

*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 honor,
“Initiative – Service – Achievement”*

The Congressional Award



Public Law 96-114, The Congressional Award Act

2018 Gold Medal Ceremony

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

It is my honor and privilege to applaud the achievements of the recipients of the 2018 Congressional Award Gold Medal. These outstanding 442 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', written in a cursive style.

Paxton K. Baker
Chairman
National Board of Directors

EARNING THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD



Voluntary Public Service

Sharing time and talents for the benefit of others.



Personal Development

Pursuing a new interest or advancing to another level in an ongoing interest.



Physical Fitness

Improving one's quality of life.



Expedition/ Exploration

Immersion in an unfamiliar environment or culture.

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 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, ages 13 ½ - 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



2018 GOLD MEDAL CEREMONY I

*Arizona, Georgia, Guam, Idaho, Illinois, Nevada, New York, North
Carolina, Utah, Washington, Wyoming*

June 21, 2018

Kennedy Caucus Room

Russell Senate Office Building | 10:00 a.m.

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies

Mr. Jonathan Karl

ABC

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

2018 GOLD MEDAL CEREMONY II

*California, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi,
Missouri, New Jersey, Texas*

June 21, 2018
Kennedy Caucus Room
Russell Senate Office Building | 12:30 p.m.

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies

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 Inspiration Award
to Mr. Daniel Moyer**

**Presentation of
The Congressional Award Gold Medals**
Members of the United States Congress

Closing Remarks

2018 GOLD MEDAL CEREMONY III

*Connecticut, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Maryland,
Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Ohio,
Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont,
Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin*

June 21, 2018

Kennedy Caucus Room

Russell Senate Office Building | 3:00 p.m.

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies

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 Congressional Award Gold Medals

Members of the United States Congress

Closing Remarks

INSPIRATION AWARD – DANIEL MOYER



Mr. Daniel Moyer is a native of Southern California and grew up in Long Beach, California, where he attended Bethany Lutheran Elementary and Middle School and Millikan High School. Mr. Moyer is the son of working class parents and was the first member of his family to attend college. During high school, he competed in the sport of wrestling. His passion

for wrestling coupled with a desire to further his education, led him to Cerritos Junior College, where he wrestled at the 177 lb. weight class and was a member of the 1995 State Championship Team. After graduating with Highest Honors, Mr. Moyer transferred from Cerritos College to Concordia University in Irvine, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude and earned both a B.A. in English Literature and a M.A. in Education, with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction.

Mr. Moyer was hired by Lutheran High School of Orange County, where he served for seven years in a number of roles, including English teacher, English Department Chair, Head Wrestling Coach, and Summer School Principal. While at Lutheran High School, Mr. Moyer had the opportunity to serve in leadership roles, which he found were well-suited to his gifts. With a growing passion in the area of school leadership, Mr. Moyer attended Azuza Pacific University and earned an Administrative Credential. He transitioned from Lutheran High School to St. Paul's Lutheran School of Orange, where he served as Vice Principal. During his time at St. Paul's, the school's enrollment grew to over 600 students - the highest enrollment in the school's history.

After five successful years at St. Paul's and with an interest in returning to the high school level, Mr. Moyer accepted the position of Vice Principal of Academics at Crean Lutheran High School in Irvine. Mr. Moyer is currently in his sixth year at Crean Lutheran. Over the last five years, the school has increased

Advanced Placement course offerings from 12 to over 20, UC a-g offerings from 60 to over 100, consistently improved student test scores, and sent over 95% of graduates each year to two- or four-year colleges. Additionally, Mr. Moyer has completed all coursework required to earn a doctorate in Organizational Leadership and is currently working on his dissertation.

