals.

Cameron Pirozzi

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: American Red Cross, HOBY, Key Club, National Honor Society

My main service initiatives were making cards for the troops and no-sew blankets for pediatric patients at St. Mary's Hospital, where I had been a patient while critically ill 8 years ago. While working on my Gold Medal I was given the opportunity to be the student coordinator of this program. I used this opportunity to learn skills I can use for the rest of my life. I was able to prepare a dinner party from start to finish, how to sew multiple articles of clothing and gain a deeper appreciation of literary classics. Due to my health issues this goal presented to greatest challenge. I was able to push myself by swimming longer than I had ever been able to do. Ballroom dancing allowed me to regain my love of dancing after being unable to participate for many years. This goal inspired me to make travel an important part of my life. As a result of being completely responsible for all aspects of planning these trips, I have a greater respect for what my family has done to enable us to have many enjoyable vacations. I am incredibly honored to have been able to participate in the Congressional Medal program and will forever consider this one of my greatest accomplishments.

Jonathan Prokos

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

I volunteered at the Boys and Girls Club of America teaching kids public speaking skills through debate, assisted counselors during a summer camp at the Boys and Girls Club. My passion was tutoring underprivileged elementary students, Spanish-speaking adults, and students at my high school. For Personal Development, I set strength goals for myself and was able to reach them through exercise and healthy eating. I focused on baseball for my Physical Fitness which I completed through multiple practices and games. I chose to travel to New York City for my Exploration. I visited memorials, museums, and attended a baseball game. The Congressional Award has allowed me to become more involved in my community and better understand the lives of others.

Shelby Russo
Jupiter, Florida
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To earn my Congressional Award, I dedicated over 500 hours by making cards for the troops and blankets for sick children. I also helped out my community and my school by participating in activities and clubs such as National Honor Society and National Technical Honor Society. To complete my Personal Development, I increased my body strength by benching, squatting, and doing ab workouts. I started at a beginner level and now I am proud to say that I am now at an intermediate level. To satisfy my Physical Fitness goals, I played softball all fall, summer, and spring. I worked very hard on improving my hitting average and fielding mechanics to become the skilled softball player that I strive to be. For my Expedition I planned a trip to Nashville, Tennessee and viewed Downtown Nashville, museums, memorials, statues, and very historical mansions. The Congressional Award is by far the best decision a person can make when preparing for your future, it has made me become very well rounded and taught me what it is like to be a leader in my community.

Brianna Steidle
Jupiter, Florida
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Inspired by my experiences with chronic illness, I worked with Lupus Foundation of America, Florida Chapter, applying skills I already possessed—photography, graphic design, public speaking—to improve the lives of lupus patients and their loved ones. Whereas first-hand experience drove my volunteer Public Service, my Personal Development was motivated by a childhood desire to take pictures. Studying photography enabled me to produce art, document community events, and interact with the world in new ways. My Physical Fitness situation was complicated by Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis, but through the Congressional Award, I found the strength to walk and bike. I started slowly and continuously improved my endurance. For my Expedition, I seized the opportunity to explore our nation's capital, spending five days immersed in Washington, DC's culture of politics, patriotism, and history. I admired Washington's dentures at Mount Vernon, bore witness to genocide at the USHMM, and played tug-of-war with orangutans at the National Zoo. Through nearly four years of perseverance, the Congressional Award has taught me to push my limits, balance my priorities, and reach out when I need guidance; it has been a journey (beyond just the five-day Exploration).

Sabrina Uvanile

North Palm Beach, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: National Honor Society

Over the past 4 years, I have participated in over 600 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I spent 4 summers mentoring young children through an environmental youth camp; each season I created cards to send our troops in Afghanistan, and each month I made blankets for St. Mary's Children Hospital. I chose cooking as my Personal Development goal to learn the necessary skills to be self sufficient in the future. I committed to preparing healthy, whole-food meals, monthly. This experience gave me the skills to learn vital information such as nutritional content, food preparation, and calorie information. As a recreational runner, I set my Physical Fitness goal for a faster time, which involved activities for strengthening my body and lowering my time. During this time I became faster, leaner, healthier, and in doing so, I was voted captain of the Varsity Cross Country team. My most ambitious Exploration was camping for 5 days in Nova Scotia for my Gold Medal. I felt empowered being responsible for leading hikes, setting up camp, preparing meals, and navigating the entire trip. I've gained confidence in my self-sufficiency and resourcefulness.

Cali Vaughn

Tequesta, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Through Jupiter High School, I planned, promoted and participated in many activities, such as Relay For Life and Best Buddies, in support of our greater community at large. My Personal Development goals included many life-long skills. By seeking and obtaining a part time job, I learned better time management and how to prioritize school, social and work related responsibilities. I continued my Physical Fitness goals by sticking to a gym schedule where I set and met specific goals. The Exploration of the Los Angeles area was a one of a kind experience. From hiking the hills of Hollywood and Malibu, to visiting the historic Getty Museum, every minute was a new experience!

Jesse J. Katzeff
Naples, Florida
Advisor: Frances Gibson

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered with Teen Court and the Sheriff's Department Deputy Club program during the summers. Volunteering has allowed me to learn more about my community and interact with professionals in the legal and law enforcement fields. For my Personal Development I fulfilled two summer internships within several departments of a local museum. I have also been part of the Civil Air Program for nearly 5 years. CAPS has not only allowed me to fly a plane, but has also mentored me how to be a leader among my peers, learn discipline, and push myself to new limits. To complete the Physical Fitness requirement, I attended practice and competitions with my local swim team. I also improved my strength training, endurance, and cardio with CrossFit. My expedition took me from Florida to the Washington DC area where I explored downtown DC, Baltimore, and I went hiking in the mountains of West Virginia. The Congressional Award program has taught me to lay a foundation of key life-skills, like commitment and perseverance, for the rest of my life.

Brenden Shipley
West Palm Beach, Florida
Advisor: Shelby Colman
Affiliations: People to People International

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I participated in many activities for Voluntary Public Service. However, I most enjoyed tutoring students after school and seeing them progress academically. My Personal Development gave me the opportunity to get a head start on my future career by building homes with a local company, which allowed me to learn the basic construction techniques used to build a house. For Physical Fitness, I trained with a strength and conditioning program called RISE. This program helped me to achieve my goals by getting faster, stronger and more agile, while at the same time applying this through the sports I love. I was granted the opportunity to join People to People International for my Expedition/Exploration. I traveled to France, England, Ireland, and Wales as a US Student Ambassador. I will never forget the experiences and the relationships that were made during the course of the expedition. The experiences I encountered and the people I met while pursuing this award has made me a more well rounded, thoughtful person and I give a lot of credit to this program.

Jillian Hanley

Boynton Beach, Florida

Advisor: Julia Diaz

Affiliations: 4-H, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed Voluntary Public Service by working as an animal caretaker at Sandoway House Nature Center. I also volunteered at the county fairgrounds in the poultry tent where I assisted the poultry judge, provided animal care, and spoke to school children. For Personal Development, I took cello lessons where I improved my technical and music theory skills. I joined a youth orchestra where I performed in the highest division. Also, as a member of several string ensembles, I performed at various venues throughout my community. For Physical Fitness, I learned how to scuba dive and earned both open water and Nitrox certifications. I conditioned my body for longer and deeper dives through P.E. classes and biking. Finally, for my Exploration, while I lived in Germany as a high school exchange student, I planned a week-long trip to the Dresden area. The cultural and educational activities that I participated in helped me gain a better understanding of a culture that is quite different from mine. Earning the Gold Medal has given me many opportunities to learn leadership and life skills which will assist me as I continue to pursue my career and personal goals.

Srijith Nair

Boynton Beach, Florida

Advisor: Glenda Sutterfield

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

In earning my Congressional Gold Medal Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a Community Hospital. I learned that hospitals are complex centers of communication and cooperation. I helped those who treat the community to better the health of patients. For Personal Development, I took private lessons and practiced Alto Saxophone. I earned Superior ratings in Solo competitions and competed to be part of county and state level Honor Bands. This created opportunities to deliver outstanding performances before audiences. For my Physical Fitness, I trained myself in two areas; rowing and soccer. I took private practice to learn and enhance my endurance in rowing. My second Physical Fitness goal was to train and improve my soccer competencies to become a staple player in my team. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a consecutive 6 days and 5 nights 63 mile long high adventure hiking from the east end of the Lake Okeechobee to the Atlantic Ocean in the South Central Florida. Through this expedition, I learned about the challenges of leading many different personalities. I have challenged myself learning multiple skills through the Congressional Gold Medal activities to become a confident leader and a patient mentor.

Colleen Murray

Miami Springs, Florida

Advisor: Charles W. Bales

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

To earn the Gold Medal, I voluntarily emphasized classical music and appreciation of opera. I initiated “Harp in Schools,” participated in TV recordings, provided music therapy to hospitals, and, as President of Junior Opera Guild of Miami, raised funds for printing an educational opera booklet. For Personal Development, I learned advanced repertoire, improving my harp skills to compete in regional and national competitions. I performed with New World Symphony and became an Honorary Caregiver for Cleveland Clinic Florida. For Physical Fitness, despite a knee injury and subsequent physical therapy, I developed an exercise regimen that enabled me to increase the distance I could walk/jog from a few blocks to a full mile at a consistent pace, strengthening my stamina and improving my health. For Exploration, I visited historical sites from the Revolutionary War to the civil rights era in TN-SC-GA, immersing myself in the culture of these states by staying with local families. I learned the value of historic preservation and its relevance to understanding the culture of a different era. The Congressional Award challenged me to exceed expectations in every part of my life, whether through community service, personal development, or physical well-being.

Sofia Santa-Cruz

Miami, Florida

Advisor: Karen Solms

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

For Voluntary Public Service, I contributed over 400 hours working with local Girl Scout Troop 350. I helped plan some of their activities, taught them skills such as knot tying, and helped them develop their team building skills. I even took charge of coordinating their Cookie sales one year. For Personal Development, I learned to speak conversational Chinese. I began first by taking classes and eventually studied abroad in Shanghai. I now live in Vanderbilt’s international dorm to continue practicing the language. For Physical Fitness, I began running and gradually increased my speed. I even participated in multiple races, including two mud runs. My Expedition was a week of solo travel around three of the more rural provinces in China. I practiced speaking Chinese with locals while moving from one city to another, tried some of the ethnic foods of each province, and visited the cultural highlights in each city.

Rachael Liu

Dacula, Georgia

Advisor: Joni Jameson

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service by packing meals, sorting goods, and creating service drives for a local food ministry. I was able to serve over 6,000 underprivileged community members and help increase awareness of severe hunger issues. For Personal Development, I took classical piano lessons once a week, practiced at least one hour per day, and performed at various auditions and recitals. I now have an increased repertoire and an improved ability to sight read. For Physical Fitness, I set the goal of improving the speed of my tennis groundstrokes and serves. To do so, I joined my high school's varsity team, practiced outside of school, attended private coaching sessions, and played in singles matches. My average stroke speed has now improved over 20 MPH. For my Expedition, I planned a five day long trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to learn more about the founding history of our country and to supplement classroom knowledge. I also learned how to manage a budget while gaining a greater appreciation for city culture and history. In all, working towards the Gold Medal taught me that progress doesn't happen overnight; with hard work and perseverance over a period of time, the results are evident.

Cristina Dalton

Atlanta, Georgia

Advisor: Nina Schwartz

I volunteered and held various leadership positions through the National Charity League. My primary focus was Children's Healthcare of Atlanta & Operation Gratitude. I also volunteered for the Atlanta Mission, Atlanta's largest homeless shelter, as leader of the Atlanta Mission Junior Board. I pursued my interest in healthcare by developing a knowledge base of different aspects of the field. I not only volunteered at Egleston hospital but also observed surgeries, attended a pre-med summer institute program and held research internships at Emory University related to global public health I participated in club lacrosse leagues and school teams in order to improve my skills, particularly assisting and lefty shooting percentages by 25 percent. As I exceeded these set goals, I was able to contribute significantly on my school Varsity lacrosse team. I planned a backpacking trip to Glacier National Park. I hiked over 32 miles along the Highline Trail as well as other trails and crossed the Continental Divide. I learned about the topography of glaciers, native plant life and wildlife behavior. I encountered a grizzly bear and her cub 25 feet away Pursuing the Congressional Award allowed me to develop a deep understanding of servant leadership and how it entails dedication and perseverance in order to achieve the goals I set forth.

Samuel Cuentas

Post Falls, Idaho

Advisor: Anna Heisey

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered over 100 hours at the regional hospital transporting patients and performing various other tasks and deliveries. I also dedicated many hours to Specialized Needs Recreation by assisting special needs children, and volunteered at the local nonprofit thrift store. For Personal Development, I took driver's education classes and practiced many hours driving before eventually obtaining my driver's license. Accomplishing my Physical Fitness goal, I successfully completed the annual Long Bridge Swim in Sandpoint, Idaho – a 1.76 mile swim. For my Expedition, I took the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors by going on a five-day camping trip in North Idaho.

Rebecca Levi

Nampa, Idaho

Advisor: Lynn Thompson

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, mostly at my local public library. I was able to help many people advance in their reading abilities and learned how to be patient with people of all ages. Being involved with the Mayor's Teen Council for several years has pushed me to become a better leader and allowed me to pick up the bulk of my hours for Personal Development. For Physical Fitness, I played both basketball and volleyball, and decided to try running some distance races. I had to learn how to control my body differently for each sport and found my hard work paying off when I continued to advance athletically. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to a dairy farm and learned many of the every-day chores of the workers. This included cleaning animal pens, making meals for large groups, and milking cows which was a slightly messy experience for me. I had a great experience, and am glad the Congressional Award rewards hard work.

Christiana Stone
Nampa, Idaho
Advisor: Michele Hinton

For my Voluntary Public Service I croqueted over five different blankets for Project Linus. These blankets were then distributed to children and individuals who experienced a traumatic event in their life. For my Personal Development, I developed my musical skills as well as my Latin proficiency by learning to play and sing the songs in the piano book “Lingua Angelica.” I also memorized multiple passages of scripture from the Holy Bible. For my Physical Fitness goal, I ran six days a week for at least 20 minutes. I also had ten minutes of other forms of exercise each day. For my Exploration, I coordinated a six day five-night trip to Seattle for myself and three friends. I planned all the activities and calculated the cost beforehand. The highlight of the trip was watching the Broadway Musical “Newsies” live. The Congressional Award had shown me how to persevere to achieve my goals as well as how to not give up if something does not go how I intended it to go.

Jesse Cole
Bellevue, Idaho
Advisor: Millie Reidy

In earning my Congressional Gold Award, I volunteered over 400 hours of time for our valley’s Hunger Coalition. The majority of this time was spent at the Hope Garden, which provides families in need with healthy, organic produce to which they otherwise don’t have access. For Personal Development, I researched various writing techniques and genres, expanding my versatility as an author. In addition to the analytical essays with which I already had experience, I now especially enjoy writing vignettes, realistic fiction, and satire. In regards to Physical Fitness, I sought to improve my soccer possession through continued practice with my varsity and club teams. I ultimately improved my average percentage of completed passes to 87%. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-night exploration of natural attractions in Idaho. I voyaged to Stanley, Redfish Lake, the Wood River Campground, and Miracle Hotsprings. By participating in the Congressional Award, I expanded my understanding in so many ways - not just about the world around me, but about my own abilities.

Annabelle Day

Jerome, Idaho

Advisor: Wiley Dobbs

For Voluntary Public Service, I raised a guide dog puppy from 8-10 weeks old for a year. I taught her basic house manners, trained her with obedience and various commands, and socialized her in public to get her used to the life she would have. She then went on to professional training and is a working guide in Missouri. I improved my writing skills by serving on my school's newspaper staff as writer and copy editor. I also served as Reporter for my local FFA chapter and the local FFA district. I applied to journalism conferences and jobs to continue the pursuit of my goal. I improved my running time for a 5k. I ran on the cross country team and in the off-season to improve. I took advice and tips from my coaches and applied them to my running techniques to improve. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Wisconsin for my family. I set up the itinerary and travel plans by searching for hotels, flights, rentals, attractions, events, and other things to do while there. I helped navigate to these different destinations and kept track of the necessities.

Annika Solveig Norton

Boise, Idaho

Advisor: Zach Parker

I completed over 400 hours volunteering, including assisting at a local hospital in the gift shop, at the reception desk, in the surgery waiting room, and with community wellness projects. For Personal Development, I earned my motorcycle endorsement and became certified in wilderness first aid. I learned to mountain bike as part of Physical Fitness and improved over the years to compete on a varsity high school team in Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. I also played on an ultimate Frisbee team which greatly improved my cardiovascular ability. All of these were important in preparing for my final five-day wilderness expedition to the Sawtooth Wilderness in Idaho. We went on hikes among the deer and the elk and mountain biked on trails throughout the soon-to-be White Cloud Wilderness Area. I am grateful I had a wonderful experience earning my Congressional Award.

Natalia Czachorowski

Norridge, Illinois

Advisor: Jennifer Rooney

For the Congressional Gold Award, I completed 405 hours of Voluntary Public Service at an animal shelter called The Anti-Cruelty Society. I worked at home on Teen Service Projects such as creating dog and cat beds, chew toys, and new adopters' goodie bags in order to help care for the animals. For Personal Development, I decided to work on my reading, writing, and comprehension skills by exposing myself to various works of literature. My goal was to read at least 24 books within two years. For Physical Fitness, I improved my sprint time from one side of a soccer field to the other and back. I trained primarily by going to pre-season and in-season soccer workouts. Lastly, for my Expedition, I planned a five night trip to St. Augustine, Florida which is known as the first Spanish settlement in America. I visited various parks and Spanish forts to immerse myself into the culture. My experience earning my Congressional Gold Award is unforgettable, and I will apply my new skills to all my future endeavors.

Mary Kuprianczyk

Chicago, Illinois

Advisor: Sophia Panos

Affiliations: United States Air Force

I dedicated my time to the Civil Air Patrol, an Air Force Auxiliary. As a member I focused on learning about emergency services and the cadet program so that I could excel and become a strong, influential leader and teacher. I took the skills I acquired to help improve the programs cadets attended. For my Personal Development, every week I spent several hours on different horses working with passionate and knowledgeable trainers from Cross Winds Farm. I have always been in love with the equestrian sport so I decided to learn what it means to be an equestrian, and as a rider, how I can improve the human horse relationship. When I made my high school varsity swim team I knew that I wanted to focus on improving my technique, stamina, and speed so that I could help bring up our teams ranking at the Chicago City Relays. Each practice I attended, the stronger I became and because of that I was able to accomplish my Physical Fitness goal. For my Expedition, my Father and I section hiked the rocky terrain of Maryland/West Virginia Appalachian Trail. The trip started as an idea but then turned into months of planning in order to ensure a successful hike. Along the way we met incredible people from across the world who each had an inspiring story to tell.

Samia Abdul-Qadir

Naperville, Illinois

Advisor: Afsha Gillani

Affiliations: National Honor Society

During the course of three years, I worked to improve the lives of youth who are impoverished, disabled, and ill in the Chicagoland area with the help of Muslim Women's Alliance and Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital. I was able to develop myself while working with Blessed Bonds. Through the process of becoming a mentor for young girls, I have developed my own skill set and watched my leadership and communication skills grow. I am a competitive fencer and I practiced every night to improve my fencing skills. Through this process, I have become a Junior Olympian and a nationally ranked fencer and I hope to continue fencing through college. Finally for my Exploration, I immersed myself in Puerto Rican culture because I love discovering new cultures. I was able to gain more knowledge on the history and the people. Through earning The Congressional Award, I have learned the values of perseverance, compassion, and empathy.

Adam Koszyk

Mt. Prospect, Illinois

Advisor: Michael Sacha

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I tutored younger students in my area, participated in my school's service club, volunteering for a wide variety of events, and assisted with food drives and the Villanova University Special Olympics. For my Personal Development component I founded a club in high school with a focus on government and politics, and interned with two financial services firms to prepare for my career. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to work out in the gym three times a week and practice my golf swing for at least 10 hours a week each summer. My goal was to drop my handicap below 5.5 and I was able to reach that goal. To cap off my Gold Medal pursuit, I planned a 5-day camping trip in Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon National Park. This trip allowed me to catch a break from the constant noise of technology and take in some breathtaking views. The Congressional Award was a great experience as it allowed me to develop not only personally, but also gave me the opportunity to notice how a little time spent volunteering can go a long way in someone else's life.

Jason Yang
Wilmette, Illinois
Advisor: Robin Forrest
Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

In the process of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I taught math to middle schoolers every Sunday at my local Chinese school for Voluntary Public Service. My service pursuits have allowed me to form incredible bonds with underprivileged kids and instill in them a love of learning. For Personal Development, I practiced piano daily and performed regularly. I have learned to appreciate the beauty of music and unwind mentally through performance. For Physical Fitness, I set a goal to get my three-mile time under twenty minutes. I trained with my school's cross country team daily and ran off-season, and I eventually surpassed my goal by over one minute. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a cultural-exchange trip to Xi'an China. I had a chance to practice my Chinese language skills and experience the culture, history, and lifestyle of inner China. I am so thankful that the Congressional Award has allowed me to step out of my comfort zone to seek opportunities and give back through service while also encouraging me to continue the activities that I love.

Clayton Pope
Alton, Illinois
Advisor: Helen Gannon
Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

I had two parts to my Voluntary Public Service goal. For my first part, I was a volunteer and mentor for the International First Lego League (FLL). For my second part, I was a volunteer tutor for the St. Louis downtown public library for CS50. For Personal Development, I completed an online coding class, CS50, from Harvard University and also took two non-credit summer courses from Johns Hopkins University (Electrical Engineering and Fast-Paced Chemistry) and an online class (Visual Communications). For Physical Fitness I improved my squash skills and competed in the Missouri Athletic Club Squash Grand Prix. I also made the Varsity squash team at my school. For my Expedition, I camped in the UNESCO Heritage Site in the Florida Everglades. I thoroughly enjoyed the Congressional Award and want to thank my advisor Helen Gannon for her help!!!

DeAnna Pope

Alton, Illinois

Advisor: Helen Gannon

For my Voluntary Public Service, my work was two fold. First, I volunteered for the Johns Hopkins University Model UN Conference as the Under Secretary General for the Press Corps, mentoring high school students in a journalism program. Second, I volunteered at a homeless overnight shelter. For Personal Development, I studied for the GRE placement test and prepared applications with essays and letters of recommendation from professors. I now will be attending the University of Cambridge to pursue my masters in Education, Globalization & International Development. For Physical Fitness, I improved my resting heart rate and lost weight while gaining muscle as I did a number of Zumba classes and boot camp weight training programs. For the Expedition, I hiked down in the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and spent 5 days and 4 nights there. I had to plan my trip and prepare for the excursion in the desert in the summer.

Lauren Ciulla

Carmel, Indiana

Advisor: Dr. Jason Lantzer

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I worked at a local low-income medical clinic, and also provided medical aid in Guatemala to indigent people. I also volunteered at various non-profits in my community. For Personal Development, I practiced my clarinet for over 200 hours. For Physical Fitness, I practiced tennis for over 600 hours. I improved my tennis serve substantially. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to India, where I learned much about the local culture and customs. This was a once in a lifetime educational opportunity. I have had a foundational experience earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal--it has been the journey of a lifetime, one that I will never forget; I hope to spread the word about this incredible opportunity throughout my community and across the nation.

Matthew Frye

Indianapolis, Indiana

Advisor: Phil Paul

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America, Boys State, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I spent extensive time serving on a weekly basis with both my local Boy Scout troop and Cub Scout Pack, providing mentorship to younger scouts. Once a month I visited Fletcher Place Community Center to serve meals and engage with the less fortunate. For Personal Development, I strove to advance as far as I could in Scouting, earning my Eagle Scout and five palms. I organized and led camping/backpacking trips, meetings, and Order of the Arrow Ceremony Teams as my Troop's Junior Assistant Scout Master. For Physical Fitness, I engaged in intense hiking and backpacking traveling over 300 miles. In addition, I spent time riding my bicycle, playing ultimate Frisbee, swimming, doing C.O.P.E. courses, and lifeguarding for my local Scout troop. For my Expedition I spent one week backpacking through the Sangre de Cristo range of the Rockies as a participant in the Order of the Arrow Trail Crew. When it came time to plan our trek, a close friend of mine and I were recognized as authoritative figures because of our prior Philmont experience. My participation in the Congressional Award program has allowed me the opportunity to see my community differently, through leadership and service.

Emily Huff

Bloomington, Indiana

Advisor: Amy Lanham

I provided 200 hours of Discovery Coach service to the Wonderlab Museum by providing assistance to children to more effectively interact with the exhibits. I gave 200 hours to Bloomington International Student Ministries by offering administrative assistance at the International Furniture Giveaway. I worked as a Student Volunteer in various ministries in our Children's Ministry at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church and now serve as a Special Events Intern. I also worked as a part-time nanny to a child with a high IQ. I took many different dance classes of different styles (ballet, jazz, pointe, tap and modern) over the past three years, but also effectively taught children from ages 3 to 12 years. I participated in a duet at my 10 year dance recital this year and I will be honored to give my senior solo. I oversaw a family expedition to New York, including a detailed itinerary to Niagara Falls, Cooperstown Baseball of Fame, and then to Manhattan. We explored pertinent museums, area landmarks, renown restaurants, bridges, and astounding architecture via foot, taxi, tour bus and van on budget. The Congressional Award offered an inspiring incentive for me to become involved in diverse activities, which helped to develop resourcefulness, service and goal-setting qualities in my character throughout my junior and high school years.

Susan Alverio

Norwalk, Iowa

Advisor: Mary Sorenson

Affiliations: National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at Blank Park Zoo. I educated the public and improved the lives of the animals living there. For my Personal Development I learned how to read music as well as play piano and guitar. I also learned how to make things grow through gardening. For Physical Fitness I went from gasping while running a mile to feeling exhilarated when running twelve miles. I learned stamina as much as dedication and hard work. For my Exploration I learned how to fully research and prepare a week long trip for my family and myself. I grew as a person while working towards the Gold Congressional Award.

Vasavi Garimella

Overland Park, Kansas

Advisor: Mrs. Cheryl Battista

Affiliations: National Honor Society

Over the last two years, I volunteered in my local hospital's Birth Center, where I helped the hospital staff in the Mother Baby ward. Also, tutored introductory Spanish language from a local community college, by helping them master the intricacies of Spanish and understand the vibrant cultures. For Personal Development, I learned how to prepare dishes from various cuisines, and improved my debate skills. I experimented with different spices and flavors, and learned about the world through food and debate. For Physical Fitness, I worked towards improving my fencing skills to participate in the North American Cup. I focused on training in the gym and attended several technique-oriented lessons every week. I planned a five-night camping trip to the Rocky Mountain National Park. We went on hikes, spotted dozens of elk, and photographed the landscape. My experience working towards the Gold Medal helped me grow as a person in the global society and taught me the importance of social responsibility and discipline.

Jared Gillen
Stilwell, Kansas
Advisor: Caroline Kill

I completed my Voluntary Public Service requirements by volunteering in hospitals. Although I volunteered at more than one hospital, I tried to make every patient smile that I could. For Personal Development I took baseball lessons with the goal in mind to play college baseball. I achieved that goal and for Physical Fitness, I played basketball and baseball for our high school and for a summer baseball league. For my Expedition, I planned an outdoor trip to Iowa to explore different landmarks and camp, which I had never done before. Although it was a huge commitment, I definitely feel that what I accomplished was important, meaningful, and helped me grow as an individual.

Arjun Mahajan
Overland Park, Kansas
Advisor: Mr. Narasimha Gondi

My Voluntary Public Service goal was to improve the quality of life of the sick and the elderly. To achieve this goal I volunteered at a hospital and at assisted living homes and started my own non-profit to raise funds for an eye surgery camp in India. I also went to India and worked at the camp. For my Personal Development goal, I decided to work towards developing a healthier mind and body. For this purpose, I go to the gym five days a week, lift weights, follow the latest research on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and eat healthy food. For Physical Fitness, I aimed to play on the school soccer team even though I had not really played soccer since elementary school. I was able to do this by going to soccer camps, practicing almost daily during soccer season, and playing on a club team in the off season. For the Exploration/Expedition goal, I planned a trip to England to learn about British culture because I find it fascinating and also because British history is so closely tied to the history of my ancestors from India. We visited Buckingham Palace, Tower of London, and other historic sights. Participating in the Congressional Award has helped me to grow tremendously as a person. Working toward my goals has helped me to be healthier and happier and made my high school years more satisfying and productive.