Beyond his personal and professional educational journey, Mr. Moyer has dedicated his time to volunteer work. Whether he is serving at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Cypress, teaching children the foundational skills involved in the sport of wrestling, or guiding students through their pursuit of The Congressional Award, Mr. Moyer is willing to serve the needs of others. His dedication to the tenets and purpose of The Congressional Award grows from both his personal journey as well as through his regular interactions with students invested in fulfilling the requirements associated with the award. Being the first in his family to transition from high school to college, Mr. Moyer knew very little about the college process while in high school. He finds The Congressional Award to be the ideal avenue to begin conversations with students about college opportunities and the joys of volunteer work. Through the pursuit of the award, students are encouraged to develop a passion for volunteer work, organizational and time management skills, and a portfolio of activities that will improve their college prospects. In an effort to increase awareness and gather more Congressional Award participants, Mr. Moyer hosts annual presentations to introduce the program to students. He also speaks at local middle schools and encourages students to engage in volunteer work and begin their pursuit of The Congressional Award as early as possible.

Mr. Daniel Moyer is blessed with a wonderful family, which includes his wife Sarah, and his daughters, Jane and Charlotte.

*Congratulations to all of the
2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists*

*2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists are listed by last name.
Asterisk (*) denotes Gold Medalists receiving a STEM Star.*



*Autobiographies submitted by 2018 Congressional Award Gold
Medalists are listed by Congressional District and then last name.*

2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Andrew Aboujaoude, Texas*
Aayush Agarwal, Illinois
Rohan Agarwal, Illinois*
Alex Aguirre, Wyoming
Abijah Ahern, Wyoming
Faiza Ahmed, Florida
Shelby Albright, Wyoming
Gabiella Alicea, New Jersey
Alexander Allison, Wyoming
Sravya Ambadipudi, Georgia
Garrett Anderson, Alaska
Esha Aneja, California
Sarah Antonevich, New York
Emily Applegate, Wyoming
Walker Atterbury, Florida
Esra Aydogdu, Nevada
Spencer Baird, Utah*
Ashley Banker, Florida
Tayten Barhaug, Wyoming*
Claudia Barney, Missouri
Sophia Barney, Missouri
Morgan Barron, Utah*
Gunner Bartlett, Wyoming
Arshia Batra, Texas*
Eric Bear, Colorado
Kimberly Beauvais, Georgia
Michael Bejarano, Texas*
Michael Bender, New York
Gailynn Benjamin, Washington*
Dayna Berg, Wyoming
Kitt Bergqvist, Arizona
Gabrielle Bernas, California*
Swati Bhageria, Ohio*
Trusha Bharadwaj, Florida
Sangeetha Bharath, California
Nishay Bhatnagar, New Jersey
Nathan Bierle, California*
Kristen Blanchard, New York
Evelyn Bodoni, Colorado
Anne Boggess, Kentucky
Daniel Bonomo, North Carolina
Lucas Bonomo, North Carolina
Sophia Boquist, Pennsylvania
Riley Box, Wyoming
Laura Bozovich, North Carolina
Evelyn Brady, Wyoming

Caroline Brolly, Georgia
Grace Brown, Indiana
Eric Bui, California
Faith Melinda Burton, Maryland*
Joseph Campbell, Texas
Estrella Carbajal, Texas
Caelyn Carlson, California
Sara Carr, Georgia
Alex Carter, Texas
Gina Carvelli, Florida*
Lauren Champlin, Washington*
Sai Vishudhi Chandrasekhar, New York*
Brooke Chang, Washington
Sihan Chen, California
Toby Chen, Ohio
Ashley Chiles, Missouri*
Christine Choi, California
Selina Chong, California
Jackson Christ, Mississippi*
Nina Christensen, North Carolina
Jenna Chu, California*
Lindsey Chu, New York
Soma Chu, California
Sang Woo Chun, California
Isaac Chung, California*
Katherine Cinnamon, Virginia*
Matthew Cinnamon, Virginia*
Kalynn Cotten, Idaho
Sienna Cowing, California
Amanda Coy, Michigan*
Katherine Craig, Virginia
Emily Craven, New Hampshire
Elena Crespo, California
Hannah Belle Crow, California
Anna Rose Cuentas, Idaho
Christopher Czarkowski, New York
Aayush Dave, Texas
Sahil Dave, West Virginia*
Isabella Davila, Texas
Jaliegah Davis, Wyoming
Dana DeMore, New Hampshire
Om Desai, Ohio*
Akshay Deverakonda, Virginia*
Abhinav Dhulipala, Florida*
Danielle DiJohn, Wyoming
Brianna DiSanza, Virginia

2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Gabriella Dodgson, Wyoming
Kaelin Dooley, Missouri
Demi Doty, Mississippi
Adrienne Duda, Wyoming
Tyler Eagan, North Carolina*
Ayse Eldes, Illinois
Katheryn Elliott, Missouri
Mark Ellis, Florida*
Dylan Esposito, California
Matthew Ewoltd, Florida
Marissa Farrell, Georgia
Nora Faverzani, New Jersey
Julianna Fisher, New York
Miranda Fisher, Massachusetts
Nolan Fitzsimmons, Virginia
Thomas Flynn, New York
Thomas Fouts, New York
Cameron Friend, Massachusetts*
Suhani Gadkari, Texas
Helen Ganley, Virginia
William Gao, Florida*
Ishan Gaur, California*
Joshua Geldreich, New Jersey
Matthew Germaine, Vermont
Abigail Gerstman, Maryland*
Connor Getz, California*
Sapphire Gibson, Florida
Connor Gililand, Wyoming
Zachary Gill, New Jersey*
Caroline Gilmore, Massachusetts
Jacob Givoni, Florida
James Goetschius, Florida
Jonathan Goforth, North Carolina*
Alexandra Gomez, California
Santana Gould, Wyoming
Nicole Gray, Virginia*
Robert Greeley, New Jersey*
John Groggel, North Carolina
Kamna Gupta, Indiana
Nikhil Gupta, California*
Emily Guyumjian, California
Davis Hale, Kentucky
Ji Woo Han, California
Nathalie Han, Florida
Seoyeon Han, California
Mary Harris, Wyoming
Shahar Hartman, Massachusetts*
Ellie Heisey, Idaho
Tanner Helmick, North Carolina
SayDree Hendricks, Wyoming
Jessica Herbert, Utah
Kate Herbert, Utah
Matthew Hladczuk, Pennsylvania
Sten Hoffman, Washington*
Tess Hopkin, Alaska
Sydney Horton, Wyoming
Rockwell Howley, Florida*
Alexandra Hsueh, New Jersey
Robin Hu, California*
Rahma Ibrahim, New York*
Diamond Jackson, Florida*
Jonathan Jackson, California
Kaelyn Jackson, California
Brianna Jahangiri, California
Samir Jain, California*
Vidhi Jain, New Jersey
Isabel Jang, California
Haesung Jee, California*
Vanshika Jhonsa, Texas
Chase Jin, California
Livia Johan, California
Adrian Johnson, Wyoming
Ciara Johnson, Wyoming
Kaily Johnson, California
Serheni'te Johnson, Maryland*
Samuel Jon, California
Kaylee Jones, Wyoming
Logan Jones, Wyoming*
Hyun Seo (Christina) Joo, Washington*
Edward H. Jung, California
Neil Kamdar, California*
Jamie Ann Kana, California
Michael Kao, California
Elizabeth Marie Kassel, Wyoming
Zeeshan Khalid, Missouri*
Brandon Kim, California
Emmalyn Kim, California*
Frank Kim, California*
Heewon Stephanie Kim, California
Julianne Kim, California
Justin Kim, California
Justin Jiwook Kim, California