Ryan Mohamadi
Leawood, Kansas
Advisor: Caroline Kill

I volunteered at Saint Luke's South Hospital to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals. I helped the staff by guiding patient visitors and helping patients by volunteering in Inpatient Rehabilitation, Central Supply, and Admitting Departments. Along the way, I received Volunteer of the Year for 2015. To complete my Personal Development requirements, I practiced piano. I developed many skills and played at a few competitions. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I continued my Taekwondo training. Since I have been practicing for 12 years, I was able to continue preparing to compete on the state and national level. For my Expedition goals, I went to France. In France, I improved my French and got to experience a new culture to broaden my perception of the world.

Katherine Walsworth
Leawood, Kansas
Advisor: Caroline Kill

I improved the lives of the people in my school and local communities by serving Rose Brooks Center, Ronald McDonald House, and Harvesters. I developed my knowledge of STEM topics by engaging in one season of Robotics and by learning to code java. I contributed to my school's athletic program by joining the volleyball team, and continued to improve my basketball skills each month through free-throw shooting, speed, and agility. I led both my teams to Conference Championships and earned All-Conference and All-District honors. I traced the ancestry of my four living grandparents through personal interviews, historical documents, and online genealogical records, and traveled to the birth-country of my great-grandparents, Lithuania. This experience challenged me to stay organized, focused, and to serve a purpose larger than myself.

Katherine Speece

Louisville, Kentucky

Advisor: Erin Ayres

I became a volunteer rowing coach for the Louisville Adaptive Rowing team where we helped people with physical or mental disabilities learn how to row. We traveled to Philadelphia to compete at the national regatta. For Personal Development, I rented a garden plot at Blackacre, a local nature preserve and community garden. There I got the opportunity to learn about the challenges and joys of gardening while cultivating a variety of vegetables. I created a fitness program that was a combination of high intensity interval training and cardio exercises as well as a diet that was designed to properly fuel my workouts. I went to China for my Expedition. Earning the Congressional Award showed me the value of hard work and determination.

John Garland

Somerset, Kentucky

Advisor: Mony Harsh

Affiliations: American Red Cross, National Honor Society, YMCA

To earn my Congressional Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at various activities including soccer camps for Kentucky Boys' Homes, Lake Cumberland Hospital, PRIDE Community Clean-ups, local NGOs including PERM and God's Food Pantry, and the Correll Leadership Program. In Personal Development I studied Koine Greek for three years to translate the Bible and old texts, attended Leadership and Science intensive camps, and studied to attain the skills to create "raised bed" organic vegetable gardens. To fulfill the Physical Fitness commitment of my Gold Medal, I cross-trained for multiple sports to increase endurance and skill, acquired first aid, CPR, and deep water lifeguard certification through the Red Cross, and participated in 5K races to support God's Food Bank in hunger relief. To fulfill my Expedition/Exploration requirement, I toured the U.S. via a road trip visiting 12 states and driving over 4,000 miles. Our trip included such sights as the River Walk and Alamo/Missions in San Antonio, the Chihuahuan Desert, the Saguaro National Park and Grand Canyon, and Mt. Rushmore. I have grown as a person through the Congressional Award Program, especially through my Community Service activities with local non-profits who work diligently in the community to improve life for thousands.

Zachariah Kiser
Grayson, Kentucky
Advisor: Claudette Patton

To earn the Congressional Award, I received 450+ hours of Voluntary Service through working with local elementary school resource centers and volunteering with projects at Christian Care Communities. For my Personal Development, I attended the Kentucky Governor's Scholar program where I studied journalism under Emmy-winning producer Mel Coffee. During my studies I was able to assist in creating a tribute to veterans that is now a permanent exhibit in the Rowan County Veterans Museum. To complete my fitness goal, I started running daily and gained an interest in races. Since training through the Congressional Award I have participated in several 5K events and have registered for my first marathon in 2018. Finally, for my Exploration experience I stayed in Manhattan, New York City for 5 nights. I was immersed in countless languages and was amazed by all the diverse cultures. The Congressional Award has opened many doors for me and it has encouraged me to never stop striving to improve!

Mackenzie Rigney
Grayson, Kentucky
Advisor: Jim Patton

To complete my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 900 hours helping to train dogs for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Organization. I also worked with Therapy Dogs International and visited my local nursing home to spend time with the occupants. For my Personal Development I worked a variety of jobs, all of which I believe helped to prepare me for life after college. For my Physical Fitness, I trained and completed 3 half marathons. As a student athlete, I also worked hard in the off season to weight train and improve my skills for the collegiate volleyball level. Throughout my Gold Medal experience I got to travel and plan expeditions for all throughout the country. I got to visit Yosemite, Monterey, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington DC, and New York. I have loved how the process of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has pushed me outside of my comfort zone, and helped me to grow so much as a young adult.

Kayla Sears

Williamsburg, Kentucky

Advisor: Margaret Ellis

Affiliations: 4-H

To complete my service goals I worked closely with the 4-H program, this allowed me to complete numerous projects. Through working with 4-H I developed leadership skills that I will use throughout my lifetime. Through Personal Development I accelerated in my photography skills. I also developed my communication skills with people in which I have never been in contact with before. The Gold Medal helped me to improved my overall health by concentrating on my physical strength and accelerated the level at which I competed in tennis. Through earning the Gold Medal I have been able to expanded my knowledge about each new Expedition. I also was able to experience new cultures during my journeys because of the extensive planning and research. Through the Congressional Award I have developed skills that I will use in my daily life and has given me a larger perspective on the world around me

Sean Thomas

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Advisor: Elliot Ory

Affiliations: 4-H, Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service I taught 402.5 hrs of Ballroom dance to teens & young adults, and trained several for the USA Dance South Central Regional Championship. Ballroom dance teaches respect for others, and allows students to know others from different walks of life. For Personal Development I learned welding and fabrication skills while building a functional recumbent trike and became proficient in the use of handguns increasing my accuracy with both 22 and 45 caliber pistols, at both open and enclosed ranges. For Physical Fitness I spent 447 hours working in Tae Kwon Do Korean martial arts. I not only surpassed my goal and attained the the rank of 3rd degree black belt, but also earned my teaching certificate giving me the credentials to open my own martial arts studio. For my Expedition I planned and executed a 5 day canoe/camping trip through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Ely Minnesota for myself and 3 additional men.

Hansel Motiram
Millersville, Maryland
Advisor: Kyle Gonzales

Working with the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore I had the opportunity to educate and inspire people of all ages about the natural world around them. For Personal Development I read extraordinary literature, both exalted and banned, and learned to think and express the ideas they inspired critically through writing. Such expression I learned to manifest through continuous study, essay, and fiction writing on a multimedia level. For Physical Fitness I worked to master Tae Kwon Do, as well as going on 100 mile mountain biking trips. The absurd amount of personally developed training have all served to literally improve and prepare me for the future. I learned, practiced, and implemented various planning and survival techniques with intense physical conditioning in order to execute adventures like hiking, biking, and camping at home and across state lines. While I was sincerely impacted by participating in this program, I think the majority of its affect, in fueling my passion and allowing me the skill and opportunity to engage with others, has yet to manifest in my future ambitions as a whole.

Ryan Briscoe
Boys, Maryland
Advisor: Jeffrey Flach
Affiliations: American Red Cross, National Honor Society, Youth Service America

My Voluntary Public Service consisted of spending more than 600 hours in my local community. I taught elementary school students at a local Title 1 school for a summer camp, I volunteered at my local American Red Cross warehouse and I spent time gathering and packaging food for the Manna Food Center. My Personal Development goal involved advancing my understanding of the medical field. I achieved this goal by attending a summer medical program at Georgetown University, shadowing an emergency physician, reading the biographies of famous doctors, and reading AAMC, NIH and JHU medical journals. I worked towards reducing my body fat percentage to under 15-18% as of last January. My goal was to lift more than my body weight on bench press and I was able to complete five repetitions of 150% of my body weight. I also achieved this goal through much running, biking and tennis. I planned and coordinated a week long trip to the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia. We explored the many tedious trails that scaled the mountains and explored local lakes and natural features. I conquered my fear of heights by zip lining down the mountain and by hiking to incredible heights. The Congressional Award has really allowed me to understand the significance of goal setting and the importance of taking steps outside of your comfort zones to push the boundaries, and to do great things.

Madeline Carwile

Silver Spring, Maryland
Advisor: Mark W. Muesse

My Voluntary Public Service included four years of volunteering at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, working with cancer patients and their siblings. I also volunteered at a student-run soup kitchen, serving over 100 Memphis residents hot meals each week. For Personal Development, I improved my skills in veterinary care and laboratory research. I volunteered at veterinary hospitals in the US and Nepal, and was even able to assist on surgeries. I also served as a laboratory assistant at the Memphis Zoo, where I focused on reproductive endocrinology. As part of my Physical Fitness, I studied Pa Sa Ryu martial arts, working my way up to my blue belt. I also stayed physically fit by aiming to walk, jog, or run at least five miles per day. My Exploration took me to the jungles of Nepal, where I undertook a research project on conservation of one-horned rhinos. I interviewed villagers and anti-poaching units, stayed at the government research base, and even took trips on elephant back to see rhinos in the wild. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal was a great experience that taught me the value of goal-setting and helped me become the person I am today.

Lucy Lee

Potomac, Maryland
Advisor: Juewen Zhuang
Affiliations: Key Club

To complete my service goals, I participated in Key Club-sponsored events, volunteered at the Montgomery County Teen Court, and taught and performed kungfu at events. I also went on a trip to China where I taught English to native students while immersing myself in the different culture. For Personal Development I attended wushu (kungfu) practice after school and learned to balance schoolwork with time put into achieving personal goals. The hours I put in ended up paying off and I won a gold medal at the 6th World Junior Wushu Championships in Bulgaria representing the United States. I played club soccer to complete my Physical Fitness goal, which included mastering different skills, using them in actual games, and overall being a more aggressive player. I feel that the time I put into soccer was definitely an asset to me during the collegiate soccer camps I attended. To complete my Expedition goal, I planned a vacation to China for my little sister and me during the summer. There was definitely parental help involved in paying for plane tickets and other things, but all the research and detailed planning made the experience extremely rewarding. My overall experience in earning The Congressional Award was immensely positive, since the process helped me develop a goal-oriented mindset and improve myself while helping others and the community around me.

WeiAnne Reidy
Potomac, Maryland
Advisor: PeiPei Cavalier

In high school, I spent three summers working to help impoverished families in the Dominican Republic. I worked hard to bring adequate healthcare to isolated and rural villages that did not have the proper nutrients for children or proficient care for the sick and dying. Those trips changed many of my views about life and how to care for people, and also how to care for myself. I pursued learning about my cultural heritage through dance, and also trained my body each day at the gym and ice rink. My senior year of high school, I decided to pursue a competitive year in figure skating. I stepped out of my comfort zone and joined synchronized skating, a team division of skating. At the end of the season, my team and I achieved a gold medal at the US National Skating Championships. Upon graduating high school, I took my passions abroad for a year, and completed the expedition portion of the award through a self-planned trip through Seoul, South Korea. My expedition expanded afterwards to include Japan, Nepal, and most recently, Costa Rica. The Congressional Award has taught me to prize my passions and to treasure them - I'm currently a program assistant at an ice rink and studying Anthropology, and I hope that I can use what I've learned from these experiences to help people every single day.

Rahul Yerrabelli
Baltimore, Maryland
Advisor: Malathi Reddy

I went to underserved elementary/middle schools in Baltimore City and implemented positive psychology interventions to encourage the students to develop optimism, resilience, and other character attributes. The goal was to encourage social mobility and prevent mental health problems at an early age. For Personal Development I decided to learn to recite digits of pi to expand my memorization abilities. On National Pi Day 2015, I recited 401 digits to my school. I also joined my university's chess club and learned to play chess competitively. Later on, I took a more active role in the club and helped organize events. For Physical Fitness I joined the gym and became physically fit for the first time in my life. I traveled across the country to visit the Twin Cities in Minnesota for 10 days for my Expedition. I immersed myself in the culture of the region as well as shadowed one of the leading physicians in the area to learn more about the medical field. The most important thing I learned from The Congressional Award was the feeling that I could achieve almost anything with the appropriate amount of self-discipline- All I needed to do was to reach out to my community, break up the achievement into smaller goals, and stay motivated to pursue my dreams.

Clara da Silva

Bethesda, Maryland

Advisor: Gina Trant

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

For my Voluntary Public Service goal I volunteered for a local performance group to bring accessible theater to the community. For my Personal Development, I committed myself to improving my art by practicing and learning new techniques. After an injury sustained while playing soccer, I committed myself to improving my physical fitness by going to physical therapy and doing modified cardio exercise. My Expedition was a trip to Vermont, where I traveled throughout the state to see all of the “champion trees,” or the biggest tree of each species in the state.

Alix MacKillop

Silver Spring, Maryland

Advisor: Javier Chavez

My Voluntary Public Service work was varied, from working a food bank farm to mentoring at-risk children to fostering rescue animals. The most important lesson learned from across all these experiences is that I have a responsibility to help others, and there is always an opportunity to do so. My Personal Development goals centered around becoming a skilled photographer and cook. I am now able to create just about any type of meal from scratch (including desserts!), and I have had several photographs published in the school paper. My Physical Fitness goal was the easiest to complete as I have played competitive hockey for over ten years! With club team practices and games, private lessons, tournaments, and Choate varsity hockey, I accumulated far more hours than required over the past four years! I completed my Expedition early in the process through an Outward Bound wilderness adventure in the Northwest. This exciting trip not only taught me the basics of traveling and surviving in the wilderness, but also helped me develop a sense of independence and leadership that have served me well. Earning the Congressional Gold Medal has been an amazing experience, full of challenges, opportunities and life skills I would not likely have experienced otherwise.

Nikhil Swaminathan

Rockville, Maryland

Advisor: Elizabeth Muehl

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn the Congressional Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Desmond Tutu HIV/AIDS Foundation Youth Centre in South Africa serving HIV positive or at-risk youth. I am especially proud of my fund raising efforts of over \$3500 dollars through crowd sourcing. For my Personal Development goal, I wanted to improve my singing ability and expand my music knowledge. This goal empowered me to participate in highly competitive choral conferences and greatly improve my self-confidence. Sticking to an intense exercise regimen and decreasing my running mile time to about 6 minutes were part of my Physical Fitness goals. These goals helped me learn the art of time management and the value of exercise towards stress reduction. I can now run a mile in approximately 6 minutes! My Exploration goal was spent working in a rural clinic in the poor township of Masiphumelele in South Africa, which helped me understand the impact of HIV/AIDS on the lives of people afflicted with this terrible disease. I am grateful and proud to have shared the time and lives of the youth here. Participation in this program has made me truly appreciate the value of service, good citizenship, the importance of empowerment and what a difference a single individual can make!

Mikayla Steele

Westfield, Massachusetts

Advisor: Jen Lavoine

To earn my Congressional Gold Medal Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service for Knots of Love. I raised funds to purchase yarn, organized a knitting event, and knitted over 50 caps. For Personal Development, I learned how to play the guitar. In addition, I am now skilled enough to play in my church praise team as one of the guitarists. Because I have a physical disability, I wanted to use the Physical Fitness portion of this award to gain more mobility in my arm. In doing this, I was also able to gain some strength that I have never had. Finally, for my Exploration, I spent five days immersing myself in the life of a horse farmer. I lived and worked without pay at a New England horse farm during the coldest week of the year, while learning from the owner how to care for the animals and run a farm. Earning the Congressional Gold Medal Award has been the first step into a life-long journey of serving others and being a vital citizen in this wonderful nation.

Alexandra Duplin
Melrose, Massachusetts
Advisor: Emily Cunningham
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

In high school I volunteered my summers to give tours of the Massachusetts State House. Once I came to Northeastern University I worked closely with the GS of America, since the organization had a great impact on me. Lastly, I organized a campus and Boston-wide health and wellness education and interactive week My goal was to develop myself as a strong, dynamic leader in my sorority community so that I could serve as a Leadership Development Consultant for Kappa Delta. I served my chapter and sorority community for three years as an executive board member in recruitment and community relations capacities. My goal was to become an advanced indoor cyclist, which is my favorite means of exercise. I became a regular at a studio in Boston where I completed the Club/101 challenged which was to ride 101 times in 6 months. I frequented, and still attend, spin classes 4-6 times a week over a two year period. For my Exploration, I organized a week long adventure for myself and 8 friends to explore Iceland. We rented vans and drove the Southwestern part of the country for the entirety of the week. I planned our 4-7 stops per day and mapped out the needs of the group to compile an itinerary that suited all 9 of us. I'm grateful for the minimum qualifications that the Congressional Award asked me to achieve in all of these categories. The requirements pushed me to find activities that I was deeply passionate about and that had lasting impact on myself and my community.

Ishan Shukla
Milton, Massachusetts
Advisor: Nicole Duhamel
Affiliations: Boys State, Key Club

I want to help to reduce the number of children in the world who die needlessly from contaminated water. For my Voluntary Public Service goals I've worked with the EPA and Engineers Without Border to help provide clean water in both the United States and abroad. I used to struggle with my grades at the beginning of high school. To fix this problem, I set a Personal Development goal to work with tutors and do independent study which helped me ultimately "crack the code" and significantly improve my grades in my junior and senior years of high school. I used to be an extremely skinny kid. As part of my Physical Fitness goal, I set up new fitness and eating habits, and eventually received a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and green belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. For my Expedition/Exploration I planned a 4-day trip to Cape Cod to explore nature and history. My favorite part was learning about how the Cape had 3 shipwrecks a month in the 1800s. In response, the government set up lifesaving stations every 5 miles along the coast, which led to the formation of the US Coast Guard. I do not think I would have accomplished as much without the discipline the Congressional Award process forces; these are skills that will stay with me for life.

Harrison Theodore
Quincy, Massachusetts
Advisor: Annette Deagle

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I provided enrichment activities for visually impaired students with a focus on social and recreational activities. For Personal Development, I explored issues related to sustainability and the healthcare industry, and in particular, sterile plastic waste accrued in medical settings. For my Physical Fitness portion, I took up the sport of fencing and worked diligently to improve my skills and qualify for a national tournament. For my Expedition, I went from Boston, Massachusetts, to Hania, Crete, Greece, to learn about the Greek culture, to improve my language skills, and to perform regional and traditional folk dance. My experiences have been memorable because I am earning my Gold Medal with my sister.

Maria Theodore
Quincy, Massachusetts
Advisor: Annette Deagle

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I provided aid to the elderly at a local senior center and in my neighborhood. Two to three times a week, I assisted the elderly in many activities such as memory games, songs, and exercises to improve balance and mobility. For Personal Development, I explored ways to increase recycling in my home, school and community with a particular emphasis on creative and artistic ways to raise awareness. Posters, recycling bins, collection drives, and up cycling programs were just some examples of how I created awareness. For my Physical Fitness portion, I practiced the sport of fencing, 3 to 4 times a week, 2 to 3 hours at a time, to improve my skills with a goal of qualifying for a national tournament. In doing so, I increased my ranking and classification rank as well. Finally, for my Expedition, I traveled from Boston, Massachusetts, to Konin, Poland, to explore the Polish lifestyle, cultural traditions and a specific focus on Polish fencing. Overall, I had many unforgettable experiences while earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and also learned that a small effort each day added up to a big result over time.

Emily Deese
Midland, Michigan
Advisor: Renee Graham
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

In a small village park near where I live, I constructed a pavilion in honor of a local teacher who had passed away. As project manager, I conceived the idea, raised over \$38,000 in funds/materials, oversaw the construction, and put in over 600 Voluntary Public Service hours. To support my endeavor with the pavilion, I evaluated several autoCAD programs so that I could blueprint the structure. I familiarized myself with construction safety, tools, codes and ordinances and learned how to navigate the tempestuous arena of local government. There is a 35% grade on Mackinac Island known as suicide hill that Honor Scouts must march up in cadence and not-so-comfortable shoes. I put myself on an exercise regime to successfully march up that hill, with my troop, without losing my breath or sweating profusely. Lastly, I planned an amazing 5 day adventure to Scotland, then met friends for an additional 7 days in London, Paris, Florence, and Rome. I gained self-confidence, realized trying new things enhanced my experience, reveled in the nuances, and submersed myself in local culture - not being just a tourist! This award is a journey and I learned to cherish each step, not race to the goal.

Jeremy Tang
Rochester, Michigan
Advisor: Yung Li-Lee

To earn my Congressional Gold Award, I completed well over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at my local senior center called Older Persons' Commission. I worked on-site collecting money for swimming and working out as well as serving every senior who walked through the entrance. For my Personal Development, I worked at a tutoring center called Kumon every Monday and Thursday. I am now better at communicating with children of all ages and at aiding these students to reach their full academic potential. For the Physical Fitness Portion, I swam competitively with a club called Kingfish Aquatics of Waterford. Through my years of weekly training, I was able to make the state cuts I was going for and my own personal time goals as well. Finally, my Expedition was a five-day camping trip in Traverse City, Michigan. While camping, my family and I went on bike trails, fished, went to the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes, and experienced camping for the first time. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal!

Emma Hicks
Romeo, Michigan
Advisor: Joani Duda

I served at Samaritan House, a local food pantry, for 4 years. My goal was to make a difference in the community and gain a broader perspective and awareness of the needs of the community around me. It was an honor to serve my community, develop relationships, and gain an experience that I'll never forget. My Personal Development goal was to develop my passion and talent for songwriting. My dream was to make an album. 5 years of writing, a year of lessons, and hours a day spent at the piano, I now have my first album released, and I wouldn't have been able to do it without the motivation I had through this program! My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my endurance, speed, and ball control in soccer. I took soccer lessons along side soccer games, ran in the mornings, ate healthy, and did cardio. I was able to improve my soccer skills through these activities and have developed a new determination- not just for soccer! I took a class from an experienced backpacker that sparked my interest in a backpacking expedition. I spent the next 2 years gathering supplies and planning a backpacking trip to the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. It was exciting to plan and make the decisions about destination and activities! The Congressional Award Program broadened my perspective of the world around me, helped me to find determination in developing my talents and passions, and gave me many opportunities to explore the world around me in a new way!

Emily Prokop
Birmingham, Michigan
Advisor: Ann Mell

To complete the Voluntary Public Service portion of the Award, I started my own charity named Trends for Teens. My organization sets up "stores" in schools and shelters that contain new and gently-used clothing. Teenagers set goals for themselves and once they obtain those goals they use points to shop at the stores. For my Personal Development goals I worked at a Venture Capitalist firm called Detroit Venture Partners to learn how I could further develop my charity, Trends for Teens. I also worked to obtain my lifeguarding certification and lifeguarded at a local pool over the summer. For Physical Fitness I practiced on my high school swim team and set goals for the times that I wanted to reach by the end of the season. In order to obtain these times, I came to practice everyday determined to get better and correctly follow the advice my coaches gave me. For my Expedition, I participated in an Outward Bound 11-day hike through the Smoky Mountains. I hiked and camped with 6 other people and we learned how to successfully live in the wilderness using the little resources that were given to us. The Congressional Award has pushed me to become a better version of myself and has allowed me to realize the amount of things I can accomplish if I put my mind to it.

Sara Trojanowski

Farmington, Michigan

Advisor: Jennifer Moloney

As a volunteer, I worked with Starfish Family Services in their daycare for infants and toddlers. I also worked with Gleaners Food Bank as a volunteer leader. For my Personal Development, I learned how to play the guitar. For my Physical Fitness goal, I improved my 5k time by five minutes for a personal record of 24:59. Lastly, for my Exploration, I camped in the woods of Michigan on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Thomas E. Libcke

West Bloomfield, Michigan

Advisor: Ara Brown

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I partnered with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society to help raise several thousand dollars for blood cancer research. Major aspects of my campaign included: The Leukemia Regatta, Paper Boat Campaign, as well as providing outreach and community partnering. For Personal Development I learned to play a brass instrument, the Trombone. Through this experience, I was able to learn how to practice, play in an ensemble, and gain confidence in learning something “foreign”. I improved well enough to participate in festivals all the way to the State Level, earning the highest level “1” I became one with the water in achieving my Physical Fitness goal. I joined two organizations; Varsity Swim Team, and Rowing Team. Both of these high intensity racing sports have helped me build a fitness based lifestyle, and given me an opportunity to pursue rowing in a college setting. For my Exploration I led a group to the island nation of Japan. There I explored the ancient culture of the Japanese, along with the modern fast paced life they live today. I immersed myself in this culture through dining, museums, shrines and interpersonal exploration. I now have a better global understanding. Through the Congressional Award, I have learned: Skills, Leadership, and Understanding by developing: Planning, Discipline, and Bravery. These attributes will help me greatly in the future.

Emily Baer

Savage, Minnesota

Advisor: Trudi Stock

Affiliations: National Honor Society, YMCA

Through my school's National Honor Society, I planned a stuffed animal drive for the Children's Hospital and co-led a 5K run to raise money for student scholarships, among many other projects. I also volunteered through the YMCA with the Track and Field summer program and Special Olympics. My Personal Development goal was to improve my tone quality and overall skill on the B-flat clarinet. I went to music camp, took private lessons, was in my school's top band and marching band, and practiced many hours each week. I was able to make the All-State band and get into my college's top band as well. My Physical Fitness goals were to improve my swim race times by 5-10 seconds and increase my running endurance. Through going to weekly swim practices and working one-on-one with my coach on diving starts, my swim times improved. I ran multiple miles each week and did strength routines, which improved my endurance. For my Exploration I planned a 14-day trip to China. After calling and researching different companies, I finally decided on doing a tour with China Highlights. I chose what activities I wanted to do in each city and even added an extra 2 days to visit Chengdu. This experience was very enriching and taught me how to work hard to achieve long-term goals and pursue my passions.

Matthew Baer

Savage, Minnesota

Advisor: Trudi Stock

Affiliations: YMCA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I provided service in numerous places such as Guatemala, Feed My Starving Children, and the YMCA. In Guatemala I built stoves and houses, through FMSC I provided children with meals, and through the YMCA I helped create a fun learning environment for kids. For Personal Development I joined mock trial and speech to improve my confidence and public speaking skills as well as practiced extensively on trombone to improve my playing. I am now captain of the mock trial team, top placed in the top band, and an integral member of the speech team at my school. For Physical Fitness I aimed to make the varsity tennis team at my high school by joining a summer league, taking speed and agility lessons, and practicing to improve. While I have not yet earned a permanent spot on the varsity team I compete for the JV team and have greatly improved my playing. For the Expedition/Exploration goal I planned an eight day, seven night trip to Arizona, Nevada, and Colorado. While on vacation we drove across the state of Arizona, starting in Las Vegas, Nevada, and visited many popular sights along the way, finally ending in Durango, Colorado. My experience in earning the Congressional Award was amazing and it taught me that nothing is impossible and that with effort anything can be achieved.

Braden O'Connor
Roseville, Minnesota
Advisor: Karen Rafter
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered with several organizations that assist the homeless including Families Moving Forward. I advocated for affordable housing projects and helped raise awareness of youth homelessness at events such as Night on the Street. I also refurbished homes in low-income areas with Urban Home Works. For Personal Development, I pursued my interest in engineering by forming a neighborhood FIRST Tech Challenge Robotics team. Not only did I learn how to design, program and build a robot, I also developed better communication skills and leadership abilities. For Physical Fitness, I committed to a weekly running schedule to increase my speed and endurance, and improved my soccer skills. For my Expedition, I spent ten days backpacking through the mountains of northern New Mexico. The 84 mile hike was incredibly challenging, but the beautiful views were well worth it. Earning the Congressional Gold Medal, has let me experience first hand how great it feels to give back to my community, and has inspired me to continue to make a difference in the world throughout my life.

Payton Puerzer
Edina, Minnesota
Advisor: Sarina David

I completed over 400 hours of community service for Arc Greater Twin Cities; sorting and stocking donated clothing and household items at Arc's Value Village. The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with developmental disabilities, actively supporting them and their families. For Personal Development, I explored my interest in my home state of Minnesota's natural and Native American heritage. I visited and hiked 67 Minnesota state parks and interned at the Minnesota Science Museum where I learned to clean, catalog and curate Native American artifacts. For Physical Fitness, I figure skated after school and on weekends; passing the United States Figure Skating Association's Junior Moves in the Field and Juvenile Free Skate tests. I also completed a 24 mile hike along the Luce Line Trail. For my Exploration/Expedition I planned and completed camping and hiking excursions in Minnesota's northwoods and immersed myself in Japanese culture by staying at a traditional ryokan in Kyoto's historic Gion District. I visited temples along the "Philosopher's Walk" and attended a theater arts showcase at the Gion Theater. Participating in the Congressional Award Program taught me how to set and accomplish goals.

Lane Mitchell

New Albany, Mississippi

Advisor: Sherry Smith

Affiliations: 4-H, Boy Scouts of America

As a member of the Mississippi 4-H Anti-Bullying Coalition, I spoke to youth in schools, camps, and at various events on the power of one person to take a stand against bullying. I was part of a group of teens who performed an anti-bullying drama across Mississippi and other states to increase awareness of this issue. I set goals to increase my skill set in technology, especially in the areas of filmmaking and unmanned aerial vehicles. I joined technology groups, attended camps, and took classes, as well as doing research on my own. For Physical Fitness I set goals to increase my speed and endurance when running. I ran at least a mile three days a week and timed myself so that I could work on cutting my time while increasing my distance. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to the British Virgin Islands where I lived aboard a catamaran for three weeks and learned to sail. I studied and worked to acquire Advanced Open Water, Enriched Air and Nitrox, night diving, wreck diving, underwater naturalist and other scuba certifications. I followed in my Dad's footsteps and set goals to earn the Gold Medal as he had, but I discovered the Congressional Award experience made me question myself and what I could do to make a positive impact on my world.

Abby Kensington Pitts

Booneville, Mississippi

Advisor: Sonja Smith

Affiliations: 4-H, Girl Scouts of the USA, HOBY

I dedicated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with the American Cancer Society. I not only helped raise funds but helped to bring about awareness to cancer. During that time, I also developed several programs which bring about awareness to cancer in my school and community. For Personal Development, I worked day and night to build up my strength for tumbling. When I first started, I barely had a back handspring. Now through the countless hours of work my skills have progressed beyond what I could have hoped for. My Physical Fitness goal was to train hard in order to increase my strength for softball. I wanted to increase my batting average from a .125 and get off the bench. Now I am batting over .400, a starter and was offered several scholarships to play ball. For my Expedition, I planned a seven day adventure to explore the architecture and diverse culture that New York City has to offer. I was enlightened by the difference miles in the same country can make. It was like being in a whole new world. Through this experience, I grew as a person and learned many lessons that will help me to be a successful citizen and a better person for the remainder of my life.

Mamie Albritton
Lumberton, Mississippi
Advisor: Brad Jones
Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered at my local animal shelter. I cared for several puppies for an extended period of time and learned how much work is entailed in such an activity. I also learned the importance of spaying and neutering pets to prevent the proliferation of unwanted animals which need to be cared for. I participated in 4-H shooting sports, both pistol and rifle, something with which I had no experience, and reached competition level competency. I earned several medals and gained confidence and skills which I use in other areas of life. Through this I have discovered a lifelong hobby which I enjoy. I began a rigorous workout program and gained physical strength and aerobic endurance. I also feel confident in my ability to protect and defend myself as a result of my strength training and gained valuable stress relieving techniques in the process. The most rewarding part of my experience was preparing and planning a hike on the Appalachian Trail. This was special to me because I enjoyed the up close and personal beauty of God's creation, while at the same time feeling extreme exhaustion and discomfort. It was a challenge I won't forget. The Congressional Award experience has given me valuable skills that will be used throughout the remainder of my life, and I am grateful to have participated.

Allison Licavoli
Chesterfield, Missouri
Advisor: Carla Lambrecht
Affiliations: American Red Cross, Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

Over the course of two years, I dedicated over 400 hours to serving my community; I worked with organizations such as St. Louis Area Foodbank, Equine Assisted Therapy, KidSmart, Angels Arms, and more. Through my dedication I learned that I can make a difference in my community while having fun. For my Personal Development I learned how to play the violin through a class at my high school and by taking private lessons once a week. Because of my efforts, I have played in the Marquette High School's Symphonic Orchestra. Furthermore, I developed my golf skills as my Physical Fitness. As a result of my efforts, my 9 hole average lowered by four strokes, and I helped the Marquette High School Girls Golf Team earn the 2015 Missouri State Class 2 Championship title. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a 5 day trip to New York City with my mom. While in New York we experienced the 9/11 Museum and Memorial, toured the island of Manhattan on a Circle Line Boat Tour, and more. By participating in the Congressional Award I have made a difference in my community, and I have gained the confidence to achieve greatness, and I will cherish the memories I made earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal forever.

Natalie Ann Dameron

Kansas City, Missouri

Advisor: Melvin Brown

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. Some of the service projects I worked on included Theater in the Park, a summer school program and a local animal shelter where I photographed dogs needing forever homes. I was happy many pets found new owners. My Personal Development of 200 hours included artistic endeavors photography skills such as the Nelson Scholars photography program. My Physical Fitness goals included countless hours in dance classes and my participation with the Pembroke Hill dance team. My Exploration/Expedition was my experience serving as a set photographer on a movie set. This allowed me to work with the cast and crew of a feature film and continue to work on my photography skills. It was an amazing experience that helped me grow as a photographer and provided me experiences that I will cherish forever. The Congressional Gold Medal was such a good experience. I encourage everyone to sign up and get started! It will make a difference in your life as it has in mine.

Luis Sanchez-Romo

Bellevue, Nebraska

Advisor: Julie Sorensen

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at Chandler View Elementary School where I accumulated over 400 hours of community service. I achieved this by assisting the custodial staff in maintaining the interior and exterior of the school. For Personal Development, I improved my leadership and public speaking skills. I accomplished this by joining my school's Future Business Leaders of America chapter, attending leadership conferences, and giving speeches at local events. My Physical Fitness focused on my favorite sport, soccer. By practicing my diving and ball handling skills, I became a respected goalkeeper. Finally, for my Expedition, I traveled to Montgomery, Texas where I volunteered as a ranch hand at a prestigious horse ranch. I experienced manual labor firsthand and was able to practice my Spanish speaking skills.

John Paul Terneus

Bellevue, Nebraska

Advisor: Rodney Wheeler

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

To earn the Congressional Gold Award, I provided Voluntary Public Service to my local library, a food pantry, and a farm education center. I worked as a Children's Librarian Assistant, distributed food to impoverished families, and built projects for a children's nature playground. For Personal Development, I operated my own lawn care and snow removal business. I gained valuable management skills in working with customers while I built up funds for my college education. Hiking, cycling, and English Country Dancing were activities I pursued for Physical Fitness. I trained for a 10-mile hike, a 50-mile bike ride, and several lively 30-minute English Country Dance performances in historical costume. For a memorable Exploration trip, I planned a five-day journey to explore the geological and historical features of Colorado National Monument, Arches National Park, Canyonlands National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, and the Grand Canyon National Park. The scenic views were spectacular! Working to achieve the Congressional Award Gold Medal was a tremendous effort, but the experiences I gained have truly enriched my life.

Terese Navarra

Papillion, Nebraska

Advisor: Julie Sorenson

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Key Club, National Honor Society

During my two years in Congressional Award, I worked with the Alzheimer's Association to establish the Walk to End Alzheimer's in my community. I reached by 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by planning the walk, as well as assisting at the local memory support unit. I got in touch with my Italian heritage to complete my Personal Development goals. I spent time with my family cooking classic Italian meals and learning that "food is love," and even had the opportunity to take a trip to Italy! For my Physical Fitness goals, I worked towards completing a half marathon. I trained several days a week to be able to complete the half marathon. I adventured to the Rocky Mountains to complete my Expedition for the Gold Medal. I stayed near Lake Coure D'Alene, Idaho where I was able to go zip lining through the mountains, go kayaking in the lakes, and eat huckleberries (something we don't have in Nebraska). Congressional Award has helped me explore so many unique aspects of life, and really enjoy becoming a well-rounded citizen.

Ethan Nelson

Dalton, Nebraska

Advisor: Rachelle Eversole

Affiliations: 4-H, YMCA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, my Voluntary Public Service project efforts included entrepreneurship promotion to youth through speeches, presentations, and workshops. I participated in music outreach to nursing homes, and volunteered as a Jr. Friend of the Sidney Public Library. My Personal Development goals were met by taking private music lessons and learning advanced techniques and different performance styles for the saxophone. To complete my Physical Fitness objectives, I enrolled in the Cheyenne County Community Center 5K run series and joined the Scottsbluff YMCA for a dedicated fitness program. My Expedition and Exploration goals were met by a 3,255 mile road trip from Dalton, Nebraska to Anchorage, Alaska via the Alcan (Alaska Canada Highway). I took thousands of photos, hiked, avoided bears, and experienced the magnificence of nature. The Congressional Award program helped me set and achieve goals, serve my community, and build self-confidence.

David Tegtmeier

Las Vegas, Nevada

Advisor: Jamie H. Corcoran

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Key Club, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I primarily volunteered with the Boy Scouts of America and Key Club. My most extensive activity was serving as a Lifeguard and camp counselor at Kimball Scout Reservation. For my Personal Development I became knowledgeable about finances. I found a very interesting way to practice personal finance and was to simulate stock trading through various programs and track the transactions. In the development of my Physical Fitness, I primarily focused on improving my running. As a Cross Country and Track enthusiast, I practiced every day in any condition to better myself. For my Exploration, I traveled through Olympic National Park. This journey allowed me to investigate the various environments and diversity of life present in the area. In earning my Award, I initiated a progression of development in my life that has prepared me for the future.

Sara Tegtmeyer

Las Vegas, Nevada

Advisor: Jaime Corcoran

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, Key Club, National Honor Society

I worked with various organizations to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals. I spent summers volunteering as a lifeguard for Boy Scout Camp and spent the school year volunteering for various activities such as blood drives, prom closet, marathons and children's festivals. For Personal Development, I sought out and completed such programs as The Ronald Reagan Leadership Program, SAME/Air Force Engineering Camp, Girls State and USNA STEM Camp. All were done in order to develop my public speaking and leadership skills. I started to play tennis and worked my way onto the school tennis team. My main focus was on training, nutrition and developing skills. I also learned to play as a doubles partner and was able to complete two seasons. I planned a trip to Olympic National Park which consists of three different ecosystems. I studied the animals, plants and different effects of the removal of the dam on the area. I accomplished this by hiking and visiting the National Park Service for information. P.S. I live in the desert. I am grateful for the opportunities this Award has led me to explore and the new skills I have developed.

Neha Zafar

Reno, Nevada

Advisor: Salih Dede

For my Voluntary Public Service, I strove to help those less fortunate than me. I volunteered at senior centers and public pediatric clinics, to aid the sick and unwell. I volunteered at these places during any and all breaks I had from school during the three years it took to receive this award. For my Personal Development, I choose something that would benefit me in not only the time being, but in the future as well. I chose to focus on studying for the ACT and SAT over the weekends starting from freshman year, so that I could build my college application early on. For my Physical Fitness, I chose an activity that would bring consistent self-motivation and improvement more than anything. I routinely followed an "at home fitness boot-camp" called 'P90X', to increase my strength, agility, stamina, and metabolism with the right diet. For Expedition/Exploration, I went on a trip to Turkey, and visited five different cities within Turkey. In Turkey, I was greatly immersed in the culture. I tried new food, interacted with people of a different language, stayed in host houses, and was exposed to a completely new environment. Earning the Gold Medal Congressional Award has truly been an honor; I was never aware of how much I could do with my time to improve not only myself, but the people and environment around me. The Congressional Award has benefitted me in ways never imagined.

Taimur Khalid

Las Vegas, Nevada

Advisor: Ismaul Kocabiyik

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I have always had a passion for mathematics, and whenever I learned something new I would love teaching others about it. So I volunteered during my summer and winter breaks, and occasionally throughout the school year to tutor bright minded students in math. My Personal Development goal was to qualify for the United States of America Math Olympiad. In order to achieve my goal, I attended Saturday classes and rigorous, 2 weeks-1 month long math camps during my summer and winter breaks. I practiced math nearly every day both in school and out of school. A few years ago I started playing table tennis and as if by miracle found a renowned coach that lived right next to me. I practiced table tennis for 1-2 hours about 3-4 days a week in order to achieve my goal of increasing my tournament rating to 1600. For the Expedition/Exploration, I organized a trip to Lake Tahoe. I spent a lot of time planning the itinerary, methods of transportation, who would go and how much they needed to pay. The trip was a complete success and was an experience unique from anything I have done before. The Congressional Award experience was a life changing journey, and I thoroughly enjoyed every last minute of both the ups and the downs I experienced throughout.

Satchel Bell

Palmyra, New Jersey

Advisor: Rosemary Laberee

For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered as an assistant art teacher at Urban Promise Ministries. I taught children of all grade levels different art forms and influential artists that have shaped the art we see today. In my Personal Development, I had the opportunity to be a part of an organization called Junior Statesmen of America (JSA), where I had the ability to take part in interesting debates, overnight conventions, and hold cabinet positions throughout my high school career. For Physical Fitness, I worked with a personal trainer to really set and achieve my goals of long distance running. I also was able to start practicing yoga, which I did three times a week. For my Expedition, I traveled to Paris, France by myself to be immersed in the culture and language. I visited the Louvre, ate croissants au chocolat, and made long-lasting friendships in a foreign country. My overall experience in earning The Congressional Award was rewarding and challenging. Through this award, I believe I have learned the importance of perseverance and always striving to achieve your goals, no matter how challenging.

Funda Akilli

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

While taking part in the Congressional Award, I was able to better myself and grow as a person. By this I mean I was able to see how far I could push myself and set new goals and face new obstacles each year. Doing this, I became aware of the things that I could do and one of these things was being able to manage my time efficiently. Whether it be my volunteering at Child Family Center with great teachers each year, or it be with my coaches pushing me to go my best, and the support of my family members. I can absolutely say that participating in the Congressional Award program helped me see the bigger picture and was one of the best choices I have made. I had a great time working with Mrs. Burns and I learned how to be more caring, more dedicated, and more confident in what I do in life as long as I have the effort and determination; just like I did to finish this. With bumps here and there I was able to finally finish and the things I learned will forever stick with me.

David Crain

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Boys State, National Honor Society

To complete my goals of Voluntary Public Service I have completed over 400 hours volunteering at the Holly Family Center with their summer program, helping with community clean ups, and other opportunities. For my Personal Development, I set a goal to improve my quality on the trombone while also keeping time by marching. I did this by joining my school's marching band, and also doing various forms of practice on my own. For my Physical Fitness goal, I decided to improve my stamina and also increase my muscle mass. I have complete my goal by practicing for tennis and soccer, and also working out in the gym. In planing all of my Expeditions I wanted to discover more about the history around me. I have been to Williamsport, home of the Little League, and also went to the state capitol of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg. I have also had an Expedition to both Washington D.C. and historic Philadelphia. Overall, my experience with the Congressional Award has been great in helping people out and meeting new people, joining an activity I enjoy, improving me physically, and helping me see new places and also learn new things.

Michael Doliszny

Ocean City, New Jersey

Advisor: Susan M Sheppard Esq

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society, People to People International

I completed over 570 hours of Voluntary Public Service under the direction of my City's Community Service Dept. I developed a strong work ethic; and I learned the importance of being an active member of my local community by actively contributing to support its diverse members, our Vets and the elderly. For Personal Development, I invested over 1,000 hours to develop skills to assist me in my endeavors. I taught myself how to code in Java, HTML, Raptor, & C++. My skills assisted me in gaining acceptance to an ID Tech program at MIT where I learned how to create my own my own video gaming programs. For Physical Fitness, I learned how to play Lacrosse; developed and strengthened my physical fitness abilities through regular workouts; learned how to competitively row as an active member of my high school Crew Team. As a People To People International Student Ambassador, I pursued my interest in exploring the cultures, traditions, life styles, & historical venues of France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany & Italy. My experiences resulted in an enhanced awareness and appreciation of worldwide cultural diversity. The Congressional Award Program helped me challenge myself, give back to my community, and prove that I am able to successfully achieve and exceed goals that I set for myself.

Madison Gandy

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I volunteered at the Millville Public Schools to help educate the young minds of the future. I also helped put together activities at Wheaton Arts. For my Personal Development, I watched different videos on how my camera works to learn how to get the best angles and lighting while taking pictures. After watching the videos, I went to different places and took photos with my new knowledge of photography. For my Physical Fitness, I went to the gym and worked on my endurance for when I play softball and tennis. By working on my endurance in the off season, it really helped me when it got time to play. To complete my Expedition, I went to Washington D.C for five days. I went exploring around and got to see many new things. My overall experience for this program was wonderful, I am glad to have been a part of it.

Marta Majewski
Millville, New Jersey
Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals I volunteered at Inspira Medical Center. My main task was to print out badges for those visiting their loved ones. I achieved my Personal Development goal of improving my Polish writing and reading by practicing with simple children books and working my way up the ladder. I swam every day during my school's winter season and throughout the summer as a member of the Holly City Swim Club for my Physical Fitness. Finally for my Exploration, I flew to Hawaii to immerse myself in the Polynesian culture and nature.

Amanda Olivio
Millville, New Jersey
Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

This year I participated in the Gold Level of Congressional Awards. To earn my medal I completed over 400 volunteer hours in Millville public schools. While there I got to work with kids in class and also help in after school activities. For my Personal Development I learned how to scrapbook. I really like making books that I can keep forever. For my Physical Fitness, I continued playing tennis. I did a lot of conditioning, running, and training to gain strength to help improve my game and move up in the ranks on my team. Finally for my Exploration, I went to Washington DC for a four night trip. I visited several interesting museums and monuments. I had the best experience earning my Congressional Gold Medal, and I learned that anything is possible when you are determined.

Urvi Patel

Cape May Court House, New Jersey

Advisor: Jamin Patel

I helped my county library with preparing projects for children that come to the library for the kid's programs. I also volunteered at my local thrift shop which is affiliated with the Cape Regional Hospital to tag and sort clothing items, in which all profits made go to the hospital. I worked at a restaurant which served breakfast and lunch in Wildwood Crest as a head waitress for three years. I swam for my county club swim team and I swam for my high school swim team as a varsity swimmer. I went on three expedition trips as required, all historical counties and sites, in which I learned a lot of new information as well as learned to prepare and plan for a trip all on my own. My experience in earning the Congressional Award has been eye opening and taught me many life skills, as well as time management.

Anthony Uzzolina

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I volunteered at the Millville Public Library, sorting and stacking books. I also volunteered at the Levoy Theatre in Millville, I sold concession items as well as worked the lighting for some shows. My Personal Development goal was to learn and improve my fishing and archery skills. I worked on this each month and saw a great progression from when I began. My Physical Fitness goal was to train myself to run a half marathon. I worked at this through intense soccer training as well as putting time into the treadmill at the gym. Although I haven't completed a half marathon yet, I feel as though it is within reach. My Expedition included planning a trip to Minnesota exploring many new things. I planned all of the housing accommodations as well as all meals. I learned a lot of things about Minnesota that I never knew before and had a great time doing so. My experience with the Congressional Award program was great for me to learn what it takes to be a successful, productive adult.

Andrew Victor Laberee

Medford, New Jersey
Advisor: Rebecca Nugent

It was a great pleasure to volunteer regularly at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia to fulfill the Voluntary Public Service hours. I helped young kids learn about the natural world and found inspiration in the dedication of the scientists and full-time museum employees. All through high school I have been involved with the Junior State of America (JSA), a national debate and civics club. I had opportunities for leadership in JSA and I came to understand and respect different points of view on pressing economic, social and legislative issues in our country. I am a competitive rower. This sport has much to teach about life because it is difficult and because progress, at times, can be slow. The Congressional Award Program helped me continually reset my speed goals, stick with it, and focus also on encouraging others. For my Exploration I spent a month in Cyprus where I lived with different host families, immersing myself in the two primary cultures which live side-by-side in Cyprus. I came away with a much greater understanding of faiths and practices, which are different than my own and I made great friends! Earning the Congressional Gold Award has taught me volumes about sticking with a goal, helping others, and working my hardest; I will always be grateful for this valuable training.

Dominic Esposito

New Egypt, New Jersey
Advisor: Mary Dancer

I raised money for a local food bank by starting Scrap Hunger, Inc., a nonprofit focused on helping the less fortunate through scrap metal collections and fundraising. I also worked on environmental projects like litter clean ups along trails and roads and tree seedling distributions to residents. I learned to play the saxophone by taking weekly lessons and practicing regularly. I now play the alto saxophone and baritone saxophone in the jazz ensemble at my high school. I have performed in numerous concerts and successfully competed in multiple jazz competitions. For Physical Fitness I decided to learn the game of volleyball. Through practice and training, I developed the skills necessary to play the middle position on my high school volleyball team. For my Expedition I planned a four-night canoeing and camping trip at Wharton State Forest in New Jersey. I canoed over 20 miles along 2 rivers, hiked, and observed wildlife and unique flora and fauna. In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I have learned that I can accomplish my goals with hard work and dedication, and that I can make a difference in the lives of others.

Christopher Lauria

Oakhurst, New Jersey

Advisor: Mark Hackler

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

Voluntary Public Service, while the most time consuming requirement, has always come easy to me. I should be able to help those who are less fortunate than I am to make the world a little bit better, which I have done through Boy Scouts, various school organizations, and the National MS Society. Through Personal Development, I explored two potential careers that I was interested in; Teaching and Photography. I took Film and Photo classes outside of school and worked as a camp counselor to gain experiences in both fields and a better understanding of how they work. From a very young age I had a passion for dancing and for most of my childhood I took tap and hip-hop classes at a local dance studio. Aside from keeping me physically fit, for 1-3 hours a week I learned how to dance and express myself while moving from a beginner to an advanced dancer. With my Boy Scout Troop, I planned and attended a High Adventure camp in the Florida Keys called Seabase. For one week, we lived on an isolated island, learning new skills such as snorkeling and having once-in-a-lifetime experiences together.

Mitchell Lauria

Rumson, New Jersey

Advisor: Lourdes Lucas

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Key Club

After witnessing the devastation from Hurricane Sandy, I wanted to prevent the devastation from reoccurring. For my Voluntary Public Service, I created a future warning system for local residents. The system uses real time tidal monitors to alert citizens of incoming dangers through text and email. For Personal Development I earned merit badges that enabled me to become an Eagle Scout and learn various life skills such as first aid, camping, personal finances, and lifesaving. For my Physical Fitness requirement, I improved my soccer skills. My relentless efforts paid dividends when I became the leading varsity scorer and lead my team into the state finals. During my Expedition to Philmont, I realized the true value of teamwork and integrity. Everyone working together as one unit for over 78 miles, with merely a backpack to reach the summit. As a special treat, I was able to catch fresh fish with my bare hands, a delicacy over the two week period. The Congressional Gold Medal was a true test of responsibility and self-improvement. The Congressional Award has left me with life lessons that will stay with me forever.

Maya Ravichandran

Holmdel, New Jersey
Advisor: Mohan Yellayi

I volunteered as a teaching assistant in a martial arts class to promote self-defense skills among children. I also helped middle class students to become more interested in science through events such as programming classes and meeting with female scientists. For my Personal Development I improved my language skills in Hindi and Chinese. As part of my Physical Fitness goal I improved my 5K cross-country running time and honed my martial arts skills. I also learned yoga. I broadened my understanding of different biomes through my Exploration in South Africa. As a participant in the Congressional Award program, I learned how to set goals and then follow through to achieve them. I have felt the joy of serving my community and learned how volunteer services positively impact the broader community in which I live. It has been a truly rewarding experience.

Allison Wetherell

Jackson, New Jersey
Advisor: Rose Stevenson

Affiliations: Big Brothers Big Sisters, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service by working for Special Olympics and Harbor House Shelter. My service was dedicated to helping and mentoring children. The ability to help others has been the driving force to continue my community pursuit. For Personal Development, I participated in Model United Nations for 2-years. Model UN builds your persuasive writing muscle when preparing position paper and speeches in mock UN scenarios. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to join the local gym to build endurance and strength. I increased my weight training, built more muscle and increased my cardio. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a five-night camping trip to Allaire Park. During the trip, we visited the historical village, learned how to cook over a real fire, took hikes and day trips. The experience taught me leadership skills and allowed me to explore new things. The journey to complete my Gold Medal Award has built my confidence in my abilities and given me life skill for the future!

Erica Wu

Holmdel, New Jersey
Advisor: Diana Cheng
Affiliations: 4-H

To earn my Gold Medal, I volunteered at local summer camps as a counselor to share my knowledge and love for technology, science, and engineering with elementary students. I also promoted music appreciation by tutoring aspiring beginner musicians and performing for the nostalgic elderly. For Personal Development, I improved my clarinet-playing abilities by taking weekly private clarinet lessons and attending orchestra rehearsals. I also competed in annual fall and spring competitions and participated in master classes. For my Physical Fitness goal, I trained at a 4-H recreational rhythmic gymnastics group three times a week. I improved my physical dexterity and flexibility and learned how to dance, choreograph routines, and stretch. For my Expedition, I planned a six-day trip to Mexico. I visited cities, cultural centers, and historic sites to develop a deeper understanding of Mexican culture, economics, and history. I also visited local restaurants to taste traditional dishes and witness the dynamics of the local market. My journey towards earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal taught me the value of sharing my skills and passions with the younger generation and fostered my appreciation for the hard work and dedication required to turn my three-year goals into reality.

Nicholas Alexander Coleburn

Franklin Lakes, New Jersey
Advisor: Rowena Saunders
Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 680 hours of Voluntary Public Service, working with various athletic and charitable organizations in the community to assist in the instruction of younger individuals, counseling in summer camps and data organization for need based services. For my Personal Development, I worked with numerous soccer organizations to improve and develop my soccer skills and my level of play. I refined my soccer abilities with the RYSA Wildcats and the Indian Hills High School soccer team. For my Physical Fitness, I worked with multiple athletic organizations to reach my goals in basketball and track, improving my free throw percentage and decreasing my race times by practicing with my high school basketball and track teams and by playing on various travel basketball teams. I explored the physical and cultural geography of Costa Rica by traveling to the country and researching the different types of forests and major drivers of its economy. I paid specific attention to the food, geography, and biodiversity of the region. Through my experience completing The Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned that it is true that “in the long run, we only hit what we aim at”.

Ryan Murphy

Mahwah, New Jersey

Advisor: Roger Wieland

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I served as a volunteer counselor at a summer camp, helped to run extracurricular activities through my school, and constructed a storage shed for local Girl Scouts. In these roles, I helped to improve the recreational and educational experiences of kids much like me. I completed my Personal Development goals through speaking publicly in a variety of venues. The experience has improved my presentation skills and made me more comfortable with an audience. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I engaged in a range of cardiovascular activity, such as hiking and cycling. This has increased my endurance substantially. My Expedition was a hiking trip through Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimmaron, New Mexico. I was able to try the new experiences of spending time in a desert and of living nomadically. The format and content of the Congressional Award program has made me better able to solve problems and reach goals.

Vaed Prasad

Ridgewood, New Jersey

Advisor: Anju Wagh

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

In order to allow Indian-Americans to better appreciate our culture, I built a library focused on Indian literature. I coordinated with public libraries and stores for venues to host book drives and fundraisers. Today, the library contains over 500 titles that can be browsed on an online catalog. With a Personal Development goal of becoming a better programmer I joined my school's robotics team, taught myself Java, PHP, and SQL, and competed in hackathons including PennApps, HackMIT Blueprint, HackBCA, HackMann, HackTrin, TigerHacks, USA Computing Olympiad, and the American Computer Science League. During the football offseason I exercised in the fitness center three times a week, improving my mile time by two minutes and increasing my bench-press to 175lbs. Through this physical training I was able to become a Starting Offensive Guard for the Varsity Football Team in just my junior year. I embarked on a 10-day, 50-mile-long canoeing trip in the Adirondacks. In this expedition, seemingly basic necessities, such as bottled water and solid food, were sacrificed for the precious space needed to prevent a capsizing. I had to filter my water using iodine tablets and cook freeze-dried meals. The Congressional Award was an immensely valuable experience to learn more about my community, my curiosity, and most importantly my capabilities.

Felicia Aschettino

West Long Branch, New Jersey

Advisor: Carol Caruso

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Girl Scouts of the USA

When I was 9, my house burnt down and the Red Cross was a huge help to my family. Since then, I have always wanted to give back to the amazing organization that helped my family through a difficult time. Over the past 2.5 years, I have completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Red Cross, Ronald McDonald House, and more. I even became a Red Cross spokeswoman to share my story and how the Red Cross helped my family. For Personal Development, I worked hundreds of hours at a local ice cream store and I improved as an actress with my school's theatre group. For Physical Fitness, I took dance classes and I learned how to ride a bike. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip to Lancaster Pennsylvania, where my family and I became honorary amish for a week. We learned a lot about their schooling, home life, and work ethic. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and I am so happy that I had the opportunity to give back to those in need and grow as an individual.

Madilyn Somers

Monmouth Beach, New Jersey

Advisor: Katrine Rempel

Affiliations: National Honor Society

In working to earn the Congressional Gold Award, I worked with the nonprofit Soles4Souls. I volunteered within my community to help raise awareness of poverty both locally and around the globe. In the area of Personal Development, I worked to further my interest in photography. I enrolled in a local photography class and practiced taking photographs in different environments, utilizing different camera functions and filters. I developed my own photographic vision. As a student - athlete, I appreciate the importance of physical fitness and education. I trained to increase my speed and agility and soccer foot skills. Finally, for my Exploration, I travelled to Paris and immersed myself in the French language, and the Parisian history and culture. It was an incredible opportunity to experience this iconic city and helped me to improve my foreign language skills. Overall the Congressional Award program has aided me in gaining a stronger sense of what it means to be a leader, develop new passions, improve the community around me, and to trust my instincts when stepping outside my comfort zone.

Lindsay Fogel
Warren, New Jersey
Advisor: Susan Cooper

I volunteered with the North Star Foundation puppy-raising a therapy dog to help better the lives of children who face social, emotional and educational challenges, as well volunteering time participating in a club that raises funds for children at a local specialized hospital. For Personal Development, I worked on developing my leadership skills through my involvement in a Leadership in Training summer program as well as getting involved in my high school's grade level council and peer leaders programs (both in high school and middle school). I enjoy working out so for Physical Fitness I focused on improving my running skills over the course of several months, ultimately allowing me to get into better shape and live a healthier active life-style. My efforts ranged from running outside to joining a gym and altering my eating habits. For my expedition, I stepped out of my comfort zone and went camping in upstate New York, connecting with nature and enjoying the outdoors. This resulted in having to consider the logistics of planning a camping trip, as well as ensuring that we would have an adequate number of activities each day. The Congressional Award demonstrated that persistence is the cornerstone of success, and that regardless of obstacles faced, it is imperative to be an active community member and strive to do better, be better, for myself and the greater community.

Maura Herbertson
Short Hills, New Jersey
Advisor: Ellen Seuffert

For my 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service most of my time was with New Eyes for the Needy at their world headquarters. I was able to sort eyeglasses for distribution around the world and start a service project called "Just in Case" to recycle eyeglass cases to schools, hospitals & nursing homes My Personal Development was to improve my swimming skills and obtain my Red Cross Lifeguard Certificate. To achieve this goal I swam for my high school varsity swim team and completed the class for my Lifeguard Certification. My Physical Fitness portion consisted of improving my field hockey skills, which I achieved on my high school varsity field hockey team and was voted 1st team Union-Essex. For my Expedition portion I planned and executed a four-night trip. Earning this medal was a great experience and I learned a lot about myself and others!

Thiago Santos

Sparta, New Jersey

Advisor: Rory Fitzgerald

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, United States Air Force

I signed up to help with Ryan's Case for Smiles, an organization that creates and gives colorful pillow cases to kids who are suffering from various types of cancer. I also helped with service projects in the Blue Ridge Parkway National Park in North Carolina and the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest in Washington. I was also an active member of Civil Air Patrol. I progressed through the ranks and achieved my goal of achieving my Mitchell Award. I attended Basic Encampment and went to Wisconsin to attend Model Air Craft Remote Control, MARC, and Encampment. I was an active part of my town's travel soccer team and a member of the high school's varsity soccer team, that went to the finals of our county wide tournament. I also participated in travel soccer during the spring and that team was able to win the division tournament. For my Expedition, I decided to put all the camping skills I've learned through Boy Scouts and Student Conservation Association, (SCA), to the ultimate test by planning and carrying out a 5 day backpacking trip across the Shenandoah Mountains, in Virginia, using the Appalachian Trail. Working to achieve my Congressional Gold Medal has been a very tough, but rewarding experience, and has opened up many opportunities to me.

Elena Boal

Princeton Jct, New Jersey

Advisor: Theresa Riley

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

I supported the theater and the arts in my community by working on stage crew, building sets, then working backstage during shows. I also learned about and worked with the West Windsor-Plainsboro Alliance for the prevention of alcoholism and drug abuse to increase awareness in the community. I improved my teaching and tutoring skills in academic subjects by tutoring students in my local library, the Trenton Free Public Library, and volunteering for Urban Promise Trenton. I grew from a middle school lacrosse goalie to a varsity athlete and improved my save ratio and clearing accuracy. I became quicker, worked on my footwork, and learned to communicate with my teammates. I travelled to Richmond, Virginia by myself on the train to learn to sail and learn about the maritime culture. I helped chart a course on the Chesapeake Bay and successfully sailed the course.

Heejin Han

Port Washington, New York

Advisor: Esther Choi

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I have served across different cities and led youth from different communities to complete community projects resulting in good public health, safety, and assistance for the needy. I improved my clarinet skills in my school band, Tri-M Music Honor Society, Nassau Music Educators Association, and the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra of New York. I hiked trails under the average completion time, as indicated on the hiking trail's websites. I trained to ultimately hike a longer distance trail under the average time. For my Expedition, I planned a camping trip for me and my family from start to finish. I set up a day-to-day schedule, which included day activities that I arranged by myself. As I have bettered my community and myself, I have learned to value the hardworking people around. I also gained confidence in myself.

Christopher Kim

Woodbury, New York

Advisor: Paul Kim

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Boys State, Military Family Advisory Network,

United States Air Force, United States Army

For Voluntary Public Service, I coached Safe Swim, Aquathlon, and Life Saving to students. I also performed in Chapel Orchestra, Flag Duty with Army Honor Guard, supported 4-Star Command and Heads of State Ceremonies, performed Building Projects/fundraising for schools, churches, VFW, Salvation Army, Red Cross. For Personal Development I completed 20 Ranks, 22 Awards, 72 Merit Badges in BSA STEM, Citizenship, Outdoor Skills. I also led my Crew to complete Harvard Business Mgt series to coach each other what we learned. Another goal was to attend the Summer Business Academy at Harvard to learn more about Entrepreneurship. I interviewed 16 CEOs. For Physical Fitness, I completed 1,000 hrs in Varsity Athletics and Training in Cross Country, Swimming, Tae Kwon Do, Jujitsu, Marksmanship, and Military Training in Tactical Maneuvers. These activities took turns but were daily, often requiring reveille at 0500, 6 days a week over 2.5 years since Summer 2014. As Venture Crew and Boy Scout Troop Leader, I led my Scouts to several overnight training expeditions at CP TANGO Wilderness Survival/Mountaineering; NCO Training Camp to conduct Outdoor Adventures/Land Navigation; Incheon Philmont Expedition to trek 50 miles. There were many things I learned doing the Congressional Award. Commitment, dedication, perseverance, humility, honor, sacrifice, competition, achievement, and reward. You will be personally tested on all these things and more along the way. You will learn to prevail, learn, and excel. Most importantly, you will learn to not quit.

Naome Sajnani

Port Washington, New York

Advisor: Mala Desai

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

I volunteered at the Long Island Children's Museum where I taught young kids about the environment and sustainability. I also volunteered as a tutor for disadvantaged kids in Port Washington. For Personal Development, I used dance as a medium to advocate for women's rights. I danced across the country spreading awareness about violence against women. My Physical Fitness goals were completed through rowing. I was determined to join the crew team and worked to lower my times and become a faster rower. I planned a trip to Martinique where my family and I stayed in an apartment in the town of La Trinité. We learned to surf and hiked up Mount Pelée. By immersing ourselves in the town we learned about the culture of Martinique and found a new place to call home. The journey of earning The Congressional Award Gold Medal taught me about determination and allowed me to find out what I am passionate about.

Genevieve Bruen

Staten Island, New York

Advisor: Robert Gullickson

Affiliations: National Honor Society, YMCA

For Voluntary Public Service I delivered meals to homebound seniors who rely on Meals on Wheels as their only source of nutrition. I also assisted teachers as a volunteer at the YMCA summer camp. For Personal Development I took cake decorating classes to learn new decorating techniques. I also took classes to learn how to paint pottery. I took three years of Regent and SAT review courses to improve my knowledge and scores. For Physical Fitness, I played softball and volleyball for Moore Catholic High School against other competitive teams. I also took Zumba classes and was a member of the YMCA where I set goals to increase my stamina on different exercise equipment. I explored several of Princeton's rich, cultural museums in New Jersey. I also explored many historical sites in Philadelphia, such as the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall. I explored many historical sites and museums in St Augustine, Florida, the oldest Spanish city. I have gained knowledge and responsibility while earning the Congressional Award. I have learned how important it is to do as you promise when people are counting on you. I've also learned how important volunteering is in order to help those in need!

Edward John McCabe

Staten Island, New York

Advisor: P.O. Vickie Bedore, NYPD

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

To earn my Congressional Gold Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at Wagner College's Lego Robotics Program, provided free Information Technology services to the Staten Island Children's Museum, and participated in many voluntary Scouting service projects. For Personal Development, I participated in my school's chorus, I started, continued and finished my pursuit of becoming an Eagle Scout, and I dedicated myself to my school's Robotics team, the Brooklyn Blacksmiths. I was chosen to be Co-Captain of the Blacksmiths for my Junior and Senior years. For my Physical Fitness portion, I tried out for my school's Junior Varsity Lacrosse team and, once I was on the team, I challenged myself to become a better player each year. At the end of my Junior year I was awarded the Coaches' Award for Outstanding Underclassman. Finally, for my Expedition, I participated in a nine day Boy Scout High Adventure Trip to Sea Base near the Florida Keys. While at Sea Base, we camped on the beach, lived off the land and sea, and performed many team building exercises throughout the trip. I am forever changed by, and thankful for, having had the opportunity to be a part of the Congressional Award Gold Medal program.

Santo Tiralosi

Staten Island, New York

Advisor: Robert Gullickson

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service in my community and assisted with local events such as parades, health fairs, food drives and an annual picnic for the blind. For Personal Development, I worked towards my Eagle Scout and learned many new things such as public speaking, kayaking, lifesaving, woodcarving, cooking, and first aid. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided that I would join the school swim team and do my best to qualify for the state championships. I quickly learned how to work hard and pace myself and swam in the 500-free divisional event after just joining the team. For my Expedition, I planned an eight-day road trip to New Brunswick Canada. My maternal Grandfather's family was from this area and I was eager to learn of our family heritage and explore another country, it was a spectacular experience! The Congressional Award program has broadened my view and has allowed me to provide some greatly needed assistance in the community. Participation in this program has enabled me to strive to change things for the better both personally and in my community.

Mahika Hari

New York, New York

Advisor: Dr. Cornelie Ladd

I volunteered at the New York Presbyterian Hospital, assisting patients and staff in the maternity and neurology departments. I also worked with the Service Learning Team at school, where I led student groups to teach after-school activities at Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, Bronx. For Personal Development, I studied piano along with music theory and composition to broaden my musical horizons. I joined the student-run school newspaper and worked my way up from having no experience to becoming a staff writer assigned to front page articles. For my Physical Fitness goals, I trained diligently to develop both my field hockey skills and achieve my personal fitness goals in order to make the Varsity team and maintain a strong fitness level during the off-seasons. This award gave me the impetus to explore healthcare differences between the US and India. I spent over ten days in India shadowing doctors and living with their families, immersing myself in a culture that was a part of me, but I had known so little about. It was a truly inspiring journey. The Congressional Award motivated me to push my limits, come out of my comfort zone and identify my inner strengths.

Fiona Dubrosa

Chappaqua, New York

Advisor: Melissa Burns

Affiliations: HOBY

The majority of my service hours were spent at Legal Momentum, an NYC non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of women through changes in law and policy. I also volunteered at the Chappaqua Library and the Westchester Food Bank. I worked to develop my leadership skills at HOBY programs (NY Metro and World Leadership Congress) and by serving as an assistant religious education teacher at my local church. I also improved my acting abilities through participation in NYC acting programs and performing in local theater shows. My fitness goals were met through my continued participation in Irish dancing. I have been dancing with the O'Sullivan School of Irish Dancing for 14 years and have medalled at local, regional, national, and world competitions. To complete my expedition goal, I attended a week-long sea kayaking Outward Bound program in Baltimore's Chesapeake Bay. Through my pursuit of The Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned about the importance of staying organized, focused, and motivated in order to achieve my goals.

William Gregson
Chappaqua, New York
Advisor: Leland Launer

I spent hundreds of Voluntary Public Service hours at Goldsmith Center, a residential facility for boys whose parents are unable to take care of them. For six years, I organized my friends to play basketball, eat dinner and raise \$25,000 to build a large Pavillion for visiting family of the boys. In the area of Personal Development, three years ago I opened Home Alone Management Services, LLC. I take care of people's homes when they are away and I offer basketball clinics for children and clinics in other sports that my friends teach. For my Physical Fitness hours, as a Varsity Basketball player, I spent three out of four seasons training or playing. My goals were to increase my free-throw average and my three-point shot accuracy. I also did strength training and bike riding to increase my stamina and to cross train. In the area of Expedition/Exploration, I spent five days at the Grand Canyon, Bryce and Zion National Parks. Dealing with a flash thunder storm at 3:00am collapsing my tent were among the many highlights of this unforgettable trip. The temperature was over 100 degrees so staying cool was a priority. Participating in earning The Congressional Gold Award was very rewarding and it taught me to make concrete goals and work toward achieving them by having a realistic action plan and having my Advisor hold me accountable every step of the way.

Allison Herskovitz
Briarcliff Manor, New York
Advisor: Daphne Crosswell
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

While earning my Congressional Gold Award, I volunteered for more than 300 hours in Nicaragua, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic building houses and educating young girls. For Personal Development I created Monarch Waystation Gardens in my community and encouraged others to protect milkweed habitat and the historic Monarch Migration. These combined experiences inspired me to now major in Latin American Studies and minor in Environmental Humanities. For Physical Fitness I worked for three years to perfect six cheerleading stunts as a team flyer. I think my most memorable Exploration was time spent in Washington, DC researching the fate of my grandfather, Martin, during the Holocaust and learning more about the military service of my grandfather, Edward, during WWII. The Congressional Award is a wonderful program that encourages personal growth on so many different levels; I was very fortunate and grateful to participate.

Zachary Kunow
Montebello, New York
Advisor: Anne Martel
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I completed four significant projects in conservation, including my Eagle project, to earn the Hornaday Silver Medal from the Boy Scouts of America, which approximately six scouts earn nationally each year. In addition, I am a volunteer fireman serving my local community. As a Boy Scout, I took advantage of the merit badge program to learn about a broad range of topics including many trades and hobbies. As a Fire Explorer and a Fireman, I received frequent training on how to handle emergency situations. I am a three sport athlete throughout my high school career and an avid sportsman who enjoys hiking, kayaking and bike riding. I swim year round as well as swimming on my school team. I also play volleyball and row for my school. I completed a 50+ mile backpacking trek in the Adirondacks of New York where we carried all our food and equipment for the week without resupplying. It was an amazing experience trekking through the woods where we didn't see another person for days at a time.

Kathleen Schofield
New City, New York
Advisor: Daniel L. Gartshore
Affiliations: 4-H, American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society, People to People International

My Voluntary Public Service focused on helping the environment, sick, poor and children through mentoring, coaching and collecting donations. As a future nurse and lifeguard, I also promoted healthier lifestyles in my community encouraging exercise, avoiding drugs and water safety. For Personal Development, I improved my leadership skills and public speaking through a variety of community programs to become captain of my teams and a leader among my peers. I also enjoy photography, so I took classes, entered competitions and developed my skills on my own. I love to play soccer, so I worked on my endurance and soccer skills with my school and community soccer teams which included training six days a week almost year round. I supplemented my training with summer soccer camps, leagues and running/training on my own. I planned and organized a trip to the Southwest of the USA to learn about a very different area of our country, Native American culture and American history. I learned how to deal with difficult weather, personalities, illness and ended up with a wonderful trip full of new ideas and closer bonds. The Congressional Award organized my high school experience and encouraged me to set long term goals, break them down and take meaningful steps to achieve my goals.

Lucas Zhao

Chappaqua, New York

Advisor: Annie Wang

I volunteered at a local hospital improving the experience of patients. In 2015 I took a gap year from high school to teach English as a volunteer at an impoverished high school in China. For my Personal Development I conducted research on the various mechanisms and techniques of high security mechanical locks, specifically those in use in China and Japan. I also presented the research at several mechanical security conferences around the world. In addition, I established my own company for distributing locks. My Physical Fitness goal involved joining the high school cross country team during the fall, and the track team during the winter and spring. I participated in the daily practices, as well as attending any meets. I travelled the United Kingdom in the spring in order to explore the landmarks, history, and culture of my birthplace. I went to both tourist destinations, as well as locally known areas in order to truly understand the history and culture. The Congressional Award has encouraged me to always help other people, and has improved my way of thinking.

Charlie Siragusa

Webster, New York

Advisor: Dr. Christopher Parks

I volunteered as a coach with several of the local volleyball organizations. My goal in being a coach was to give back to a community that had given me so many great opportunities. For Personal Development I participated in my high school's Jazz Band from Freshman to Senior year. I played both the tuba and the piano. My Physical Fitness goal was to get a triple double, double digits in three statistical categories, in a volleyball match. Achieving this goal entailed team practice, private lessons, and strength and conditioning training. My Expedition goal was to explore the west coast of our country, as I live on the east coast. My stops on this expedition included historical sites, social hotspots, and natural parks. It was eye-opening to see just how distinct the west coast was from the east. I am honored to receive the Congressional Award Gold Medal alongside the other talented and well-rounded recipients.

Gabriel Curcione

Wilson, New York

Advisor: Maj. Thomas Scozzafava

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I chose mentors and organizations that I witnessed positively impacting me and my community. I volunteered hundreds of hours with Cornell Co-Op Extension's Operation Military Kids program; a program that had a positive impact on me at a young age. I worked with and established connections with motivated and inspirational community leaders from government, non-profit and corporate backgrounds in my Personal Development studies. The Physical Fitness component motivated me to surround myself with physically active friends, develop a strong teamwork mentality and cultivate healthy competition for greater results. In my Expedition I learned how depend on my French speaking skills as I planned for and led my family on a trip to Montreal to experience the winter festivals, cultural activities and food. The Congressional Award inspired me to work smarter and track progress toward multiple goals so I can reflect on what I have achieved and inspire myself to greater future endeavors.

Holly Hutcheson

Durham, North Carolina

Advisor: Catherine Parker

I used my 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service to serve the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, the Orange County Teen Court and several local summer camps that support both the arts and science and math. Additionally, I volunteered as a page in both houses of the NC General Assembly and for the NC Governor's office. My Personal Development activities ranged from earning my Silver Award through the Girl Scouts of the USA working with dementia and memory loss patients to taking guitar lessons, glass fusion art classes and getting the American Red Cross Lifeguard certification. My participation in varsity tennis, swimming and soccer satisfied the Physical Fitness requirement. Last, for the Expedition component, I planned and executed an eight-day trip cross-country trip from NYC to San Francisco via train. Without the motivation of the Congressional Award program and without the support of my advisors and mentors, these accomplishments would not have materialized. I am honored to have received the Gold Medal Award.

Jacob Rowe

New Bern, North Carolina

Advisor: Tracy Kruse

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Habitat for Humanity

I worked with the Habitat for Humanity retail store, the BSA, and my school. I also helped with and organized Hurricane Matthew flood efforts in which I helped raise over \$5,000 in supplies for people affected by the flood damage in eastern North Carolina. I took leadership classes with the Boy Scouts and I helped lead my boy scout troop with the help of my troop leaders. I also developed my leadership through student council conventions and conferences which led me to run for and win senior class president. I also was captain on multiple teams. I ran cross country and track for 3 years of high school. I don't plan to continue to run competitively but I still wish to run for fun after high school. I also took Krav Maga classes on top of doing cross country and track. My family and I went to Alaska for our Exploration. It was a trip in which my family and I immersed ourselves in the Alaskan Culture as well as touring the fantastic scenery which you cannot see elsewhere. It was great to be in very well preserved environment. It was a great experience and it helped me mature as a teenager into a young adult and I would like to thank the Congressional Award for developing this award because it was truly impacting on my life.

Emma Morris

Rougemont, North Carolina

Advisor: Gregg Gerdau

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Girl Scouts of the USA

I completed 100 hours at the American Red Cross where I supported disaster services, constructed fire safety education and disaster preparedness kits, organized blood drives, and created fire alarm distribution routes for the ARC MLK Day of Service. For my personal development, I earned the Girl Scout Gold Award by creating a program called "Keeping Kids Safe." It consisted of a slide show, questions, and first aid/CPR demonstrations. I presented it to nearly 300 children, and gave them handouts and pillowcase to help start their "go kit." To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I played on my high school's tennis team and placed in the top ten players. I also began to learn yoga and mastered ten basic poses. For my Expedition, I planned a three week French immersion and stayed with a family in provence where I had the opportunity to practice conversational French and learn about a different way of life.

Thomas Douglas

Winston Salem, North Carolina

Advisor: Deborah Casstevens

Affiliations: Habitat for Humanity, Key Club, National Honor Society, YMCA

To earn my award, I completed Voluntary Public Service by coaching youth basketball, helping at Habitat for Humanity, participating in Key Club, and working with H.O.P.E. of Winston Salem. At H.O.P.E., I prepared and provided nutritious meals for underprivileged people in poor areas of my community. For Personal Development, I attended faith formation classes and weekly Catholic mass to nurture and develop my Christian faith. In the process, I have become more involved at my church by altar-serving and ushering at these masses. For Physical Fitness, I played for multiple basketball teams at my school and in my community, played on an organized football team for the first time at my school, and played and practiced golf for my school team and individually. For Expedition/Exploration, I planned a five night trip to Louisiana to experience and immerse myself in my family's Cajun heritage and culture. While in Louisiana, I stayed on a rural farm, fished in the Gulf of Mexico, learned to cook Cajun cuisines, and learned about the levee system. I had an incredible experience earning my Congressional Award, and I was really able to grow as a person and learn more about myself in the process.

Capri D'Souza

Oak Ridge, North Carolina

Advisor: Christina Hart

I earned my Congressional Award Gold Medal by completing more than 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Greensboro Urban Ministry, collecting food for the homeless and hungry in my community, and the Brenner Children's Hospital, helping families with children who have cancer. To earn my Personal Development hours, I practiced my violin for thirty minutes each day so I could be a better violinist in the Greensboro Symphony Youth Orchestra. I have played in first violin and I am currently principal violinist. For Physical Fitness, I played outdoor soccer in fall and spring and indoor soccer in winter. I am passionate about soccer, which I have played since kindergarten. In addition, I worked out at the gym to increase my stamina for soccer season. I earned my Expedition/Exploration hours by planning and taking a two-week trip to China, the highlight being climbing The Great Wall. Through working towards my many goals, I have learned a lot about self-discipline and perseverance, and I am extremely honored to receive the Congressional Award Gold Medal.

Caroline Fitzgerald

Greensboro, North Carolina

Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley

Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

In earning my award, I volunteered with the Boys and Girls Club of Greensboro and at Habitat for Humanity building houses around my community. I also volunteered at Canterbury School working summer camps, coaching volleyball and working on the high ropes course. In building my interests and skills through Personal Development, I taught myself new ways to work with new mediums and explore many different techniques through art. I also learned how to cook various dishes from unique cultures around the world. Through my Physical Fitness activities, I played varsity soccer and volleyball at my high school. I participated in Club Soccer, Indoor volleyball and Beach volleyball too. The Expedition I planned was to Yosemite National Park in California. I organized a trip where my parents, brother and I spent a week in the backcountry of Yosemite backpacking and camping. In working toward my award, I learned much about myself, my community and also met many new people and had new experiences I would have not otherwise had.

Jack Maginnes

Greensboro, North Carolina

Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley

Affiliations: National Honor Society

For Voluntary Public Service, I choose to spend time doing home repairs for families who were unable to afford them. In addition to this, I also was apart of a service trip to the Dominican Republic, where I helped teach school children English. I fulfilled my Personal Development goals through teaching myself how to play guitar. I worked on learning different techniques, and how to apply them to different genres of music. To complete my Physical Fitness goal, I played on both the soccer and lacrosse team at my school. Both teams required me to participate everyday after school during their respective seasons. In addition to this, I also played travel lacrosse throughout the summer and fall. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Spain to backpack the Camino de Santiago. This was a 10 day hike, in which my friends and I walked nearly 70 miles. It was a wonderful experience, and something I hope to do again in the future. The Congressional Award gave me opportunity to see myself progress throughout my 4 years of high school. By setting goals freshman year, I had the ability to see tangible progress in the three areas specifically emphasized in the guidelines of this award. While sometimes difficult to balance the stresses of school with the requirements of the gold medal, I have found that the award feels very validating, as my hard work has not gone unrecognized.

Delaney Dunlap
Indian Trail, North Carolina
Advisor: Francie Dunlap
Affiliations: Key Club

I spent 200 hours planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, and delivering fresh vegetables to a food pantry. I also spent 87 hours on community outreach with my FIRST Robotics Team, and 60 hours with Key Club. I spent 56 hours providing childcare for refugees taking English classes. My Personal Development goal was to learn Bach's Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major, the Prelude. To accomplish this, I worked with my instructor weekly and practiced daily, for a total of 420 hours. To accomplish my Physical Fitness goal of completing a 5.12 rated rock climbing route, I did strength training, technique lessons, physical therapy, and lots of climbing for a total of 312 hours. To complete a three-month long immersion experience in France, I learned the basics of French and French culture, and prepared myself to be independent.

Bennett David
Asheville, North Carolina
Advisor: Joe Mouer
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of community service through the Boy Scouts of America. This included researching, organizing, and participating in many projects related to my completion of the William T. Hornaday Silver Medal in conservation. For my Personal Development, I earned 135 Boy Scout Merit Badges. Through these experiences, I learned and mastered many new skills, and met many interesting people. For my Physical Fitness goal, I trained for and completed three challenging treks, also through the Boy Scouts of America. This training culminated in a fifty-mile kayaking trip, multiple mountain biking trips, and a 95-mile backpacking trip. For my Expedition, I was the crew leader on that 95-mile, 12-day backpacking trip, at the beautiful Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. This was one of the most significant two weeks of my life, a journey of pushing my limits and interacting with the great outdoors. My pursuit of the Congressional Award Gold Medal has taught me the importance of record-keeping, goal-setting, and trying new things, and I am very appreciative of the opportunities and experiences it has provided me with.

Ashley Jamison

Belmont, North Carolina

Advisor: Florence Kane

Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service working as a Girl Scout. I restarted the Middle School Service Club at my school where we collected food, school supplies, and backpacks for a summer camp for Title 1 children and The Boys & Girls Club. For Personal Development, I worked toward improving my singing and acting skills and earned larger roles by performing in every school production and joining the Concert Chorus. I also took wake-boarding lessons and practiced my skills on the lake during the summer. For my Physical Fitness, I strengthened my core and rehabilitated my hip from a prior injury. I reached my goal to competitively run cross country for my high school. I successfully competed in the North Carolina State Conference Championship Meet. For my Expedition, I went on a nine day Outward Bound course. I hiked and navigated through some of the Appalachian Trail with 50+ pounds in my backpack and went white water canoeing. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal was an amazing, life changing experience that helped me discover my passions, and taught me that I am capable of accomplishing everything I set my mind to.

Kathryn Ellis

Mooreville, North Carolina

Advisor: Heather Ayris

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I volunteered at the Mooreville Christian Mission Food Pantry for over 400 hours throughout the past 3 years. My duties included restocking shelves, leading clients through the aisles to choose food, and receiving deliveries from grocery stores. I chose meditation as my Personal Development goal. I meditated for a minimum of 15 minutes every day and recorded the time and place in my dream journal. I became more patient and compassionate throughout my journey. My Physical Fitness goal was to pole vault 8 feet in the air. I achieved this my sophomore year after training during both winter and spring track. After reaching this goal, I also qualified for regionals. For my Expedition, I visited both Savannah, Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina to learn about the rich history of each town. I planned house tours and museum visits to learn about the civil rights movement, the fall of the Old South, and feminist improvements throughout time. The whole experience of earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal has been very beneficial to my personal growth and has helped me become a critical thinker and gain new perspectives.

Jordan Feldman

Mooreville, North Carolina

Advisor: Debbie Maunus

Affiliations: Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society, YMCA

My Voluntary Public Service for the Gold Medal varied from coaching children in sports, to helping to build homes, working in the ReStore facility, and socializing with and fostering animals. My Personal Development hours were spent improving my piano skills. I have taken piano lessons for 7 years, and I was determined to learn more difficult, classical pieces. My Physical Fitness portion turned out to be more challenging than I ever imagined. I wanted to improve my tumbling, cheer, and lacrosse skills, however, last year I had surgery on my leg, and had to fight my way back from not being able to walk, to regaining my tumbling skills, which I did! Finally, for my exploration portion I visited New York City historical and cultural sites such as the 9/11 memorial, the United Nations, the Tenement Museum and more, all of which had a huge impact on me, and helped me to understand where I come from, and how we have evolved as a country and a world. Every aspect of this process has given me the chance to learn more about myself and those around me, as well as to never give up.

Lawton Gresham

Greensboro, North Carolina

Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Habitat for Humanity

I served children with academic needs and children from disadvantaged backgrounds in my area and also coached and mentored children with special needs. I also engaged in activities to protect the environment. Lastly, I served underprivileged families outside of my area through service projects. I educated myself on natural ways to control ADHD symptoms (through exercise, diet, vitamins, and neurofeedback therapy). I also learned the elements of the game of golf (including the rules, etiquette, history, and technique). I improved my tennis abilities by increasing my first serve percentage from 50% to 75%. I also improved my resting heart rate from 70 to 65 and increased my maximum bench pressing weight from 7 repetitions of 105 pounds to 7 repetitions of 145 pounds through an interval, weight training program. I traveled to Nassau, Bahamas, a foreign country I had not previously visited, to experience a different culture and natural environment and to complete two open-water scuba dives reaching depths of greater than 30 feet. I greatly enjoyed working to achieve the Gold Congressional Award and have gained a deeper understanding of my role in both my community and the world and what I can do to positively impact both.

Jenna Viveiros

Mooreville, North Carolina

Advisor: Michelle Robertson

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

For my Voluntary Public Service I participated in a program called Rooms at the Inn, a program within a Methodist church that helps the homeless. I also led a personal safety day for middle and high school girls. My Personal Development activity was getting my black belt in Tae Kwon Do. This took a lot of discipline and hard work. My Physical Fitness activity was training myself to run two miles. My father was a runner in his youth so he wanted me to try and see if I could run, and I found I could. For my Expedition I planned a trip to Canada. The Congressional Award broadened my horizons and made it a lot easier to put myself out there.

Natalie Carter

Springboro, Ohio

Advisor: Angela Addington

I completed over 300 hours of Voluntary Public Service at One Bistro, a local community cafe. In addition, I spent nearly 100 hours writing letters to and visiting residents at an assisted living facility. Most of my hours for Personal Development came through enhancing my creative writing abilities by studying, writing, and editing my work. I also spent some time studying the German, French, and Russian languages, gaining at least basic proficiency in each. For Physical Fitness, I participated in Taekwondo, earning the rank of First Degree Level 5 black belt. I planned a 5-day trip to explore the Chattanooga Civil War sights and battlefields as my Expedition. This took me hiking around rifle-pits, exploring Civil War museums, and walking through downtown Chattanooga. In achieving this award, I learned to be responsible in managing my time and completing all of my hours, and I thoroughly enjoyed every activity.

Ellen Haney
Maineville, Ohio
Advisor: Amanda Brindley

For Voluntary Public Service, I utilized excess commercial products to provide medical supplies, personal care products, and educational supplies to communities in need. Furthermore, I served as a tutor for intermediate and high school English language learners at two local public schools. For Personal Development, I started an Etsy shop, for which I first researched intellectual property laws and practiced my creativity in art and handicrafts and then handled all aspects of business. I learned a great deal about integrity, quality, sustainability, and customer care in business. For my Physical Fitness, I attended ballet class seven hours a week and rehearsals around three hours a week in order to participate in school performances. I also supplemented classes with exercises on my own time, leading to increased opportunities to perform with more advanced choreography. For my Expedition, I backpacked 41 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Great Smoky Mountains National Park with my sister. In the 8 months prior, I researched equipment needs, selected my route, and learned backcountry preparedness. Through my participation in the Award, I have encountered many adventures I would not have experienced if not for this program, and I would not trade the memories I formed during this time for anything.

Pakrush Katragadda
Springboro, Ohio
Advisor: Venugopal Yerubandi

My Voluntary Public Service goals involved serving as a Youth Rep., and Youth Ambassador for India Club of Dayton community activities as well as volunteering at the local hospital's emergency room, and serving as an advocate of Teen Alliance Council to empower youth to be substance free and good citizens. To complete my goals for Personal Development, I practiced and improved my vocabulary. I made goals to learn at least 10 new words a week and to master their usage. I took some tutoring and practiced for the ACT and achieved a good score towards obtaining admission to college. To complete my goals for Physical Fitness, I regularly went to the gym, exercised, and trained. I improved my agility which helped me participate in high school tennis. As part of improving my tennis techniques, I improved my style, stroke strength, and my first serves in percentage improved by 40%. For my Expedition goal, I assisted my family members on a three week trip to Europe, by searching the internet for sight seeing, tickets, reserving hotels, restaurants, checking train timings, and maintaining an itinerary. My research, planning, and records maintenance helped save time and money. My journey towards earning the Congressional Award has made me experience and learn a lot of life skills apart from the knowledge I gained about the community, its needs, and my role in it as an active citizen for a better society.

Katherine Skelly
Morrow, Ohio
Advisor: Catherine Lopez

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I had the opportunity to help educate children who otherwise wouldn't have had the chance to attend school through the Freedom Christian School in the Dominican Republic. I also worked with Matthew 25 Ministries and the Aruna Project to help those in need. For my Personal Development, I worked as a babysitter. Through this I learned how to better care for children. My goal for Physical Fitness was to improve my 5K time. By running high school cross country and training on my own, I improved my time by over two minutes. This also improved my overall health and fitness. To complete my Expedition, I went to the Red River Gorge. It was amazing to explore the beautiful rock structures and the culture of the surrounding area.

Max Lee
Canfield, Ohio
Advisor: Mei Guo

For my Voluntary Public Service goals I tutored students for the ACT and played piano for patients at a local children's hospital as well as for senior residents at a local nursing home. For my Personal Development goal I honed my musical talent by practicing piano. I went to the gym on a regular basis and worked out - cardiovascular exercise as well as weight training to complete my Physical Fitness requirements. Lastly, I went on an Exploration to the city of Toronto, Ontario, Canada and explored the cities museums and attractions.

Hannah Addington
Springboro, Ohio
Advisor: Patricia Carter

For the first part of my public service project, I distributed over \$1,100 worth of school supplies in the Bahamas. The second part of my project was to collect and distribute 4,000 books to local children and schools in need. For my Personal Development goal I learned more about the equestrian industry and horse training. I worked and trained at my trainer's barn, going to clinics taught by International riders and reading books and articles about all aspects of the industry. For the Physical Fitness portion, I trained for my first full year of showing in Eventing. I cross trained in aerobic and anaerobic exercises in and out of the saddle. For the Exploration portion of the award, I decided to go to the Pan American Games in Canada to experience an international competition and the Canadian culture for the first time. Every day, from one week, I observed a sporting event and visited a national museum. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an amazing experience and I have learned a ton about myself and the world around me.

Arihant Chordia
Centerville, Ohio
Advisor: Manish Sheth

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals I volunteered at a hospital and food bank. I would help patients and visitors to get to the room they need to go to. While at the food bank I packed boxes with a variety of foods to give to people who couldn't afford food or who were less privileged. To complete my Personal Development goals I worked on landscaping and participated in Science Olympiad. Working on landscape taught me how to manage a garden and keep it from overgrowing as well as looking good. While participating in Science Olympiad I improved upon my science and math skills. To complete my Physical Fitness I played volleyball. I played volleyball daily because it is my favorite sport. I would usually play with a group of friends every day as well as play on a club team during the winter. To complete my Expedition/Exploration I went to South Africa for a week trip because I learned in school that there is a surplus of history there and I like to learn about the history about countries. This expedition was probably my favorite of all the places I have visited. My overall experience while participating in The Congressional Award was great especially being able to expand my horizon to activities I thought I would never do like going to the food bank or landscaping.

idur Prasad

Beavercreek, Ohio

Advisor: Hitesh Trivedi

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I worked to develop a self-sustaining volunteering program to create clothing artifacts for kids in a homeless shelter in Indiana. I also created a training program where the current volunteers trained the next set of volunteers to create over 400 pieces of clothing annually. For Personal Development I worked as team captain of my FIRST Robotics team to develop my management and technical skills in a competitive environment. I worked to start 52 teams throughout Dayton, Ohio to continue increasing access to STEM resources for students in the area. I ran regularly to improve my cardiovascular endurance and successfully reduced my mile time by a minute and 12 seconds for Physical Fitness. Lastly, for my Exploration I planned a trip to Washington D.C. as I had prior experience as a volunteer on a presidential campaign and wanted to experience politics in action. I went to multiple different monuments and buildings, including the White House, and attended a session of Congress.

Sanjana Yerubandi

Dayton, Ohio

Advisor: Manish Sheth

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I completed over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service at Kettering Medical Center by helping distribute supplies to different units in the hospital. I also helped revitalize the wetlands with the Beavercreek Wetlands Association. In addition I served at a Food Bank and worked on a Homeless Shelter Project. For Personal Development, I studied Indian Classical Dance and took violin lessons. For my Physical Fitness goal, I trained to complete the 2015 Flying Pig Half Marathon and the 2016 Louisville Mini Marathon by running and training at the gym. I also practiced tennis in order to improve my game and increase my stamina. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip to Richmond, Virginia and Washington D.C. While exploring the cities, I learned about the different cultures, food, and their historical significance. This helped me understand all the planning that needs to be done in order to make a trip successful. Working towards the Congressional Award Gold Medal has really helped me explore different dimensions by setting goals and measuring progress while making me a better person.

Laurel Grae
Chardon, Ohio
Advisor: Cathy Sweet
Affiliations: 4-H, Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with Kiwanis of Geauga County. I worked local community service events, food banks and assisted with local programs. For my Personal Development portion, I participated in several ride along shifts with an active duty police officer. First and foremost, I learned about loyalty, trust and teamwork; this job cannot be done without those things. For my Physical Fitness portion, I took canoeing lessons, starting at a beginner's level. I increased my training and reached intermediate level at 3-4 hours per outing. And for my Expedition, I planned a five night trip to Detroit, Michigan, where I studied the histories of inventors and inventions that revolutionized America. I visited National Landmarks, explored museums and viewed various types of Architecture. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an experience, and has contributed to the confident and independent person I am right now.

Jaidev Sharma
Solon, Ohio
Advisor: Ms. Cora Young
Affiliations: American Red Cross, National Honor Society

I am a Red Cross Blood Donor ambassador and a volunteer trainer, having trained 5-6 new adult volunteers. I volunteer at a local senior citizen home called Kindred-Stratford. I also volunteered for a non profit called Eco Kitchen in India and both of these experiences have taught me the values of service above self. My Personal Development goals in music have motivated me to practice consistently and with more vigor. I was a part of the Sustaining Sampradaya program for 3 years in a row where we had to train rigorously for six months to perform a group concert. I am also able to give solo concerts now. I started going to the local gym much more regularly where I would do a full body workout and play basketball. Also, I have attended multiple tennis clinics, playing tennis for two hours at a time. Thanks to the Congressional Award, I feel healthier, happier, and more content. I helped organize a family trip to India where we explored many temples in the southern and western parts. Booking the flights, train tickets and hotels at reasonable prices involved a lot of searching and planning. Overall, it was a rewarding experience, teaching me the value of time management. The Congressional Award journey has been a long but rewarding one, and the steps taken to earn the Gold Medal have had a profound impact on my character for the better.

Alan Ai

Massillon, Ohio

Advisor: Stanley Barnes

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Boys & Girls Clubs of America

I volunteered at the Akron-Canton Food Bank, at the Massillon Boys and Girls Club, and at various small events, such as Cub Scout summer camps and the like. Over the course of my 400 hours, I took on a number of tasks, from packing meat at the food bank to tutoring at the Boys and Girls Club. An Eagle Scout Project is no easy task, but through the time that I spent preparing and developing my plans and actions for the project, I grew monumentally as a person and as a leader. Also, I worked on my speaking in order to improve in speech and debate. As an avid tennis player, I spent time practicing my forehand, backhand, and serve accuracy in order to make sure that I was returning shots properly. This process made me a much better player, and a better athlete overall. I traveled to Alaska in order to study the wildlife and the glaciers that the region had to offer. Over the course of my Expedition, I did copious amounts of research to not only the area's environment, but also the culture of the locals. Overall, the Congressional Award has made me a much better person, and the skills and work ethic that I have acquired on the way will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Dustyn Reynolds

Wooster, Ohio

Advisor: Crystal Lilley-Hunt

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service throughout my community focusing a significant amount of time at a local rescue farm. I advocated around my community for the benefits of free range farm poultry. For personal development, I sought out appropriate training to work with young Girl Scouts in the outdoors. For my Physical Fitness portion, I dedicated time and effort to improve my fast pitch softball catching abilities. I was able to compete on a travel team and also represent the United States as a Catcher on Team USA at the Europe Cup in the Netherlands. Finally, for my Expeditions, I planned camping trips that involved kayaking, hiking, and outdoor cooking. I also planned local trips to my state's Amish community to experience their culture and kindness. I enjoyed all of the aspects of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and gained leadership skills that I am using as I pursue my career dreams of working in the medical field.

Luisamaria Rubio

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Advisor: Silapberdi Berdiyev

Affiliations: American Red Cross

I have completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the nearby day care center. I helped clean tables, floors, rooms, and helped take care of young children. In Personal Development, I have learned how to cook traditional Turkish food and I also studied for the ACT test. In the end I have improved on both activities. For Physical Fitness, I have expanded my knowledge in theatrical dance and in yoga. I now understand the process of getting fit. Finally for Expedition/Exploration, I have journeyed to Italy. I learned of many customs and history revolving Rome.

Kendall Fleshman

Portland, Oregon

Advisor: Crissy Gragnola

Affiliations: National Honor Society, Youth Service America

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a senior care home. I worked on-site cooking, cleaning, and visiting with residents. For Personal Development, I expanded my leadership skills on the Abby's Closet Student Advisory Board. I helped collect, sort, and distribute prom dresses to students. I also attended board meetings and appeared on the local news promoting Abby's Closet. For Physical Fitness, I participated in club and high school lacrosse. I worked on different skills to improve my overall performance. Finally, for my Expedition, I hiked for six days in Central Oregon, including the Deschutttes River Trail. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and learned that I can accomplish more than I thought possible. The reward is not actually the Award, but everything I discovered along the way.

Megan Baumhardt

Damascus, Oregon

Advisor: Gail Loffler

Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered through my local 4-H club to help serve the community by doing road cleanup and other community service events. I improved my public speaking skills through my 4-H livestock judging. I learned how to evaluate all sides of options, and then defend my decision. Defending my decision is done my concise, clear speaking. I increased my core strength, as measurable by my improved batting average. I lifted weights as the primary source of strength, but also ran to build general core strength. I took a road trip with my family from Oregon to California and stopped at the historical points along the way. I also learned many life lessons while on the course of this trip. My experience was hard, but fantastic.

Nisha Arya

Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mirtha Altman

I served on the Steering Committee that organized the Peace Walk in Philadelphia in 2015 and 2016. In this walk, more than 500 people of different faiths get together and walk to houses of worship of different religions (such as church, temple, and mosque). I learned how to play Indian classical music on the Indian flute (bansuri). I have played the bansuri in numerous public venues such as the Peace Walk. I am on the swim team of my school and have received a Varsity letter for three years in a row. I planned a hiking trip to Acadia National Forest in Maine. We hiked several trails in the forest and along the ocean. I found the goal directed approach of participating in the Congressional Award rewarding.

Joshita Varshney
Exton, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Jennifer Laible
Affiliations: National Honor Society

I work with orphanages with a international outreach, specifically Amigos de Jesus and the Suzhou, China orphanage by interacting one on one with the children. Also, I served my high school's Quiz Bowl team where I volunteered at tournaments and coordinated fundraisers. For the past 7 years, I have supplemented my global passions by learning Mandarin through personal studying, private tutoring, and a 6-week immersive experience in Suzhou, China. I also completed a 5-part financial modeling specialization on Coursera, which grew my knowledge of the business world. My Physical Fitness goals were to secure a spot on my high school's varsity field hockey team and boost my position to midfield. I attended post-season workouts, clinics, and personal training sessions. Through this my team was able to advance in playoffs farther than we had in my high school career. Curious of my family history, I realized there was no proper documentation of my genealogy. As a result for my Exploration, I traveled to India, interviewed family members, and participated in unique cultural events to learn more about my rich heritage. I am extremely grateful of achieving my goals throughout the past two years and expanding my local and global awareness.

Elizabeth Belka
Glenside, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Mary Rodgers
Affiliations: National Honor Society

For Voluntary Public Service, I worked extensively with the local free library, nature center, and several other organizations, with a primary focus on helping children explore, enjoy, and learn about the world around them. For Personal Development, I discovered and developed personal interests that otherwise I would not have entertained in my busy lifestyle, like studying Japanese and practicing the viola. My Physical Fitness goals have built healthy habits for life. I found that I actually enjoyed the gym, taking group exercise classes like yoga, and especially running. I trained and went from not being able to run a mile to finishing a half marathon! My Expedition was my first-ever trip to D.C. I learned so much about our nation's cultural and national identity, in both museums and walks through urban neighborhoods. Although it feels amazing to finally see all of my hard work pay off, I'm sad to let go of what has become such a huge part of who I am, but I will always strive to plan and execute new goals for myself, and never forget the lessons I learned 'going for Gold'.

Victoria Belka

Glenside, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

I worked with Briar Bush Nature Center as a camp aide during the summer months. I also volunteered at my local library, the Abington Free Library, for various educational programs like Abington Reads, Science in the Summer, and the Abington Teen Advisory Board. For my Personal Development goals, I taught myself Italian and worked toward mastering advanced pieces of classical music on the flute. Both have helped me discover my passion for music- both linguistically and in the traditional sense. My Physical Fitness goal was to train for and complete a half-marathon. After arduous training, I completed my first half marathon in January in under two hours, which was my initial goal. Running introduced me to a new sense of confidence and accomplishment. For my Expedition goal, I planned a trip for my family to Washington D.C. It was a lovely experience all around, and my memories of the time I spent there are unforgettable. I am so proud and happy to have earned my Congressional Award Gold Medal. Every hour was quite literally a labor of love, and I have learned so much about myself during the trials and tribulations I faced while working towards my goals.

Noah Berkowitz

Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society, People to People International

I am the secretary of my school's H2O for Life club, which raises money to bring accessible water to schools in developing countries. I also helped organizations such as PBS & Toys for Tots. For my Eagle project, I organized a food drive, & helped to collect over 1,000 cans for a local food pantry. For my Personal Development, I learned about new advancements in technology and photography. I took private lessons with a professional photographer, who taught me about shot composition and different ways to utilize editing software. After taking these lessons, I was proficient enough to enter my photographs in a competition. For Physical Fitness, I practiced playing tennis, specifically at improving my serve and ball placement. By attending clinics and practicing, I was able to play more consistently, proficiently, and competitively. I was even able to win two Grand Prix tournaments. I traveled with People to People on a Capitals of Europe tour, in which I was able to explore London, Paris, Milan, Florence, Tuscany, and Rome. Through this experience I learned about different European cultures and about the history behind monuments such as Notre Dam, the Colosseum, and the Roman Forum

Seth Berkowitz

Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society, People to People International

I helped to serve my community with my Boy Scout Troop by helping with service projects, such as collecting donations of canned food for a local food pantry and removing invasive plant species from parks. I also worked on service projects through my high school's service station. For my Personal Development, I improved my skill at playing the cello by playing in my school's string orchestra. I practiced at home and in school in order to prepare for orchestra concerts. I also played in the chamber orchestra and in the pit for the school's musical productions. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my speed and stamina by walking on my local park's walking trail. Over time, I increased the distance that I walked and decreased the time that it took me to travel around the park. I hiked across the White Mountains in New Hampshire over the course of about a week. The expedition included high winds, pouring rain, and difficult terrain that I needed to travel across. Earning the Congressional Award was challenging for me, but it was ultimately a fulfilling experience that improved my abilities.

Lindsay Fullerton

Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Affiliations: Key Club

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by running multiple fundraisers and charity events through the different clubs at my school. I specifically participated and volunteered with Key Club, Athlete's Helping Athlete's, and Mini-Thon. For Personal Development, I went to Gratz college once a week to continue with my personal journey into Judaism. I then at the end of this year, received my Reformed hebrew school teaching certificate. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to try to shorten my mile time by running three times a week, while also increasing my speed. I was eventually able to cut my mile time down by over a minute. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a 5-day trip to Maryland and started by visiting a large city and then traveling to a tiny town. I toured historical sites and learned more about the differences between urban and rural cultures. The journey to earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal helped me grow as a leader, and I would not trade this experience for the world!

Samantha Gable

Abington, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Affiliations: Key Club, National Honor Society

To complete my 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, I participated in a plethora of activities through clubs in school and outside of school programs. Most of my hours centered around my passion to help the local food insecure community. For the Personal Development section of the Congressional Award, I spent many hours learning and exploring Jewish culture and ethics through my synagogue leading up to my Confirmation. For my high school I am a two sport athlete: tennis in the fall and lacrosse in the spring. I spend many hours both during and outside of season staying in shape and practicing for these sports, which fulfilled the Physical Fitness requirement for the Congressional Award. For my Expedition, I helped to plan a trip to Israel for 17 students as a part of The Satell Teen Fellowship program. I planned community service activities and impactful speakers who taught us about the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. The Congressional Award taught me how to set goals for myself and work over a long period of time to meet these goals. I am thankful to be part of such an amazing program and proud to achieve my Gold Medal.

Jasna Janikic

Jenkintown, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Throughout my Congressional Award experience, I volunteered at Moss Rehab by working at the nurses station and assisting patients. I also volunteered at Forgotten Cats by feeding and socializing the cats, in addition to fostering them. My service was also completed with my participation in H2O for Life. To complete my Personal Development goals, I participated in Reading Olympics and attempted to read more during the school year. The club gave me the opportunity to read a large variety of books. I also taught myself how to knit and focused on learning new stitches. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I practiced yoga with the help of tutorials. I trained myself to master a myriad of poses. I would practice each morning prior to school. My Expedition was completed at a state park in Maryland. My family and I worked through the goal together, and completed each possible hiking trail at the park.

Erin Markham

Glenside, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

To earn my Gold Medal I volunteered with local theater companies within my community such as the Willow Manor Players and Jenkintown Music Theater. In addition I also volunteered at my school, helping with various events. I was involved with my school's fall plays and spring musical's throughout my high school career. I also was not only volunteering for community theaters, but was also able to be in their productions onstage as well. I set goals each month and did yoga. This helped with a past back injury and helped me become a more centered person. For a week I volunteered for the National Parks Service at Thomas Edison National Historical Park (and did not count this in my Voluntary Public Service hours). I also explored Patterson National Park and Morristown National Park, both of which were nearby, putting myself in completely history. The Congressional Award has made me a more focused and driven person, I can set goals and know I can accomplish anything I set out to do.

Emily Matthews

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Stephanie Schwarz

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society, People to People International

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I worked with families who were staying at the Ronald McDonald House. Their children were undergoing treatments at local hospitals and were staying at the House. I planned fun activities for the kids, helped families at the front desk, and kept the common areas of the House clean. I spent my time developing myself through working and learning with my school's SeaPerch team for my Personal Development goals. I soldered circuit boards, built motors, and wired controllers for a Remotely Automated Vehicle that we competed with at the Philadelphia High School SeaPerch competition. To complete my physical fitness goals, I trained, conditioned, and competed with the Hatboro Twisters Gymnastics team. I also practiced with my school's cross country team and tennis team and competed for my school in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia leagues. For my Exploration/Expedition goals, I traveled with People to People in the European Discovery program and was able to participate in a home stay while in Germany. Communicating and staying with a German family was a fun and challenging experience that helped me to immerse myself in the culture. The Congressional Award helped me to broaden my horizons and challenge myself through the achievement of my goals.

Anthony Radcliffe
Glenside, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Mary Rodgers
Affiliations: Key Club, YMCA

At my high school, I looked over the service station each month which had upcoming events in my community. Also, I reached out to local organizations to see if there was any volunteer work they had available. To complete my Personal Development, I committed to a certain amount of time each day to work on my personal goals. I devoted 15 minutes each day to reading and worked a part time job to save money. For Physical Fitness, I worked on my basketball skills for one to two hours each day after school. I set personal goals such as shooting and passing that I worked at to improve over time. For my Exploration, I planned a camping trip in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania for me and my family in September 2016. The trip gave a lot of room for interaction with nature and was also a good family-bonding experience. My experience in working towards my Gold Medal has truly helped round me into a hard-working young adult, and I feel that with the help from my advisor, Mary Rodgers, along with my family and friends, I am set up to fulfill all of the goals that I have in life.

Kristen Sparhawk
Rydal, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Mary Rodgers
Affiliations: Key Club, National Honor Society

I founded a club at my school called Athletes Helping Athletes connecting special education students and general education students through sports. I also worked as a coach for Montgomery County Special Olympics. To complete my Personal Development goals, I worked as a babysitter for families in my area. I strengthened my babysitting skills by babysitting several times a month. I worked to cut down my mile time by training with my lacrosse coach for Physical Fitness. I went to workouts several days a week and ran on the weekends to cut my mile time under 8 minutes. For my Expedition/Exploration goal, I went to New England to explore my ancestry and the history of America. I ventured to New York and Massachusetts without technology.

Stephanie Waldstein

Rydal, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Affiliations: Key Club, National Honor Society

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals I volunteered with a buddy with special needs and mentored other volunteers. I spent hours reaching the needy and the disabled by packing food for the poor, teaching inner city kids dance, and certifying my dog as a service dog to visit my neighborhood nursing home. For my Personal Development, I wanted to learn more about computer science by teaching myself computer coding. Additionally, to learn more about the history of race relations in my community, I delved deeply into the issues between the African American and Jewish communities with Operation Understanding. For Physical Fitness, I competed on multiple competitive dance teams as well as trained to run a 10 mile race and to improve on my lacrosse team with weight training and cardio. Lastly for my Exploration, I planned a trip for my family in Amsterdam and Spain in which we explored the art of each city, the architecture, the food, the culture, and spent a lot of great family time together. It was a great way to see how other countries celebrate our same holidays, but differently.

Indra Alagar

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Joseph Petron

I volunteered in the children's section of a public library where I shelved books, helped the librarians with children's programs, assisted children on computers, and helped patrons locate and use library resources. I helped establish and staff a free homework help program at the library. My Personal Development activity goal was to improve my abilities as a violinist. Through regular practice and lessons, I learned more challenging repertoire and joined the first violin section of a regional youth orchestra where I enjoy performing in free community concerts. My Physical Fitness activity goal was to improve my ability as a swimmer. I consistently attended swim practices with my high school and club swim teams. I was a member of my varsity swim team for three years and significantly improved my freestyle times. For my Expedition, I planned and completed a five-day, four-night bicycle and camping trip on the Great Allegheny Passage trail, traveling over 160 miles on my bicycle from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to just past Cumberland, Maryland. I enjoyed experiencing the natural beauty of the varied landscapes I learned the power of perseverance and dedication throughout this entire experience, and I am extremely excited to receive my Congressional Award Gold Medal.

Jaya Alagar
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Joseph Petron

I volunteered in the children's room of a library, assisting librarians with Saturday morning literacy programs, shelving books, reading to children, and helping patrons find materials. I also helped co-found a free tutoring program through which I tutored children who needed homework help. My Personal Development goal was learning to play the viola. I attended lessons and regularly practiced. Once I had advanced to learning viola concertos, I auditioned for, and became a member of, the Pittsburgh Youth Concert Orchestra where I have enjoyed playing well-known orchestral works. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve as a swimmer. By practicing with my club team and my school's varsity swim team regularly for over three years, I became a strong freestyle and breaststroke swimmer. My times, starts, turns, and endurance all improved. My Expedition consisted of a four-night, five-day bicycle ride on 160 miles of the Great Allegheny Passage trail, each night being spent in a tent. Beginning in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I biked across the Eastern Divide and finished just past Cumberland, Maryland at the C & O Canal National Park. The Congressional Award Program pushed me to learn and experience new things, and it gave me an appreciation for the power of long-term goal-setting and perseverance.

Krishnan Alagar
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Joseph Petron

I volunteered as a tennis coach at a free weekly tennis clinic for inner-city youth. I taught beginning tennis players ages four through ten the fundamentals of tennis. I also volunteered as a tennis coach for one entire summer at a low-cost summer youth camp sponsored by my city parks department. My Personal Development goal was to learn to play the viola. I had to learn the alto clef and appropriate fingering positions and bowing for viola. I took viola lessons and practiced regularly. I became a member of a regional youth orchestra's viola section where I enjoy performing at concerts. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my swim times in freestyle and butterfly events. By practicing with my club team year-round and swimming on my school's varsity swim team for three years, I significantly improved my times and even qualified for the conference swimming championships. For my Expedition, I rode my bicycle from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Cumberland, Maryland on the Great Allegheny Passage trail. I slept in a tent for four nights, carried my gear on my bicycle and in my backpack, and pedaled over 160 miles through the Allegheny Mountains. Throughout all activities of this Congressional Award Program, I was challenged to be consistent, kind, positive, prepared, organized, patient, and dedicated.

Rajan Alagar

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Joseph Petron

I volunteered as a youth tennis coach through the Inner City Junior Tennis Program and through the Citiparks organization. I taught children tennis skills and the importance of sportsmanship. I also helped establish a free tutoring program at a library, and I served as one of the volunteer tutors. For Personal Development, I improved as a violinist and learned increasingly difficult concertos and orchestral works. I practiced regularly and became a member of the Pittsburgh Youth Concert Orchestra's first violin section. I enjoy performing in recitals and at free concerts in my community. For Physical Fitness, I swam with a club team and was a member of my school's varsity swim team for three years. Attending swim meets and practices year-round helped me improve my freestyle times and become an asset to my teams. For my Expedition, I rode my bicycle approximately 160 miles over five days on the Great Allegheny Passage trail. I slept in a tent for four nights, cooked meals on a camp stove, and especially enjoyed riding my bike across the Mason-Dixon Line and through several old railroad tunnels. I am grateful that the Congressional Award Program has left me with irreplaceable memories that are sure to last my lifetime.

Sarah Laible

Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Paula Maldonado

Affiliations: American Red Cross, HOBY

I started Kids Gone M.A.D. to create a network of students to "GO MAKE A DIFFERENCE" in their communities and beyond. I volunteered with the Red Cross, Operation Christmas Child, the Salvation Army, the Lehigh Valley Zoo, and Student Council to begin partnerships to get teens serving everywhere! To become a stronger writer, I wrote a book, a short story, and sports articles for my school newspaper. To pursue my interest in Japan, I took Japanese 1 and studied Post-war Japan through on-line EdX courses. To develop my musical talents, I participated in community cantatas. To meet the Physical Fitness goal I competed on Lehigh Valley's Varsity Cross Country and Varsity Track & Field teams. For XC, I ran in multiple 5k races, League, and District Meets; for track, I ran the 300 and 100 m hurdles, 400 m dash, and 3200 m at meets and invitationals. We just won (6 - 0) our League Championship! I immersed myself in the Japanese culture by hiking Mt. Fuji, networking with the Red Cross in Yokosuka, traveling to a historic ninja village, exploring Disney Sea, touring Tokyo Tower, dressing up in traditional Japanese kimonos, and attending local cultural festivals. The Congressional Award has encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone by trying new things and learning along the way, while helping me grow into who I am today!

Teja Polisetty

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Kishan Yerrabelli

I volunteered as a patient escort, information desk employee, and emergency medical technician (EMT) at the St. Clair Hospital, devoting 400 hours over a span of three years. I also lead a team of 45 students in organizing an annual hackathon known as MedHacks for two years and continuing. I worked on a design project which focused on creating an application for 3D local soft tissue flap design for facial reconstructive surgery. I researched to quantify the eyelid laxity and tension for an ectropion, and have submitted a paper for publication. For Physical Fitness I dedicated at least 1 hour per day to cardio, strength training, and drills with the hope of improving my physical fitness and basketball skills. I also played intramural basketball at Johns Hopkins and AAU Basketball Stars of America in high school. I planned a week-long round trip to Washington DC to explore its historical areas and museums as well as camp outdoors for the first time in my life. I have developed life-long habits to help my physical and mental health, gained a stronger understanding of my community, and became better at balancing work, family/friends, and personal enrichment.

Aidan Sowa

North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Advisor: Louis Alfonso

For my Voluntary Public Service goal, I ran chess clubs at my local library and middle school over the course of three years. I taught students how to play chess, with members achieving success playing in local chess tournaments and honoring my contributions with a plaque of recognition. For my Personal Development goal of becoming a United States Chess Federation Expert, I played in competitive chess tournaments around the world. I prepared for my games by studying my opponents' games and learned from their many different strategies. I studied Taekwondo and reached my goal of a third degree black belt Physical Fitness goal. During this time, I learned many different Taekwondo poomasas (forms) and self defense techniques, and put my knowledge into practice by competing at yearly tournaments. To achieve my Exploration goal, I traveled to China and visited a number of historical sites in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Xian, including the Great Wall and the Terracotta Warriors. I studied Mandarin for several years, a skill that came in handy throughout this trip. I had a great experience obtaining the Gold Medal Congressional Award, and I learned that I was capable of reaching my goals if I focused on them.

Ryan Sowa

North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Advisor: Diane Hogan

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goal, I ran chess clubs at my local library and elementary school and taught kids not only how to play chess, but how to better master the game. I was honored to receive a plaque of appreciation from library patrons for my efforts. My Personal Development goal was to become a United States Chess Federation National Master. To accomplish this goal, I competed in tournaments at least once a month, took chess lessons from a chess Grandmaster, and studied chess frequently. I chose Taekwondo as my Physical Fitness activity, and my goal was to become a third degree black belt. I dedicated myself to attending classes three times a week, competing in Taekwondo competitions, and helping teach classes to younger students. I planned a visit to five islands (Conanicut, Aquidneck, Goat, Prudence, and Block) in my home state of Rhode Island to reach my Expedition/Exploration goal. My exploration included scheduling ferry trips, riding my bike, camping, and visiting historic sites including lighthouses, mansions, and fort. Through the process of earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned the value of challenging myself, contributing to my community, and most of all, not giving up.

Margaret Bowyer

Rock Hill, South Carolina

Advisor: Ashley Lesslie

I completed over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service working with my community to help with children with disabilities. For Personal Development I started learning sign language and I put my love for electronics to the test by filming basketball games for my school and manning the auto board at my church. For the Physical Fitness component, I built strength in my knee for surgery. After the surgery, I was able to strengthen it, even more, to run a mile under 13 minutes. For my Expedition I put my knowledge of animals to the test by living on a dairy farm for five days and learning how much work owning a farm is. I had amazing experiences while earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and I am very thankful for all the opportunities that it has given me.

Mary Grace Shannon
Lake Wylie, South Carolina
Advisor: Laura Summer

I volunteered as a State Certified First Responder at River Hills/Lake Wylie EMS and served over 1400 hours on the ambulance providing emergency care to the members of my local community. For Personal Development I participated in summer leadership camps and workshops to increase my leadership skills to better serve my school community. I trained in Pilates and Cross Country running to improve my overall Physical Fitness and qualify for my high school cross country team, meeting the Physical Fitness requirements. The city of New Orleans was my Expedition destination. I planned a family trip to the city to experience its culture, history, and cuisine. I enjoyed the learning about a city and culture so different than my home town. The process of achieving the Congressional Gold Award allowed pushed me to set goals, work to achieve them, and develop into my best self.

Jeremy Ward
Chester, South Carolina
Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I have worked for five years as a docent at Historic Brattonsville, participated on service trips to the Navajo reservation for nine years, planned and led numerous community service projects, and served as a leader in my Boy Scout and, later, Trail Life USA troop, among other endeavors. Since I first began taking lessons just five years ago, I have learned how to play the cello proficiently. Currently, I take lessons at nearby Winthrop University, and play at church, choir concerts, community functions, and other events regularly. For physical fitness, my goal was to lower my 5k time to under 20 minutes. At the end of 2016, I was serving as captain of my cross-country team, the York County Trailblazers, and consistently running 5ks around 19.10 in meets. Our team placed 2nd in the South Carolina State Meet for independent schools. To advance my knowledge of American history, I planned and embarked on a week-long trip to the Historic Triangle in Virginia. This trip included in-depth research and exploration of Yorktown, Jamestown, and Williamsburg, among other historical sites and museums. Earning the Congressional Award has encouraged me to continue pushing myself towards personal excellence and leadership - it was a tremendous opportunity, and I am grateful for its existence.

Evan Ladd

Bristol, Tennessee

Advisor: Leslie Skeens

I completed 400+ volunteer hours at the James H. Quillen V.A. Hospital and at the J. Hansel Peoples Wildlife Preserve. I worked in the Human Resources Department and Voluntary Service Office of the V.A. At the Preserve, I performed physical tasks ranging from general maintenance to planting trees. I took art lessons during the week and practiced at home on the weekends. I also learned to play the guitar by taking lessons every week and practicing at home. I joined my high school's cross country and track teams. I greatly improved my long distance running endurance and exceeded my goal of reducing my 5K time. I took a seven-day cultural and environmental science exploration to Key West, Florida. I learned the history and culture of the island and by boat, kayak, and SCUBA diving, I experienced the maritime environment and wildlife. Earning the Congressional Gold Award has demonstrated to me that dedication, perseverance and hard work leads to great things and that seizing opportunity opens the door to many wonderful experiences.

Carmen Ross

Hixson, Tennessee

Advisor: Tonya Craft

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I completed over 400 hours of community service by coaching basketball for first and third graders and tutoring at my school. I served as a positive role model for young girls and helped people succeed in their academic pursuits. For Personal Development, I learned how to play the guitar. I took lessons for a short period of time and have continued to practice on my own, and I have performed in multiple showcases. For Physical Fitness, I trained to clear 9'6" in the pole vault. I did hard work outs and trained year-round until I achieved this goal. For my Expedition, I planned a week-long educational trip to St. Simon's and Jekyll Island. We paddle boarded, hiked and rode bikes around the historic area of Jekyll Island, learned about sea turtles at the sea turtle emergency hospital, and cleaned up trash off of the beach.

Grant Gammon

Cookeville, Tennessee

Advisor: Sherri Howard

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Boys State, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I worked over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service with local and national organizations to benefit my community. To do this I joined organizations, such as PBS, and I asked to serve at different events in my community, such as our County Fair. To enhance my Personal Development I did several plays in my community. I participated in community through Cookeville Children's Theater, Drama Club productions and School plays. I also did school plays to grow remembrance, expose me culturally and to grow friendships as well. For my Physical Fitness I worked out three times a week with a trainer. Both with my Boy Scout Troop and on my own, I did hikes in several state parks, National parks, on the Railroad Tracks through my town and the Appalachian Trail. For my Expedition I went to Philmont Scout ranch. I did months of preparation with my Adventure crew, planning what activities we would do, supplies we would bring and gear needed. While there, I shot black powder rifles, went on a mine tour and watched the most beautiful sunset I have ever seen. Overall I must say that I had a blast earning my Congressional Award and I would do it all again whether I got an award or not.

Chelsea Parrott

Beckville, Texas

Advisor: Linda Hight

Affiliations: 4-H

My Voluntary Public Service revolved around children in summer camps and the Relay for Life. Serving the youth around me and raising money for cancer were both challenging and very rewarding. In the area of Personal Development, my overall goal was to learn more about veterinary medicine and gain both animal and veterinarian contact hours. During this pursuit, I earned my veterinary assistant certification. To reach my goal in Physical Fitness, I used different work-out plans that involved cardio, weight training, and core strengthening. I logged in over 1100 hours in the physical fitness area of the Congressional Award. My favorite Expedition was a trip I planned to the Caprock Canyons in Texas. There were a lot of logistics involved for 10 people, seven horses, and a week's worth of activities.

Briana Gonzalez

Spring, Texas

Advisor: Kelly Doan

Affiliations: HOBY

For my Voluntary Public Service I worked 400 hours to buy, iron, and sew baby blankets for Project Linus. The blankets are given to sick and premature babies in the hospital. For my Personal Development goal I learned to play the guitar. I continue to take weekly hour lessons and practice three days a week. I have learned and played ten songs for my instructor and family. For my Physical Fitness goal I ran three miles in twenty-five minutes, which is just over an 8-minute mile down from a ten-minute mile. I trained at the track three to four days a week to run faster to meet my goal. For my Exploration goal I planned my family's vacation from 7/1/15-7/10/15 to South Padre Island, TX. We went on day trips to surrounding cities to visit museums and many historical attractions. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience on this journey to achieve the Gold Medal Congressional Award and know that I can do anything with a desire and a plan.

Ruveyda Karaca

Richardson, Texas

Advisor: Firdevs Ozaslan

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public service at Raindrop Turkish House. I taught kids leadership skills, expertise in math, and increased vocabulary and reading speed in English. For Personal Development, I took guitar lessons in the conservatoire. I started learning from very basic chords and rhythms and later performed 5 concerts at city auditoriums. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to train myself as if I had a marathon to participate in. My running minutes have gradually increased and now I can enjoy and attend 10k races in my city. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a 7 day trip to the Balkans. We visited Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Kosovo. It was a magnificent experiment because I had the responsibility of staying on our own feet with my group.

Almaas Khan

Lucas, Texas

Advisor: Kbrom Yohannes

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. Through this time I got to work with young children and senior citizens and gained priceless knowledge about the needs of my community and what I can do to help it thrive. For Personal Development, I volunteered to help out at my local hospital every weekend. I now know the importance that even the smallest task can have on an individual and have obtained valuable organizational skills. For Physical Fitness, I designed a workout regimen that would help me live a healthy and successful life. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-night trip to Colorado. While there I got to experience different environments and cultures that I had never before encountered. My experience earning the Congressional Gold Medal was life changing. It taught me the value of hard work, goal-setting, and above all, determination.

Gopal Raman

Plano, Texas

Advisor: Kannan Srikanth

Over the course of many years, I volunteered as a mentor and teacher at Gooch Elementary School for more than 400 hours. As I grew with the Saturday School program, I coordinated and founded the Summer JumpStart Camp and the Spring Break Math Camp. Blending together my passions for poetry and photography, I wrote, designed, and published a book that delved into my work across different media. Now, I focus more on writing poetry and spreading my love for verse as a National Student Poet. A tennis player since my youth, I have started on my varsity team for four years and now lead as captain. For my Expedition, I hiked and spent ten days in the Pecos Wilderness in New Mexico. As the Pecos skies revealed stars I'd never seen before and as the beautiful trails opened up its natural treasures, I learned not only more about my world but also more about how it gives depth to my life.

Monica Marie Attaway
Palestine, Texas
Advisor: Judge Jeff Doran
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

All service is valuable, but the experience of working in a flood ravaged neighborhood where three children and their grandmother had drowned, and witnessing the spirit and determination of those left to go on, was truly inspirational. One goal focused on leadership skills. Through study and seeking leadership roles I grew in confidence and skill so that I was ultimately chosen as the youth Sea Scout leader of a four state area. Before I began this program I didn't know much about tennis. Over three years I learned the game, made my high school varsity team, was district champion, and made it to the second round of the regional tournament. I organized and led a nine day zoological expedition through the Rio Grande Gorge of New Mexico. The experience of studying the flora and fauna of the region while rafting down the gorge and camping on the upper Sonoran desert was exhilarating and confirmed my determination to become a zoologist. The Congressional Award Program challenged me to discover and grow, and has made me a better person.

Adam Hoffman
Houston, Texas
Advisor: Bruce Stein

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 550 hours of Voluntary Public Service fighting hunger through an organization that I founded, Food4them, which has collected enough food to feed almost 15,000 people. In addition, I visited senior citizens and helped special needs children. For my Personal Development, I was interested in civic engagement and learned about our government. I became impassioned: I started school political clubs, worked on numerous campaigns, and took on political leadership roles, from national to local. For my Physical Fitness portion, I trained to run two miles in under 20 minutes. Finally, for my Expedition I planned an eight day family trip to Yosemite National Park and surrounding areas to see Redwoods and Sequoia trees. Working on my Congressional Gold Medal Award taught me to more goal oriented. I was also able to find new passions in areas that I had perceived been unaware of. This has been a rewarding journey.

Byungjun Kim

College Station, Texas

Advisor: Jamie Bassett

Affiliations: National Honor Society, Youth Service America

I counseled at a special needs camp for several weeks over several years, led students at an enriched math camp at Texas A&M, performed classical and pop music at local hospitals, nursing homes, and churches, and served in my school's LEO Club and Student Council to improve my school and community. I tutored younger students in mathematics and English at my local Kumon Math and Reading Center, learning different styles of teaching and becoming a positive influence on these students. I set goals in my tennis practices to improve my first and second serves, and to improve the accuracy of my strokes. Throughout the years, I have improved my first serve accuracy and precision in strides and am now able to strike the ball anywhere on the court. I camped in Inks Lake State Park for five days, partaking in various activities from hiking to canoeing to exploring a cave. During this time, I stayed away from technology, limiting myself to necessities and challenging me to be resourceful. Receiving the Congressional Award Gold Medal has not only been an achievement, but also a developmental journey which has allowed me to grow throughout high school and constantly has challenged me to strive for more and settle with nothing less than the best; for that, I am grateful.

Animate Mazurek

San Marcos, Texas

Advisor: Susan Viau

For my Voluntary Public Service goal I enhanced my community over the course of 4 different goals, including volunteering at our library, at the Bandera Sister City Partnership Association cultural outreach, cleaning the local river banks, and bringing youth suicide prevention to the community. For my Personal Development goal I actively learned about authorship and literature distribution by working at a community bookstore in order to further my dream of someday working in publishing. For my Physical Fitness goal I trained in the classroom and underwater to become a PADI certified Open Water diver. I proudly achieved this goal due to hours of assistance from the Scuba Shack San Antonio coaches and by tackling a longtime fear of underwater sports. To achieve my Expedition goal I planned and executed an excursion to Cozumel, Mexico, where I was able to demonstrate my grasp of the Spanish language, to experience some of the culture and history of Mexico, and to participate in my first international scuba diving exercises. While the volunteering benefits I was able to provide to my community and the effects of personal achievement I experienced were invaluable, my overall takeaway from achieving the Congressional Award is the incredible confidence I gained to face adversity

Miki Athene Somosot

San Antonio, Texas

Advisor: Kelly Jorgensen

At a labor office in Doha, I assisted migrant workers, manned Hotline and supervised the Shelter for runaway migrant workers. I digitalized articles at a library in NJ, worked at a mini-mart of an animal shelter and a hospice in San Antonio, built/repared houses and fed the homeless in Philadelphia. I did research in computational chemistry. I improved my piano skills by playing in B flat major, E flat and eighth-notes. I attended a leadership/economics camp in economic analysis and public policy design. At a microfinance in Mumbai, I was exposed to lending strategies for lower-income sectors. For Physical Fitness, I did up- and down-hill running, and interval run training and body-weight strength circuits to prepare for a track conference. In Japan, I participated in community activities and post-tsunami rehabilitation efforts. In Qatar, I rode camels and paraglided over the Persian Gulf, and visited Islamic museums. In India, I stayed with an Indian family, navigated the Spice Market in a rickshaw, and visited mosques and temples. Through The Congressional Award, community service and cultural explorations have become a natural way of life, and given me the chance to engage in self-reflection on the things that matter most.

Srikar Anantha

Pearland, Texas

Advisor: Harish Krishnarao

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

In order to complete over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at the Children Museum and the Veteran's Affairs Hospital, interacting with both the oldest and youngest members of our society and helping make their lives easier and better. For my Personal Development, I decided to focus on improving my tennis game, and to do this I took private lessons and became a member of my school's varsity team. I became a starter on the team and have continued to compete in tournaments since. My Physical Fitness consisted of me training for the MS150, a bike ride from Houston to Austin that raises money for people with multiple sclerosis. I fund raised over two thousand dollars in the five years I rode, and I eventually became one of the fastest riders on my team. Lastly, my Expedition was at a Boy Scouts High Adventure Camp, Philmont. I backpacked over a hundred miles over the New Mexico terrain and camped out in the wilderness, picking up valuable lessons along the way. I helped lead the expedition and became a better leader and teammate. At the end of it all, I can honestly say the Congressional Award changed my life forever, as it allowed me to strengthen my leadership, develop a better work ethic, and also motivated me to give back to my community.

Tejna Dasari

Manvel, Texas

Advisor: Lata Krishnarao

Affiliations: National Honor Society

In order to achieve my goal in Voluntary Public Service, I engaged in the community by volunteering at my local library and Health Museum. Additionally, I took part in organizing and volunteering at Gulf Coast Blood Center's Be the Match Bone Marrow Transplant drives. In order to achieve my goal in Personal Development, I took part in Policy Debate at my school's debate team, while furthering my skills by taking part in summer debate camps. In order to achieve my goal in Physical Fitness, I trained in Karate, and took part in the MS-150 bike ride to raise awareness and funding about Multiple Sclerosis. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Toronto, upstate New York and the Niagara Falls. By participating in the Congressional Award, I was granted to opportunity to expand my horizons and explore new activities that were out of my comfort zone, while letting me enhance my skills in activities that I enjoy.

Ashish Dave

Pearland, Texas

Advisor: Harish Rao

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society, YMCA

I served my community almost exclusively through my local YMCA. There, I founded the Leaders Club to educate local youth about college/career preparedness, and was responsible for leading expansion of YMCA Youth and Government to my high school. I also coached youth soccer for kids ages 6 and under. I have grown personally by learning and practicing the Eastern Classical (Indian Carnatic) Violin, with the goal of preparing myself for a solo performance in the future. Through diligent training and many performances at venues across Houston, I gained valuable experience that will aid me later on. To achieve my Physical Fitness goal of improving the consistency of my tennis shots, I drilled different strokes systematically, made notes of how my consistency was improving, and reacted accordingly. This process was instrumental in improving my game and helping me earn my spot on the varsity tennis team. I immersed myself in a new culture by exploring rich, diverse New Orleans and surrounding Louisiana. Historical landmarks like St. Louis Cathedral, the Cabildo, Evergreen Plantation, and more taught me more about New Orleans than I ever knew; it one of the most insightful experiences of my life! The Congressional Award taught me that achieving change in one's lifestyle requires a thorough assessment of one's abilities, and then a commitment to a sustainable plan of action towards improvement.

Shrey Derasari

Pearland, Texas

Advisor: Harish Krishnarao

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

I had focused on the betterment health and education in my community and the world through my volunteering. By volunteering in my local nursing home and hospital, I had learned how health professionals work and helped patients in the process. I had also tutored children in India in math & English. In order to fulfill my Personal Development goals, I had learned the tabla, which is an Indian percussion instrument. Along with learning the tabla, I also learned debate by attending and succeeding in debate competitions through my school club which helped me develop my presentation skills. In order to fulfill my Physical Fitness goals, I had joined my school tennis team and attending district competitions which allowed for me to achieve a healthier lifestyle. I had also participated and practiced for the MS 150, a 150 mile bike ride that raises funds to cure MS, for 3 years. In order to achieve my Expedition goal, I went to Philmont, a boy-scout camping expedition. Through this 70 mile backpacking journey in a challenging landscape, I learned many survival skills and came to appreciate nature much more. Through this journey, I discovered a new beautiful environment, Throughout the Congressional Award experience, I discovered and developed myself by increasing my involvement and impact on my community and the world.

Siri Jois

Pearland, Texas

Advisor: Lata Krishnarao

To earn my Congressional Award, I volunteered at the Children's Museum of Houston, Ben Taub General Hospital, and a three week health expedition through Himalayan Health Exchange. To complete the Personal Development portion, I practiced piano 4 hours per week, excluding my weekly 30 minute lesson. My ultimate goal was to reach the TMEA All-State Festival, which I was able to accomplish. For the Physical Fitness aspect, I trained daily for the BP MS150, a 150 mile bike ride from Houston, TX to Austin, TX. Every week, I increased my mileage by 10 miles to build stamina and endurance. For my Exploration, I planned a 5 day, 4 night trip to Vienna and Salzburg, Austria. During the trip, I was taught to think on my feet and embrace different cultures and traditions. The Congressional Award Gold Medal was an amazing experience and taught me many life skills such as following up, consistency, and determination.

Emily Jue

Friendswood, Texas

Advisor: AnneMarie Macoit

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Key Club, People to People International

I volunteered at many of our local communities, including Habitat for Humanity, Bay Area Turning Point, The Resources and Crisis Center, local Special Olympics, local swimming communities, etc. I shared my skills and knowledge by teaching music theories and musical instruments, teaching math as a math instructor at Mathnasium, coaching swimmers by working as a swim coach, and more. I participated with three different swimming organizations to keep me physically fit and engaged. I have been a varsity swimmer in all four years of my high school and a year-round club swimmer as well as summer league swimming for the past 13 years. I did my Exploration trip to Europe. I thoroughly enjoyed the Congressional Gold Medal experience and it has been a great journey!

Eric Li

Manvel, Texas

Advisor: Sarah Sim

Affiliations: Youth Service America

I helped disaster victims and initiated an electronics recycling/computer refurbishing project. With the help of others, I learned how to refurbish computers and thus, helped less fortunate people around the world get access to technology. I took Art of Problem Solving online math classes, attended summer Awesome Math camp, and practiced Math and Physics out of school. By doing so, I built a strong foundation and was able to take Physics AP and PreCal in freshman year in high school. I trained for basketball through AAU basketball team training and frequent personal practice either at home or at gym. I was able to improve my skills tremendously and played in my high school team at 9th grade. I planned a road trip around Texas, because I realized that I haven't seen much outside of Houston. I visited many popular locations such as Natural Bridge Caverns and Guadalupe Mountains. Overall, the trip was a fun way to spend part of winter break and a success. All in all, earning the Congressional Award was an incredible experience and I realized that if you don't succeed the first time, no matter what, even if everything falls apart, you should try again and not give up.

Rahul Popat
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Kotesb Rao
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered at the Houston Museum of Natural Science as a helper in their summer camps and exhibits. On the weekends, I volunteered at MD Anderson Cancer Center serving coffee, tea, and popcorn to the patients. For my Personal Development, I learned how to play the Tabla, an Indian drum, and the bagpipes. After practicing extensively, my experience culminated in two major performances, one for each instrument. Through both of these instruments I learned a lot more about Indian and Scottish culture. For my Physical Fitness, I did training rides for the BP MS 150 bike marathon from Houston to Austin every weekend. I also did training hikes for my trek at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. I planned a two week trek at Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimmaron, New Mexico with my Boy Scout Troop. Before the trip, I had to choose the route we were going to take and the different supplies we needed to bring. While on the trek, I helped to navigate between the campsites. The Congressional Award was a great way for me to learn about myself and experience different types of enriching activities.

Charles Wang
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Shixia Huang

I taught the incoming generation about how computer parts work and helped underfunded orphanages obtain computers. I've spent a lot of time caring for disabled children and helping them have a good time. I led flood relief programs in Houston, distributing care packages to families in distress. I joined the Houston Youth Symphony and my school band to develop my musicianship for violin and clarinet. I rehearsed and practice for performances at Rice's Stude Hall and other public and personal competitions. I also performed for my local senior home multiple times. I attended a basketball camp and took tennis lessons to be physically versatile. I am most involved in my school's ultimate frisbee club, which meets weekly to play. I visited the museums and streets of Chicago, St. Louis, and Nashville, experiencing the unique atmosphere of each city. My activities ranged from eating deep dish pizzas and visiting Navy Pier to immersing myself in a city's cultural history and helping a homeless man carry his bike up some stairs. I've come to realize that The Congressional Award is not just a garnish for my resume, it's symbolic of what I can contribute to myself and to my community if I set a goal.

Lauren Yang
Sugar Land, Texas
Advisor: Junli Hu

I founded the Houston branch of Girl Up, a United Nations Foundation campaign, and planned over 15 events that raised over \$10,000 for UN programs that support adolescent girls. By advocating for gender equality and leading volunteer events, I was able to fight for a cause that I'm passionate about. With a goal to improve my understanding of music and to perform piano at Carnegie Hall in New York, I increased my practice time daily and worked to improve practice habits and my technique. I achieved my goal after performing a piano solo at Carnegie Hall in 2016 with two others scheduled for 2017. Dance has been a part of my life since I was 4. I strived to improve my ballet techniques through solo classes, practicing at home, and performances in order to be fundamentally strong enough to advance to pointe shoes. Eventually, I was able to reach that stage and began pointe shoes classes. For months, I researched and planned a family trip to the western region of Canada. We explored the beauty in Canada's raw wildness and nature by visiting glacial lakes whose blue color could not be matched, the Columbia Icefield, white water rafting, and hiking to various other locations. Through maintaining and finding a balance in my life with extra-curriculars and school, the journey to The Congressional Award has taught me the strength of perseverance and self-motivation.

Elizabeth Zhang
Sugar Land, Texas
Advisor: Leile Sun
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service work, I founded Spread the Music Association, which performs at libraries, nursing homes, and hospitals. I also organized a benefit concert with over 600 people and donated over \$7,000 to Girl Up, a United Nations Foundation. In the summer, I taught English in China. For Personal Development, I took weekly violin lessons, practiced, and performed. I was able to develop my music skills and also serve the community by sharing my music with others. Through my hard work, I made TMEA Allstate and have placed in Symphony Region and Area since freshman year. For my physical development, I decided to train and go to weekly lessons. I have been on my school's tennis team since sophomore year. Through the physical and mental training, I have learned to never give up and to always try my best. For my Exploration, I planned a road trip from Houston to the Smoky Mountains National Park that stopped by Memphis, Nashville, Atlanta, and Destin Beach Florida to explore the diverse culture, music, and nature. I was able to experience the different cultures and appreciate Earth's beauty. I am honored to earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal and beyond grateful for these eye-opening opportunities that have taught me to always have a positive outlook on life despite the hardships along the way and to always look for ways to improve myself

Darrel Dennis

Hurst, Texas

Advisor: Jalajakshan Bhanskaran

By performing over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service in healthcare by volunteering at different nursing homes, homeless shelters, and hospitals under service healthcare professionals, I was able to get insight on what challenges I would face as a physician one day. Being part of a North-Indian dance team for my Personal Development, it has shown me the importance of being involved in my culture and to appreciate different forms of dances. Taking part in extraneous advanced swimming lessons, not only did it prepare me for my scuba diving license but also taught me how to never give up. Taking an Expedition to New York, helped me realize that our world is very different and how culturally ignorant I was growing up in the suburbs of Hurst, in Texas. Overall, joining the congressional award program is something that I can be proud of. For it allowed to me to become a better citizen of the world's biggest democracy.

Jarrold Clark

Roanoke, Texas

Advisor: Amy Miller

While completing my Congressional Award, I did 400 Voluntary Public Service hours at my local food bank. Here I sorted canned goods, stocked the shelves, gathered goods for people in need, and talked with local people on how much of an impact the food bank has on their lives. For Personal Development, I took classes on how to become a lifeguard and how to teach water safety. I am now able to give CPR, administer oxygen, and do first aid on any events that may occur in the water. For my Physical Fitness goal I wanted to increase my serve percentage in tennis. I practiced serving weekly in order to increase this percentage. During my Exploration, I went to the five major metroplexes to compare and contrast the influences of history, culture, and business around Texas to see what influenced them. This experience truly taught me how to plan and come up with backups in case something comes up.

Shan Su
Dallas, Texas
Advisor: Brandy Yost

I have volunteered with schools, hospitals, and nursing homes, among others, as my skill set has changed over the years. I am most proud of Artists for Sandy, a project I initiated in which I compiled and sold CDs, raising \$390 for Hurricane Sandy victims by donating to the American Red Cross. I have studied viola for over 10 years, currently with Dr. Susan Dubois at the University of North Texas. Viola has taken me to Carnegie Hall three times, as well as across the US and abroad with the National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America. I walked to school for many years, an experience that taught me the value of daily fitness and allowed me to enjoy the scenery along the way. In high school, I joined the swim team and learned skills that would later translate to my experiences as a lifeguard and as a swim instructor. I planned a trip to Shanxi, China, where I taught English to a class of students and shadowed healthcare providers at the local hospital. I learned more about the student-teacher interaction and the provider-patient interaction while immersed in a culture very different from what I am used to. I appreciate that the Congressional Award encourages us to pursue a variety of different activities because it gave me the chance to simultaneously continue pursuing what I love and try some new activities along the way.

Joseph Nemec
Taylor, Texas
Advisor: Gwyn Vrabel
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

During the course of my working on the award, I spent most of my summers volunteering at camps that help to build a person's character, among other outstanding organizations. But what meant the most to me was being able to help my peers with their Eagle Scout projects. For Personal Development, I attended many speech and debate club meetings and went to several tournaments. I attended various leadership trainings including the National Youth Leadership Training put on by the Boy Scouts of America. I also served on the youth staff of a Catholic youth conference. A big part of my Physical Fitness was going to Philmont Scout Ranch where I hiked around in the mountains for a couple weeks. Also, I was able to try out 15 different sports or group games including ice hockey, partner dancing, canoeing, and sailing. I traveled out of the country for the first time of my life to Italy where I stayed in an Italian neighborhood with a young Air Force family. I explored several big cities in Italy, and while I was in Europe I also visited Switzerland and England. The congressional award taught me a lot, specifically how to plan, and I am very grateful for the award.

Hannah-Lee Brau

Provo, Utah

Advisor: Randy Eggleston

Affiliations: Girls State, United States Army

I volunteered at a convalescent home for many months. I also knitted many hats for a homeless shelter. For Personal Development, I learned how to play guitar. This took several years of practice and even lessons. I ran track and cross country in school for Physical Fitness. I also signed up at a gym and worked out daily. I planned several outings and trips. While on the trips I was in charge of everything. The Congressional Award helped me learn a significant amount about not only myself but how to be an outstanding citizen.

Payam Shwani

Sandy, Utah

Advisor: Hulya Kablan

To earn the Congressional Award, I completed more than 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, which included worked in a hospital. I also worked in a preschool setting to help minority children prepare for elementary school. This volunteer work was fun as I read books to the patients. To complete my Personal Development, I practiced many hours for the ACT. I also practiced for the MCAT to develop my skills so I can attend medical school. For my Physical Fitness I was able to become a better and healthier person by running. For my Exploration/ Expedition, I was able to learn many interesting things about the history of my grandparents and the place that they are from. I was able to explore and learn about their ways of life in the country of Iraq. I have learned many things during the Congressional Award process. I have become a better person because of this. I know now the impact that these acts can have on the community and the people in it. I am very glad I was able to do something like this and influence our community through the acts of volunteering and self improvement.

Sofia Tiratto
Draper, Utah
Advisor: Hulya Kablan

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goal, I volunteered at multiple organizations including animal shelters and children's benefits. I devoted myself to helping out my community and volunteered my time to altruistic organizations. To complete my Personal Development goal, I studied for the ACT in large groups as well as alone. By doing this I was able to greatly improve my score and develop my mathematical, writing, language, and science skills. To reach my Physical Fitness goal I recorded my many hours of practicing and playing soccer for my competition, as well as my high school women's soccer teams. To complete my Expedition/Exploration goal I planned a family event in New Mexico. In my plan I included food, transportation, expenses, time, and also entertainment. My overall experience working towards earning a Gold Medal has allowed me to acquire life skills as well as gaining experiences that will prove to be extremely valuable regardless of where my future may take me.

Madison Arriaza
Sandy, Utah
Advisor: Hulya Kablan

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at a few different locations but the most memorable ones were the Friend In Need Animal Sanctuary and the special olympics. When I helped these places I actually felt like I was changing the community. These volunteer jobs we life changing. To complete my Personal Development goals, I worked after school on the classes I was struggling with. I also did ACT prep on Saturdays for a few hours, doing practice test and working on specific subjects on the test I needed to excel in. I was on a competitive soccer team and a high school soccer team. We practiced every day of the week and had games Thursday and Saturdays. I was constantly working out with my team and practicing for games. I planned my family trip to Seattle by finding tickets, hotels, coupons, attractions, etc. We went to many different attractions in Seattle and each day was planned differently by me. My overall experience to earn The Congressional Award has been life changing and I've met so many people and have made unforgettable memories.

Saja Hassoun

*Salt Lake City, Utah
Advisor: Hulya Kablan*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at various organizations including my local food bank, local library, and one of the city's learning centers. I completed different tasks such as cleaning, shelving, and organizing books and DVDs. For Personal Development, I went to a class every Saturday and practiced ACT questions for two hours. I also studied on my own for an hour a day and raised my ACT score by 6 points. For Physical Fitness, I took Hapkido, or self defense classes twice a week for an hour to two hours as well as practicing at home. For my Expedition me and my family planned a week trip to California, where we went to a Turkish Festival hosted in Los Angeles, where we were able to try all kinds of delicious food and even learned a traditional folk dance. The experiences I had throughout earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal were life changing and I developed many different skills through the people I met and the activities I did.

McKenna O'Connor

*Eagle Mountain, Utah
Advisor: Thomas Wiltbank*

Affiliations: Girls State, HOBY, Key Club, National Honor Society

As part of my Volunteer Public Service, I served at my local library, organized fundraising efforts for the CURE Starts Now Foundation; for pediatric brain cancer research. I worked at an animal rescue, helped disabled adults and served the elderly. For my Personal Development, I gained knowledge in leadership by attending retreats, camps and training to better my skills as I served on various leadership teams. I also developed my voice and acting skills by performing in my high school play; Damn Yankees. The goals I achieved for my Physical Fitness was that I developed my overall motor skills, coordination and mental strength as it related to my golf game. I also increased my fitness by practicing and performing with my High School marching band spending over 1200 hours mastering my Color Guard skills. Finally for my Exploration, I traveled to London, Paris, Florence and Rome for 10 days to explore the different cultures, languages and history/architecture of each location. It was a trip of a lifetime. I am grateful for what I have learned by participating in the Congressional Award. It has made be a better person and taught me that with hard work, time and determination that one person can make a difference.

Mariah Pay

Saratoga Springs, Utah

Advisor: Tom Wiltbank

Affiliations: HOBY, National Honor Society

In my journey of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at my local library. During this experience I was able to help my community by helping kids learn to read, organizing and mending books, and even help to grow the library by participating in community book drives. For Personal Development, I practiced daily to develop my skills in the study of piano performance and technique. I prepared Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C Sharp Minor, and Beethoven's Sonata in C Minor to be performed. In addition to practicing piano daily, I also developed a habit of exercising forty-five minutes daily for my Physical Fitness goal of lowering my BMI by three points. From this goal I have become stronger and more able to be of service to others. For my Expedition/Exploration I traveled to Yellowstone National Park. There I studied and observed the earth and its formations. As I love the sciences, my journey interested me and took me out of my comfort zone by putting me into the wilderness while also encouraging me to think on my feet. This experience has been challenging and extremely fun as I have done so many diverse activities and also had so many opportunities to serve those around me.

Caroline Yi

Culpeper, Virginia

Advisor: Barbara DeJarnette

Affiliations: 4-H, National Honor Society

To fulfill my Voluntary Public Service, I worked at a food pantry and oversaw children at a 4-H summer overnight camp. I also served at a Nursing and Rehabilitation Center and the Interventional Radiology Department at two different hospitals. To complete the Personal Development requirement, I practiced the piano to master complex rhythms and techniques in Chopin's Ballade Op. 47 No. 3 and Chopin's Nocturne Op. 27 No. 2. I was able to heighten my use of dynamics and expression. For the Physical Fitness portion, I played on my school's tennis team and improved my serve and footwork skills. After drilling my strokes and increasing my endurance, I was able to play in the top three singles and doubles for my school. To complete my Expedition, I investigated the history of Shenandoah National Park. I learned about the history of the Park's inception, culture, and wildlife. While camping, I was able to take some incredible pictures, go on hikes, and receive informative presentations by the rangers. Working for the Congressional Award Gold Medal allowed me to push my boundaries and ultimately showed me the fruits of tenacity.

Jordan Hibbs
Alexandria, Virginia
Advisor: Kathleen Ryan

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I served over 400 hours assisting the non-profit Red Means Stop Traffic Safety Alliance, which aims to prevent motor vehicle crashes by educating drivers about safe driving. This included outreach at events, coordinating social media and providing victim support. For my Personal Development goal, I worked an administrative job while attending school full-time. I was responsible for answering phones, scheduling appointments, and training administrative staff. Through this work, I learned about the importance of time-management and customer service. For my Physical Fitness goal, I worked to improve my running skills. I started at a 14-minute mile and alternated between running and walking. Through consistent endurance and strength training, I reached my goal and can now run a 9-minute mile without needing to take a break or walk. For my Exploration, I visited Taiwanese historical sites, monuments, and museums while participating in an international fellowship. I learned the challenges of navigating a country with limited communication ability. This exploration allowed me to be fully immersed in the culture of Taiwan. The Congressional Service Award has provided me the chance to learn more about myself through the process of evaluating my strengths and weaknesses, setting goals, and determining steps to make my goals a reality. The Congressional Award has revealed my true potential to understand the needs of my community and the demonstrated the importance of public service.

Kimberly Laker
Arlington, Virginia
Advisor: Betsy Christian

I am passionate about serving others and helping improve their communities. I volunteered in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Louisiana, where I reconstructed a front porch, completed yard work for a terminally ill man, tore down dry wall in an attic, cleaned a moldy kitchen and prepared schools for the upcoming school year. I coached a volleyball team of 8th grade girls, strengthening their skills and deepening their knowledge of the sport. I taught them various positions and how to read the ball. I also babysat children ranging from 6 months to 8 years, engaging them with educational games and books they enjoyed. I played high school volleyball and ran sprints and hurdles for my track team. I worked on cardiovascular as well as strength training at a local gym. For my Exploration I planned a trip to Pigeon Forge, TN in which I took my family on exciting adventures. While we were there we went to a local artisan craft fair, hiking in Rainbow Falls and white water rafting on the Upper Pigeon River. This was a good challenge to my comfort zone. Through my experiences in earning my award I got to see a larger picture of our country and was humbled by the people I met and served.

Lisa Huang

Herndon, Virginia

Advisor: John Pi

Affiliations: 4-H

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at multiple organizations including at summer camps and parks. I took care of and played with the children at the camps and planted trees and cleaned up waste at the parks. For Personal Development, I took ACT courses four times a week in addition to studying on my own. I reached my goal of scoring above the 90th percentile. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided I would create a workout routine and bike 10 miles under an hour on a stationary bike. I began with biking five miles in thirty minutes and gradually increased my distance and speed until I could bike 10 miles in 40 minutes. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a two week long volunteer trip to Hualien, Taiwan and Miaoli, Taiwan. While volunteering at a group home and summer camp as an English teacher, I was able to develop patience and understanding for each child. Dedicating my time to earning The Congressional Award has taught me to persevere through whatever obstacles may come and this overall experience has helped shape me into the person that I am today.

Pavan Krishnan

Reston, Virginia

Advisor: Sylvia Trammell-Robertson

In the area of Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at University Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio. I learned and used motivational interviewing techniques to help patients overcome their addiction to smoking. I also volunteered at the activities center of the pediatric institute. In the area of Personal Development, I conducted research at the Department of Pathology of Case Western School of Medicine. I used numerous biochemical protocols in order to further elucidate the etiology of Parkinson's disease, finally presenting my findings at the annual Case Western symposium. My fitness goal was to increase the amount of weight I lift for three main movements: bench press, chin-ups, and overhead press. By practicing the movements three days a week, I was able to ultimately increase the weight by 15 pounds for each exercise. In 2015, I planned a sight-seeing trip to various cities within Spain. This involved almost two weeks of researching to choose which cities and activities to do. With the goal of immersing myself in the culture of each city, I made sure to visit historical sites, major museums, and population hubs. Over the course of earning The Congressional Award, I developed personal characteristics which will help me attain success in the future such as dedication, perseverance, and integrity.

Andrew Chin

Mill Creek, Washington

Advisor: Toyo Nakayama

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

I completed over 841 hours of Voluntary Public Service through numerous environmental, historical restoration, and community service projects as a Boy Scout. I also helped folks learn and take action about the marine environment and its challenges at the Seattle Aquarium and Schooner Adventuress. For Personal Development, I earned my Eagle Scout rank, and completed 42 merit badges. I also served in peer leadership positions in scouting and at school, and developed my public speaking and acting skills with my high school drama club. For Physical Fitness, I played football, and prepared for high adventure treks by running and strength training during high school. I continue my Physical Fitness journey by training for and competing in club ultimate frisbee. For my Expedition, I helped plan and completed 14-day, 88-mile high adventure hike at Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. The Congressional Award has given me the confidence to stick to my goals and to take initiative for them every day.

David Singleton

Monroe, Washington

Advisor: Scott Cavassa

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

To serve my community, I volunteered at events that gave people with mental and physical disabilities the chance to have a nice night out once a month. I also was active as an Assistant Scoutmaster in the Boy Scouts of America where I was privileged to encourage and mentor the boys of my old troop. As a youth I was active in the Boy Scouts of America. With the help of my adult and youth leaders I was able to accomplish my goal of attaining the rank of Eagle Scout. For many years I have been practicing Tae Kwon Do to better myself physically and mentally. My goal for the award was to reach the rank of second degree black belt, which I accomplished. For my Expedition/Exploration goal, I planned a seven-day road trip for my brother and myself that took us from Washington State to California and Arizona, and then back up through Utah and Idaho on the return trip. Earning this award pushed me to do and learn more than I otherwise would have, and I am thankful for everything I have gained because of it.

Benjamin Stewart

Redmond, Washington

Advisor: Paula Peterson

For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered for over 300 hours with the Redmond Hopelink Foodbank by sweeping, mopping, and organizing. I also volunteered with Auto Angles, repairing cars for lower income people. For my Personal Development, I got to learn life skills such as first aid, search and rescue, and camping in the wilderness. I currently have 3 certifications in first aid. I also have learned how to be active in the outdoors by participating with my Trail Life USA Troop. For my Physical Fitness, I worked at getting better at endurance biking. My longest bike ride was from Bothell to Seattle which was over 40 miles round trip. I have biked to work and feel comfortable biking to different destinations for work and for fun. For my Expedition/Exploration, my sister and I flew alone to Ecuador, South America. Here I was immersed in a different culture, foods, and language. I was able to fly into the jungle on a small Kodiak airplane and also assist earthquake refugees in coastal towns. The Congressional Award has helped develop my skills I will need to serve in my community and reach goals I have set for myself in the future.

John McManis

Mukilteo, Washington

Advisor: Mabel Chin

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I worked with my local elementary school to plan, design and build an outdoor classroom to allow students to study conservation in a natural environment. This effort spanned over four years and included my Scout troop, students, teachers and parents volunteering over 5000 hours of service. As a Boy Scout, I camped more than 125 nights including a 12 day backpacking trip at Philmont Scout Reservation and a 7 day sailing adventure in the Virgin Islands. Though I achieved the rank of Eagle and the Hornaday Silver Medal, the leadership and self-reliance skills I learned are invaluable. I rowed competitively with a local rowing club for the last four years. The rigors of training were difficult but rewarding involving cardio, weight training and many hours on the water perfecting technique and teamwork. My boat competed nationally last year finishing 10th overall in the nation. My Expedition was a 12 day backpacking adventure at Philmont Scout Reservation in the San de Cristo mountains of New Mexico. My crew of 10 Scouts and 2 adults covered nearly 100 miles summiting Mt. Baldy at 12,441 feet in the process. These experiences will shape my life forever, making me a better, more conscientious person.

Rachel Demaree
Seattle, Washington
Advisor: Rebecca Hoskyn
Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC

To earn my hours for Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at a camp that taught math skills to young girls! It was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. For Personal Development, I participated in the YMCA Youth Legislature to develop my skills as a public speaker. Through the program, I found my passion for advocacy and diplomacy. I intend to pursue diplomacy in my future career. For Physical Fitness, I bouldered and hiked! That, and I started a quidditch team at my school, where we played quidditch and did cross fit. My favorite part of earning the Congressional Award was the Expedition/Exploration portion, where I was able to plan a trip to Europe. We went to England, Austria, and Germany. My experience in earning the Congressional Award taught me leadership, interpersonal, and communication skills.

Isabella Maehl
Seattle, Washington
Advisor: Carol Box

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked with organizations that benefitted children with special needs, cancer research, and people within my local community so as to help those in need through direct interaction and personal involvement. For my Personal Development, I stepped out of my comfort zone, musically and artistically, and also improved skills that will be useful for my future such as cooking and first aid. For Physical Fitness I was challenged to try out several new sports which I thoroughly enjoyed. I learned to ski in the Swiss Alps, developed a love for netball, and benefitted from living near a lake to learn windsurfing. In order to complete my longer Expeditions, I again challenged my limits by completing my two longest expeditions in the Scottish highlands, pushing myself both physically and mentally, and learning and developing a great number of skills during the process. I feel that overall, the Congressional Award has pushed me to step out of my comfort zone and push myself to explore and succeed in ways I would never have experienced without the challenges enforced.

Katherine Chen

Bellevue, Washington

Advisor: Susan Hainze

I acted as a youth volunteer coordinator in outreach events for the cord blood program at the non-profit organization Bloodworks Northwest. In addition, I volunteered twice a month at their local blood donation center to monitor the health of donors and register them for subsequent donations. I attended a summer camp on photo-editing and website-creating software to learn how to create online content. In my free time at home, I learned how to create project management files using Excel. If I came across something that I didn't know how to use, I would seek help from online forums. I took an increased number of dance classes at my dance academy in order to develop my skills to the extent of their potential, and maintain the state of my abilities to keep them within the competitive level for my age group. This allowed me to reach a high enough level to perform solo dances. I planned and executed a 5-day trip with the purpose of exploring the Los Angeles metropolitan area. This trip allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the communities in Los Angeles, as well as a closer look at the movie-making history and culture of Hollywood.

Nathan Chen

Bellevue, Washington

Advisor: Manchung Ho

I volunteered with Bloodworks Northwest, a local non-profit blood research organization, to increase awareness of its cord blood program in communities and to promote community support of blood/tissue donation. I improved my music knowledge and skills by taking violin lessons, practicing regularly. For Physical Fitness, I practiced ballroom dancing and competed on National Dancesport Championships. I was also a member of a local swim team. For my Gold Medal Exploration, I researched, planned and organized a trip to Tokyo, Japan. During the trip, I explored the many different aspects of the local culture and connected with the local people.

Nicholas Grosinger
Bellevue, Washington
Advisor: Dawn Guymer
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I worked with my troop and other friends to complete service projects and Eagle Scout projects. Also a portion of my hours were from volunteering at a local cub scout summer camp teaching archery to cub scouts. I made a goal of becoming the driver of my high school's FIRST Robotics team. I spent the last four years practicing and learning everything I could to become the driver. I have been the driver for the last three years and this year I took us to the world competition in Houston, Texas. I made a goal to increase my ability to march and play trombone in my high school's marching band. I was in the band for three years and we went to many competitions. In addition we performed in the Disneyland parade, and as the halftime show for the Seattle Seahawks. Some friends and myself went on a 14 day, 120 mile hike through the New Mexican wilderness at Philmont Scout Ranch. To prepare for this trek, we went on monthly practice hikes in Washington. During my experience I learned many life lessons that I will carry with me; Including helping other people, pushing myself to the limit, and working hard to create positive results in my life.

Alexandra Marsh
Bellevue, Washington
Advisor: Megan McGinnis
Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC, National Honor Society

I did the majority of my volunteering with a community riding club in which I helped teach kids how to interact with and ride horses. I also helped coach a gymnastics camp and run a local math event. For Personal Development, I learned Bach cello suites on the viola and studied Christian Science religious texts. Throughout high school I competed on my school's Varsity Gymnastics and Pole Vault teams, and did conditioning on the off-season. I took a 6-day canoe trip to a Canadian waterfall on Lake Superior. Before embarking, I packed the canoes, practiced cooking on portable stoves, and planned and packaged all my meals for a week. Keeping a positive attitude through rough weather allowed me to stay focused and reach the destination. The Congressional Award has given me so many opportunities that have impacted my future and helped me become a better person. I'm so grateful to have been able to participate in it.

Jessica Waller

Mercer Island, Washington

Advisor: Robert Thorpe

I devoted the majority of my Voluntary Public Service activities to working with abandoned and injured animals through the Seattle Humane Society, helping them find health and forever homes. As a composer and musician, my Personal Development focused on mastering the French horn and mellophone. I also wrote several music compositions, and one French horn/piano duet won first place in Washington State and second place in the nation in the PTA's Reflections Art competition. My most significant Physical Fitness activity was jogging, which kept me in shape for the Cross Country team. My Exploration activities allowed me to further my interest in different cultures. From the native Hawaiians to the people of Central and South America, I arranged several trips that allowed me to meet the people. The Congressional Award encouraged me to push myself and keep on track.

William Waller

Mercer Island, Washington

Advisor: Robert Thorpe

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

My Voluntary Public Service focused on my passions: the trombone, environment, and animal welfare. In earning the Award, I volunteered to teach trombone lessons to students in an underserved school, assisted with lake preservation and habitat restoration, and fostered injured dogs through the Humane Society. Most of my Personal Development activities surrounded mastering the trombone for jazz, wind ensemble and marching bands. My commitment led me to be selected for the prestigious All Northwest Honor Band, play complex solos at jazz nightclubs and perform for a Seahawks halftime show. My Physical Fitness activities include improving my endurance and strength. My most significant activity was jogging with dogs we fostered and my own dog. My Exploration activities allowed me to combine my love of history with my love of the outdoors. Among other things, I visited Pearl Harbor, the site of the Pig War and Central America. The Congressional Award motivated me to set goals related to charity, health and skill development. Working with my advisor, Mr. Thorpe, allowed me to gain insights from a well-respected business owner who loves the outdoors as much as I do.

Alonzo Webb

Ridgeley, West Virginia
Advisor: Katrina Westfall

I volunteered to clean up and assist at the Annual Free Hair Cut Event at Mr. Easley's Barber Shop and well as other Community Holiday events hosted by Mr. Easley. I dumped trash, handed out fliers, served drinks and spoke to young student about keeping a positive self image. For my Personal Development, I became knowledgeable in how a Congressional/Senate office is run. I answered phones, and followed the instructions of the Staff Assistant. I created and updated constituent case files which enabled me to expand my knowledge base on how an office in Congress is run. I independently ran laps at school for my Physical Fitness, starting at home with a mile of walking slowly and eventually graduated to being able to run up to 2 miles one way. I also lifted weights in my home to build out my muscles and increase my stamina. I went independently with a group of friends to Deep Creek Lake for my Expedition. I explored the surrounding areas via biking and hiking. I learned how to fish, control a small boat and identify edible plants and how to start a fire without a match. My experience has been life changing, because I was once hesitant about completing activities and now I have confidence in myself.

Bailey Anderson

Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen
Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered by playing the piano for senior citizen's, where people could come and go as they wished to enjoy the music. I also volunteered to foster dogs from the local animal shelter in order to help with population overflow. I made a goal to master four books in a piano series as my Personal Development goal. I practiced and attended lessons to improve my skill set. My ultimate goal is to become a choir teacher meaning I would love to become a successful piano player. For Physical Fitness, I learned four swimming strokes including freestyle, butterfly, back stroke and breast stroke. I also worked on improving my deadlift max from 135 to 150lbs. I lifted twice a week and continued to increase weight on each side of the bar until I met my goal. I planned an Expedition near Tensleep, Wyoming to complete my Congressional Award. This was my first time staying in a tent and making all my food over the fire or portable stove. This trip gave me a new love for the outdoors and adventuring. My favorite memories come from the wonderful, fun-filled camping trip and learning to play the tuba and sousaphone through the Kelly Walsh Trojan Marching Band. The camping has opened up a whole new hobby and love for me as has the band. The band is one big family and something that will always be a part of me.

Grace Belize Anderson

Devils Tower, Wyoming

Advisor: Dianne Kirkbride

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered with blessings in a Backpack – a group that distributes food to students from low income households so they have food for the weekend. I began helping with the program and I am now the manager of the program. I buy the food, order online from the food bank, write weekly menus, and recruit volunteers to fill the backpacks weekly. Another big project is Operation Christmas Child Shoe Boxes. This past year we collected 149 shoe boxes from my community and over the past three years we've collected nearly 1,000 shoeboxes in all. Over the course of earning my Gold Congressional Medal I learned how to play the flute and became second chair flute in the high school band. I've also developed my leadership skills and I'm proud to say I was selected to be on the Wyoming 4-H State leadership team and elected Wyoming FCCLA Vice President. One of the greatest accomplishments I will take away from Physical Fitness is trying to new sports that I had never participated in before, cross country and golf.

For my Expedition I planned a five day, four night backpacking trip to the Bighorns for my family. One of the biggest takeaways I had from our trip was the realization that you don't always have to achieve your original goals to accomplish something new and make memories. I will always remember the friends I made visiting residents in the long term care facility and assisted-living.

Lexi Bedard

Rock Springs, Wyoming

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered to help with a variety of community and charity events in completing my Volunteer Public Service hours, including The National High School Rodeo, the local Soup Kitchen, an Elementary School Carnival, and the Rock Springs High School Blood Drive. I have also been very involved with the Cowboy's Against Cancer program/event and Make a Wish Campaign. My Personal Development goal was to improve my leadership skills by participating in Student Council. I have been involved with Student Council in elementary school, junior high school, and high school. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my dance skills, specifically my fouetté turns, triple turns, and my flexibility by getting one side splits. I planned a five-day, four- night camping trip to South Buckboard, Flaming Gorge Recreation Area, in pursuit of my Gold Medal Level Expedition. I learned how to set up a campsite upon arrival, as well as how to clean up the campsite in order to preserve the environment when the camping trip ends. My favorite memories in completing the Congressional Award would be in completing the Volunteer Public Service hours, as well as in completing my Personal Development goals.

Maxwell Bockmann

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

To earn the Silver and Gold medals, I volunteered as a tutor at my schools after school program, Thunderbird Academy. I helped students in math and science. I also tutored at Baggs Elementary School, helping first grade teachers organize lessons for their students and tutoring students in need. At the local library, I helped sort books, prepare materials and prepared for any planned activities. In the area of Personal Development, I spent time playing the piano. I also worked on developing my cooking skills which I had begun at the time of beginning my journey with Congressional Award. I made dessert related items including Cream Puffs. I spent time at the school gym and a local gym in Cheyenne to meet my Physical Fitness goal. I spent countless hours with friends as well on the app Sensation Pokémon Go, sometimes walking for miles on end without realizing how much time had passed. For my Expedition, I went to Jackson Hole and Yellowstone with my mom, planning activities to keep us occupied throughout the trip. By far, the Wyoming Congressional Award Youth Retreat was my favorite part of the Congressional Award experience. From tearing down an old barn to painting a mural downtown, it was a great adventure I got to share with my peers.

Sara Brennecke

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

For my volunteer hours, I volunteered at a preschool where I helped with the program. I also volunteer through the Dandies, which is the good will ambassadors for Cheyenne Frontier Days. I rode in the parades and rodeos associated with the event. I worked to improve my public speaking skills for my personal development. I was on the Parliamentary Procedure team, Agriculture Issues team and helped with the state booth at state and national convention. I also joined the Livestock Show team at Laramie County Community College where I continue to practice my public speaking skills and overall livestock knowledge. I rode my horse for my physical fitness goal. I ride in the winter approximately once a week and then in the summer, I begin riding a lot more in order to prepare for Dandies. I went on my expedition to Texas on a trail ride that lasted 6 days. I was able to see new country and experience things we don't have in Wyoming. My favorite part of completing the Congressional Award is all of the people that I was able to meet. I worked in a variety of places in my community and was able to help a lot of different organizations.

Molly Burns

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

To complete my volunteer hours, I worked with teachers and students at Bain Elementary School. I worked with students who were struggling to give them a helping hand in areas they were having trouble understanding. I also volunteered as the Cheyenne East High School Volleyball team manager for the 2016 season where I did various activities for the teams coach including keeping score during practice drills, taking stats and I went on every trip to help with girls. For Personal Development, I initially worked towards earning my driver's license but as time went on, I learned responsibility and time management by getting my first job at a local retirement home. While at this job, I worked in dining services where I served food to the residents, cleared and cleaned tables and then did side work which included vacuuming, cleaning the ice cream parlor and setting up for the next meal. My Physical Fitness goal was a weight lifting goal. I took strength training classes and did workouts with my father. I made a goal to improve my bench press overall weight and worked towards this goal by doing various exercises to improve my overall upper body strength. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I experienced art, history and culture of the city while also spending time with family members. Many of my favorite memories come from volunteering at Bain Elementary School. It is the school I attended when I was younger so it's fun for me to go back and see what has changed since I was a student there, and the many similarities as well. During my time participating in the Congressional Award, I have gained self-confidence and I've learned many new skills including self-motivation, dedication and the value of hard work and commitment.

Tanner Christensen

Casper, Wyoming

Advisor: Chase Olsen

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered through non-profit organizations in Casper where I volunteered with Make-A-Wish, volunteered at state track, with habitat reconstruction work, back to school orientation, trick or treat for cans, Powder Puff football, kids against hunger, the Reindeer run, delivered meals to cancer patients, Operation Christmas Child and set up for youth Conferences. I worked at my local country club to meet my Personal Development goal. I took care of the grounds by mowing, weed eating, picking up trash and taking care of people's needs. I also assisted others in planning and leading a youth group. I wanted to improve my max bench press from 95lbs to 125lbs. I was able to meet my goal by going to the weight room for one hour each day. I planned and executed an Expedition to Yellowstone National Park where I learned all there was to learn about planning. I am sure our parents got a kick out of this trip because we just decided to go with little planning. Throughout the Congressional Award, I learned so much. Of those biggest things I've learned was the need and effect that community service provides.

Kaitlyn Erramouspe

Rock Springs, Wyoming

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council, Boys & Girls Club

I volunteered in the Rock Springs community by volunteering at events such as Cowboys Against Cancer, the Boys and Girls Club, Make-A-Wish, backpack projects for those in need and at Commerce Bank. I worked at the Wyoming Congressional Award Golf Invitational multiple years in Jackson and volunteered in my new community of Boise, Idaho where I am attending college. I continuously worked on my leadership skills through Student Council for my Personal Development goal. I was parliamentarian for Rock Springs High School Student Council where I assisted in planning events. I also was the leader of Giving Pack Project by Health Academy. I worked on my mile time for my Physical Fitness goal. I wanted to get my mile time down to 7:15 through various cardio exercises. I attended multiple cardio classes such as Zumba, Piyo, Rapid Weights as well as running 2 miles at least three times a week. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Seattle, Washington to take tours, ride the ferry to Bainbridge Island to experience something different than I had ever seen before. Participating in Congressional Award has taught me a lot of self-respect in physical fitness. I am humbled by what I have and feel extremely lucky from what I have seen volunteering.

Elexis Forgey

Casper, Wyoming

Advisor: Chase Olsen

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

In order to complete my Congressional Award, I volunteered in the Casper community where I volunteered for trash cleanups, park clean up days, rock removal projects, mountain clean-up programs, fairground maintenance groups and I assisted in putting on poverty resistance breakfasts as well as provide meals for those in need. I also mentored youth in Casper through the community Easter Egg hunt for preschoolers, hiking with kids in the mountains, working with kids at a workshop for interviewing and public speaking, Agriculture in the Classroom, volunteered at the Kids Against Hunger program and made valentines with third graders. I developed an effective budget and utilized it in conjunction with my career as well as to begin my Angus Cattle Ranch for my Personal Development goal. I learned how to complete seven difficult dives for my Physical Fitness goal. I trained extensively to learn the dives through practice and weight training. I planned my Expedition to Lander, Wyoming where I stayed in a cabin for a week by myself. I went hiking, volunteered in a nearby camp for children, identified birds and cooked for myself. I have learned to function as an independent American citizen, help others and keep myself in shape by participating in the Congressional Award.

Benjamin Gallagher

Casper, Wyoming

Advisor: Chase Olsen

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered at the Boys and Girls Club where I worked with the after school program and in the summer to work with kids on motor development, interaction, crafts, sports and other activities. I also volunteered at the Soup Kitchen in Casper where I cleaned, organized, served meals, did inventory and helped where I could every month. I worked on acquiring my driver's license for my Personal Development goal as well as I also joined Deaf Socials to learn sign language. I learned how to sign with people. I wanted to increase my squat max by lifting on a daily basis. I engaged in other lower body exercises to improve my squat as well. I attended open gyms, weight room times and worked out on my own to reach my goal. I planned my Exploration to Boston to explore and discover the defining moments, historical events, places and people that resulted in the American Revolution and gave birth to the United States. I learned a lot of things while being in this program. It opened up my eyes and showed me there is a lot of less fortunate people. It was really nice getting to help these people.

Daniel Garcia

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

To complete my Gold Medal, I volunteered to tutor students at my high school, raised awareness for child homelessness in my community, volunteered at Cheyenne Frontier Days to maintain the grounds and help at the Pancake Breakfast, and I volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat in Cheyenne. I participated in DECA to compete in automotive services for my Personal Development goal. I have always enjoyed working on cars and decided that in addition to continuing to work on cars that I would take an auto body class at the local college in my spare time. For my Bronze and Silver Physical Fitness goal, I worked to improve my 200 meter time in track. I attended practices and continued to work on improving my time. For my Gold goal, I wanted to increase the number of pushups I could do without stopping. My Exploration was a trip to Arizona with my family. Arizona was somewhere I had never been. This was a completely new experience for me as my mom had always taken care of travel arrangements in the past. My favorite part of the Congressional Award was volunteering and be able to meet new people. I was able to network which will in turn help me as I pursue my future goals.

Liam Guille

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered through East High School's Interact Club where I attended planning meetings, landscaped for disabled community members, made and distributed burritos to those in need, participated in Henderson Steam nights and local literacy nights, volunteered at the COMEA shelter to clean and organize, worked at the Gobble Wobble, worked with youth at a local dance studio on adaptive dance for disabled children, volunteered at the local adoption agency for their awareness event and at the cultural festival in my community. I joined Improv Club where I practiced once a week and learned how to be confident in my abilities as an Improv actor for my Personal Development goal. I also learned how to better think on my feet even when I am not scripted. I wanted to improve my 5K time by running three times a week for my Physical Fitness goal. I can now run a 5K in about 21 minutes, down from 26 minutes. I planned my Exploration to Toronto, Canada with a side trip through Ohio. I loved to hear the Canadian French that was being spoken by many groups in Canada. It has inspired me to re-open my own French studies so that I can maybe communicate better in the language. I have gained a sense of my abilities in many fields as well as discovered so much about myself as a leader in both my school and community. I have also learned how valuable my contributions can be to my community organizations.

Charlotte Hecht

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

To fulfill my volunteering hours, I volunteered at the Veteran's Association as a gardener. I watered flowers and improved the garden area at the facility. In addition, I volunteered to organize a 5K run for Cerebral Palsy awareness and suicide prevention. I was involved in Student Council and DECA where I took part in multiple volunteer projects and lastly, I volunteered at a local elementary school to mentor youth. In the area of Personal Development, I learned how to cook many new recipes. I made a goal to cook for my family once a week trying out various new things. I also participated in Junior Leadership of Laramie County where I attended a class each month focused on drug/alcohol prevention, community development and youth impact. My Physical Fitness goals revolved around my participation in tennis, track and weight lifting. My goal was to improve my 50 meter running time which required me to run outside of the track season. I also made a goal to learn a forehand and backhand approach in tennis through taking lessons. My Expedition was a trip with my family to the Grand Canyon, Colorado, Utah and Arizona. We took a large road trip in order to see everything that we wanted to see. This trip taught me how important it is to be able to think on your feet in difficult situations and problem solve because inevitably, unexpected problems will arise. Through participating in the Congressional Award, I have built character, learned about upholding commitments and gained a greater awareness for my community.

Jarom Herring

Encampment, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I spent my time in the Congressional Award volunteering in my community at a local ranch and mentoring youth. I had lunch with my “buddy” every other week and went to recess with them. For Personal Development, I worked on improving my shooting accuracy for hunting season. Once I reached my goal for my rifle, I began working on my accuracy with my bow. I recorded how many yards I was away from my target and my accuracy percentage. I truly enjoy running which was the basis for my goals in the Congressional Award. I am involved in track and cross country but I also run on my own time to improve my overall time. I went on a five-day camping trip on the Encampment River Trail for my Expedition where I was able to lead other campers. I have spent a lot of time camping in my life as I have grown up in Encampment. Therefore, I challenged myself by leading others on this trip. The Congressional Award has taught me to be aware of my community. It is difficult to realize the need in a community without taking time to volunteer. I learned that in one community, there are several different ways to help and it is a wonderful thing to give back.

Lily Joslin

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I spent time volunteering at Henderson Elementary School where I tutored second and third grade students, East High School where I was a staff assistant during my off hour at school, Cheyenne Frontier Days where I provided security at performances and the pancake breakfast, and I provided childcare through a youth group. I wanted to increase my knowledge about child care for my Personal Development goal. I provided child care services approximately one time per month to engage with children and learn child care skills. I truly enjoy pole vaulting and therefore set my goal to clear 12’6” by attending summer practices and participating in indoor and outdoor season. I planned an Exploration trip to San Francisco, California where I was able to see a lot of new things in addition to visiting family I had not seen in a very long time. I have gained many life skills such as responsibility, patience, time management skills and rewarding experiences from my involvement in my community by participating in the Congressional Award.

Carli Knight

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

For Volunteer Public Service, I worked with the Good Samaritan Mission and also served as a youth leader and peer mentor to many people. I helped organize activities for youth, helped put on events for the community and mentored high school students. I volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat in Cheyenne and at the Golf Invitational in Jackson as well. I worked on improving my piano skills for my Personal Development with an emphasis on my performance skills. I spent time running to meet my Physical Fitness goal of improving my mile time by cutting a minute off of my time. I ran with my dogs around my neighborhood and was able to meet my goal. My Expedition took place on Ross Plateau for five nights. During this adventure, my father and I fished and hiked in the surrounding areas. My favorite memories from the Congressional Award come from volunteering at the Youth Service Retreat in Cheyenne in 2016. This was because I was able to meet more people in the program and as a result, I learned more about myself and others.

Konnar Knotwell

Encampment, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered as a coach and referee for our local Utah Jazz Basketball program. I also helped young elementary kids with their basketball skills as well as controlling the games. I volunteered in my community with cleanup's, aiding in aging garden club group, provided assistance at the Platte River Ranch Rodeo and providing Valentine goodies to widows and widowers. I served as an officer in National Honor Society, 4-H, FFA and E-Club. I helped 4-H members with their projects, set up displays for National 4-H week and served as president of my club. I exhibited my heifer at the Nile in Billings, Montana for my Personal Development goal. I had one year to acquire my donor heifer, gentle her, train her, raise her and get her bred to take to the Nile to exhibit. I wanted to improve my breakaway time in Rodeo for my Physical Fitness goal. To get faster and more consistent at roping, I had to practice a lot on my roping dummies and live cattle. I planned a trip with my grandparents, sister and cousins for my Expedition. We set up camp to host the Wyoming Family Camp. The Congressional Award program has taught me about the importance of community service and giving back to my community. I have learned that setting goals is important in order to stay focused and achieve what I want to.

Cassidy Little

Encampment, Wyoming

Advisor: Brooke Powell

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

To complete the Volunteer Public Service portion of The Congressional Award, I participated in many community beautification projects across the state of Wyoming and volunteered my time to help out in various community events. I also was involved in a youth mentor program where I was able to help kids overcome challenges. For my Personal Development goals, I chose to study and learn more about my religion. Throughout the year, I attended early-morning seminary and made it a priority to read my scriptures every day. As I did this, I learned a lot about my beliefs and my faith grew stronger. My other goal had to do with taking care of my market pigs. I learned a lot about how to keep a healthy pig and how to medicate them when they were in need. Physical activity has always been a big part of my life. I am constantly working out in the gym or weight room to train for my athletics including volleyball, basketball, and track and field. As I trained in the weight room, I increased both my squat and bench press max. I also worked on improving my free throw percentage. As I worked on these goals, I learned the importance of dedication and determination. For my Expedition, I planned a backpacking trip for my mom and me in Zion National Park. This was a great experience, as I have never backpacked at all. This trip definitely pushed me to my limits, and at times I felt like I wanted to give up. As we climbed back up the canyon on the fifth day, I was exhausted, but with my mom's encouraging words were able to pull through! The Congressional Award has been a true blessing in my life! Throughout this program, I have become a better person inside and out. I have learned what it means to be a determined individual and that this value will take an individual far through life. I have met many of my best friends through the Congressional Award and I wouldn't trade this experience for anything!

Thomas Lubnau III

Gillette, Wyoming

Advisor: Gregg Blikre

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered to create blankets and a sense of safety at GARF. I sewed blankets in my home and learned the importance of hard work and giving. I also served as a leader in Student Council where we participated in events, helped oversee activities, fundraised, organized campaigns and attended local, state and national events. I wanted to better myself through learning business for my Personal Development goal. I went to Denmark for my Exploration where I stayed with a host family. I learned enough about how this country works, studied their currency, customs and culture. I have gained the relationships and skills necessary to be a diverse, successful individual. From flight lessons to planter boxes to a trip to Denmark, the journey to my Gold Medal will carry me for a lifetime.

Gregory Marchal

Green River, Wyoming

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered in my community by officiating soccer games for youth ages 3-14 for the recreation department, assisted with food distribution at the senior center and food bank and raised money for Make-A-Wish and Cowboys Against Cancer. I also was able to volunteer at the Wyoming Congressional Award Golf Invitational and the Service Retreat in Dubois where I helped with many different community projects. My Personal Development goal was to participate in Speech and Debate and improve my communication skills. I increased my core strength by increasing my curl-ups from 80 to 150 which overall helped me in soccer. My Gold Expedition was a camping trip to Death Valley National Park. I planned activities including hikes and site visits at the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes, Father Crowley Vista, Darwin Falls, Charcoal Kilns, Mosaic Canyon, Stovepipe Well, Artists Drive, Golden Canyon Trail, Badwater Basin, Natural Bridge Hike, Devils' Golf Course, Harmony Borax Interpretive Trail, Dante's View and Rhyolite Ghost Town. My favorite memories of completing the Congressional Award included working at the food bank and meeting new people. While there, I got to see a direct impact of my work with the different types of people who came there.

Patrick Marchal

Green River, Wyoming

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

In order to complete my Congressional Award, I officiated soccer games for youth ages 3-14 for the recreation department, assisted with food distribution at the senior center and food bank, made blankets for children of mother's with substance abuse issues, helped prepare sand bags for the National High School Rodeo Finals, volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award Golf Invitational, raised money for Make-A-Wish and Cowboys Against Cancer and volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat in Dubois where we made repairs to playground equipment and fences. I had several different Personal Development goals during my participation in the Congressional Award. I improved my writing skills by writing two stories for the Young Author's competition, improved my cooking skills by planning, shopping for, preparing and cleaning up 11 meals for a family of five, improved my reading and language skills by reading an adult book that was 660 pages long and competed in Speech and Debate to improve my communication skills. My Physical Fitness goal was centered around training to increase my upper body strength by doing pushups. I did this to compete better as a goal keeper. My favorite memories were especially from volunteering at the Wyoming Congressional Award Golf Invitational because I loved the interaction with people, the different duties and responsibilities and the idea of the program bringing great people together.

Conner Robert Martin

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

In order to earn my Gold Congressional Award, I volunteered at the Laramie County Library where I helped with the Summer Reading Program and the prize tent. I also volunteered to coach the LEGO Mindstorm Robotics team at the library. Lastly, at the library, I volunteered for their teen advisory board where I planned youth activities for people in my community. A significant portion of my hours were dedicated towards projects in California, Montana and North Dakota where I built fence and trails for a summer camp in the mountains, rebuilt houses after a flood that affected the town and provided meals and community assistance in California. I truly enjoy being part of band, thus it seemed appropriate to shape my Personal Development goal around band. I made a goal at the bronze level to master each part of the drum line in order to reach tenor by senior year. My other Personal Development goal was to perform "For River" at my year end recital on piano. Because marching band is such a big piece of my life, I decided to make a Physical Fitness goal that increased my marching endurance. I attended practice during the school year and summer as well. I went on my Exploration to San Francisco, California where I volunteered and explored downtown. This trip was extremely unique for me because it not only showed me a lifestyle in a big city, something I've never fully experienced, but it also showed the lifestyle of a homeless or impoverished person in this setting and how they deal with it. By participating in the Congressional Award, I have learned how to identify different needs in my community while still doing activities that I enjoy.

Luke McIlvain

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Dianne Kirkbride

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I enjoy mountain biking and was able to volunteer to maintain the bike trails around the campus of John Brown University by cleaning the trail of branches, trees and I built jumps. My Personal Development goal was to learn five new songs on the guitar and be able to play and sing them with other people. I spent a lot of time learning new songs from a book that I have that shows chords and lyrics. For my Physical Fitness goal this past year I wanted to ride 600 miles worth of mountain biking. I'm not sure exactly how many miles I ended up logging but it was more than 600. Those miles included most here in Wyoming, some in Canada and Washington State and some in Arkansas where I was selected to head up the maintenance on the brand new mountain bike trail at John Brown University. One of the major highlights of my time earning the Congressional Award was my final Expedition trip in which my Congressional Award buddy and my dad and I explored Horse Thief Cave for two days and then did a camping trip with the intent of setting up some extreme hammocking. Through my experience with the Congressional Award, I have learned what the motivation of having a goal can do to change attitudes and perspectives on work and dedication.

Nicholas Nelson

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

Rock Springs, Wyoming

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered during several community events in Rock Springs, which included: Rock Springs International Days, Sweetwater County School District #1 Foundation Golf Tournament, Sweetwater County BMX bike track and the Sweetwater County Fair. I also volunteered as an assistant coach for a U10 boys soccer team and U12 girls soccer team. I volunteered at the Congressional Retreat in Cheyenne and at the Congressional Golf Tournament in Jackson. For Personal Development, I continued to improve my skills in the area of wood crafting by designing and completing a chalkboard message station, paper towel holder and am continuing to work on a computer desk that I designed. My Physical Fitness goal was to complete a 5K without walking. I planned an Expedition to Fremont Lake in Pinedale, Wyoming. My family and I went fishing, canoeing, paddle boarding and boating on the lake. My favorite memories from the Congressional Award are meeting other Congressional Award recipients from all across the state. I also enjoyed participating in the Congressional Award Retreat and Golf Tournament.

Megan Pachniak

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered to tutor students in need, volunteered through Key Club, Skills USA and other organizations to clean up trash and volunteer at local elementary schools, I also volunteered in the Color Guard at ceremonies and events in need. I cooked a meal once a month for my family to learn new recipes, as well as I learned how to do a 3D animation with CADD software for my Personal Development goals. I went to the gym twice a week to increase my bench press and my mile time for my Physical Fitness goals. I planned my Exploration to Florida where I saw new things, ate new food and learned about the culture in Florida. I learned leadership goals in planning community events as well as organization. I learned that I can try new things because I will enjoy them.

Giovanni Pizzato

Rock Springs, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered in the Rock Springs community to improve the community and local support programs. I volunteered at the Sweetwater County Events Complex for the BMX races and the Sweetwater County Fair by taking tickets, providing directions, and running errands for staff. I helped the School Foundation put on their annual golf tournament and I helped collect and wrap gifts for kids in need through the Tree of Sharing for Christmas. I volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat and the Golf Invitational in Jackson. I wanted to learn to be a safe driver and earn my Driver's License for my Personal Development goal. In order to reach my Physical Fitness goal, I wanted to increase my bench press from 85lbs to 120lbs in 6 weeks of regular Crossfit training. I attended Crossfit and was able to improve my bench press. My goal was to learn about family history and heritage through a genealogy trip to Kansas where my maternal grandparents are from. I have learned so much from participating in the Congressional Award. I have learned to push myself to do things I have never done before and to always give my best.

McKenzie Powell

Encampment, Wyoming

Advisor: Tiffany Herring

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I knitted cancer caps for Knots of Love and blanket squares for Warm-Up America. The blanket squares were sewn together into an actual blanket. I volunteered through Student Council as a mentor for younger children in my school where we ate lunch together and went to recess afterwards. Lastly, I volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Service Retreat where I helped at a 5K, Meals on Wheels, Curt Gowdy State Park and helped plan the retreat. I attended morning scripture study class Monday through Thursday for my Personal Development goal. I wanted to lower my 400 meter time for my Physical Fitness goal. I participated in volleyball, basketball and track which all contributed to becoming faster. I planned my Expedition to Yellowstone National Park. This Expedition was challenging and because of that, it yielded great rewards. I got to explore one of my favorite places in more depth and discover its true beauty. I have gained so much from participating in the Congressional Award such as, leadership experience, a gratitude for service, higher expectations for myself and ways to set goals and accomplish them.

Devrrae Russell

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered at the Christmas parade, judged speech and debate, prepared and presented a Matthew Shepard community awareness presentation, volunteered at Henderson Elementary at STEAM night, worked on a logo for Change for the Hungry, volunteered at a carnival at Deming Elementary, picked up trash for Earth Day, cleaned trails, volunteered at the Aggie Day BBQ, Special Olympics, packed health kits and volunteered at the Congressional Award Service Retreat in the Cheyenne community. I also volunteered as a camp counselor at SEEK summer camp. I worked on my public speaking skills for my Personal Development goal through Speech and Debate and Choir and Band. I wanted to increase my hiking endurance from 1-5 miles for my Gold Congressional Award. I tracked how many steps I walked as well as did various activities to build my strength. I planned my Expedition to Rob Roy Camp Ground for inexperienced campers with accommodations for young children. Through the Congressional Award, I have gained leadership skills, team work skills, a true sense of community and confidence.

Karen Russell

Encampment, Wyoming

Advisor: Tiffany Herring

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

My Volunteer Public Service included volunteering at the public library where I shelved books and cleaned for both the Encampment and Saratoga libraries. I also knitted hats and sewed nightgowns to donate to the homeless shelter in Casper. Lastly, I did inventory work at the Grand Encampment Museum. My Personal Development goal included reading at least seven historical books including Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Laura Ingalls Wilder, John Steinbeck, Harriet B. Stowe and many others. In order to complete my Physical Fitness goals, I increased the amount of time I could walk on the treadmill from 25 minutes to 1 hour. I exceeded my goal by making it to 1.5 hours one day. I went on a camping trip in Medicine Bow National Forest for four nights. During the trip, I stayed in a cabin, learned how to cook over a Dutch oven, explored the night by stargazing, went kayaking for the first time, hiked new trails, went mountain biking, tried woodcarving and experienced new museums.

Meagan Skolnick

Steamboat Springs, Colorado

Advisor: Dianne Kirkbride

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I volunteered in a variety of settings in Cheyenne including making and providing homemade blankets for the Linus Project to give back to children in need, helping at Frontier Days and at the Old West Museum. I learned how to push through long days, smile and interact with people of all ages. I set two Personal Development goals for the Gold Medal. I wanted to read twelve books of literary merit with the thought of reading one a month. I also worked in the median of paints in order to submit into the Doodle for Google contest. My Physical Fitness goal was to learn and practice isolation techniques in hip hop. I did so by taking hip hop classes and practicing outside of class. I also took snowboarding lessons in order to become a level five snowboarder. For my Expedition, I went camping at Steamboat Lake Marina. On the trip, my family and I went fishing, hiking and crawdad hunting. For me, the best memories from the Congressional Awards are not from completing it but from the journey to it.

Jaycie Wells

Dubois, Wyoming

Advisor: Katrina Schueneman

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

To complete my community service hours, I volunteered at and ran many events. I started by volunteering at my local food bank and then once I became confident, I started organized events for the community such as blood drives. Having a blood disorder myself, this event was very important to me. Another way I volunteered was at the Senior Center and Assisted Living where I was fortunate enough to play games and cook for the residents. For Personal Development, I became a better pianist and cook. I started playing piano at a young age and became attached to it very quickly. When starting the Congressional Award, I had little to no skills in cooking. Now I cook dinner for my family at least twice a week. I am fortunate enough to be Varsity captain of both the volleyball and basketball team. Starting this basketball season, I knew I wanted to increase my free throw percentage to a steady 80%. For my Exploration, I was able to travel to Gainesville, Georgia, a place much different than Wyoming! Here, I was able to go to the city of Atlanta, where I explored popular sites, such as the World of Coke and the Georgia Aquarium. My favorite part of completing the Congressional Award was getting involved in my community. Organizing and participating in events gave me confidence and allowed me to meet a variety of people. The Congressional Award taught me a lot about myself and has developed me in more ways than one.

Benjamin Wetzel

Powell, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliation: Wyoming State Council

I have become more involved with ASUW at the University of Wyoming, also known as student government. I worked as a senator with ASUW to serve my student body. My work included community health and awareness events, meetings regarding social issues, and traveling to represent the University and its members. I also volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award Golf Invitational where we were able to raise money for the program which in turn helps youth from across Wyoming. I enjoy being part of ASUW and decided to develop my Personal Development goals around leadership through my participation in student government senate meetings and specific committee meetings.

My goal was to reach a new bench press max while improving my overall fitness. I had workouts that included running, lifting, rock climbing, and various other outdoor activities to improve my overall fitness. For my Gold Exploration, I planned a trip to Europe to learn more about the European culture and more specifically, World War II. I have had the opportunity to meet countless friends while serving my community. I have gotten real world experience and dedicated myself to projects. Serving others has become a passion I will carry with me the rest of my life.

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