2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Kevin Kim, California*
Kyle Kim, California
Min Kim, Arkansas
Minji Kim, California
Scott Kim, California*
Suyeon Kim, California*
Jacqueline Kincaid, Kansas
Margaret Kirtley, Virginia
Corrigan Kirvin, Florida
Susanna Klicka, Massachusetts
Madeline Koontz, California
Neil Kothari, Virginia*
Greta Kowalski, Tennessee
Pranab Krishnan, Virginia*
Shreya Krishnan, New York*
Priyanka Kumar, New York*
Sofia Kwon, New Jersey
Larissa Lai, California
Czarina Land, Utah*
Isabelle Lao-Ngo, California
Ryan Lawrence, New York
Cobey Ledford, North Carolina
Alexiya Lee, Oregon*
Amber Lee, California
Christopher Lee, Pennsylvania*
Joseph Lee, California*
Justin Hanvin Lee, California
Lauren Hope Lee, California
Melody Lee, California*
Seungmin Lee, California
Sydney Lee, California
Yong Min (Nathan) Lee, California
Chelsea Leung, California
Jennifer Levito, Pennsylvania
Talon Lewis, Texas*
Theodore Lewis, Texas
Matthew Liao, California
Alexander Lieske, California
Steven Lim, California
Angela Lin, Washington
Luke Lindgren, California*
Shelby Lindsey, Mississippi
Kuanting Ling, California
Andrew Lockhart, South Carolina
Shaunak Lokre, Kansas
Raleigh Loughman, California
Breanna Luckey, Idaho
Rachel Luther, Oregon
Derick Ma, California
Cameron Macdonald, Georgia
Matthew Macres, California*
Nicole Macres, California
Victoria Macres, California
Jonathan Mah, California
Aman Malhotra, New York*
Cullen Malone, Texas*
Vismaya Manchaiah, Ohio
Sydney Martin, Wyoming
Elijah Martineau, Michigan
Jozie Martinez, Florida*
Jakob Matala, New York
Emily Mather, Washington
Tanya Matthew, California*
Francesca Mauro, Missouri
Carmen Mazyck, Virginia
Zachary McCammon, Idaho
Chase McCleary, Colorado*
Ginger McCormick, Wyoming
Athena McNinch, Guam*
Nicole Meister, Maryland*
Kayla Merriweather, North Carolina
Sophia Merriweather, North Carolina
Thane Messer, California
Seth Meyer, Wyoming
Jerry Miao, Arizona
Sofia Miera, California
Elliott Miller, Wyoming
Raelynne Miller, New Jersey
Justin Miranda, California
Martin Montalvo, Texas
Brady Moon, Utah*
Joshua Moon, California
Ze Hyun Moon, California
Rachel Moore, Missouri
Akhila Moorthy, Texas
Leela Moorthy, Texas
Josie Moran, Missouri
Anaya Moreland, Maryland*
Sarah Morris, Maryland
Matthew Mu, Maryland*
Eldar Muhic, Utah*
Cade Myers, California

2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Sean Myers, Florida*
Arjun Nanda, Oklahoma
Ariza Nanji, Kansas
Akshatha Narasimhan, Nevada
Malvika Narayan, New Jersey*
Evan Naughton, Wyoming
Eesha Nayak, Texas*
Tiffany Ngan, California
Aurora Noe, Wyoming*
Kallista Noel, Missouri
Caroline Nolan, Florida*
Jeremy Nugent, New Jersey
Aedian O'Connor, Wyoming
Brianna Oh, California
Matthew Joonsung Oh, Ohio
Alexis Oliver, New Jersey
Anthony Olivio, New Jersey
Ibukun Oluyi, Arizona
Ethan Onyszchuck, Kansas*
Gala Palavicini, Arizona
Bryce Palmer-Toy, California
Dhaivat Pandya, Ohio
Micaiah Pantle, Wyoming
Sakshi Parikh, New Jersey
Charles Park, California
Christian Park, California
Christine Park, California
Daniel Park, California*
Jimin Claire Park, California
Joon-Ha Park, California
Matthew Park, California
Sarah Park, California
Timothy Park, California*
Brayden Parker, Wyoming
Meghana Pathapati, Kansas
Samantha Patterson, Wyoming*
Grace Pawelczyk, Illinois
Kara Percival, Florida
Emily Perkins, New York
Paul Peruzzi, Connecticut
Blake Peters, California
Noelle Peterson, Wyoming*
Chase Pinkerton, California*
Sasanka Pitta, New Jersey
Mulleak Pitts, Florida*
Frank Pizzella, New York

Allison Plattsmier, Tennessee
Dawson Poste, Wyoming
Alexandria Potter, West Virginia*
Christopher Potter, West Virginia*
Victoria Potter, West Virginia*
Joshua Prochaska, Texas*
Danielle Purinton, Massachusetts
Sofija Radulovic, New York
Hruday Rajput, New York
Priya Ramamoorthy, Texas*
Divya Ramamurthy, Texas
Rylee Ramsey, Wyoming
Jagannathan Rangarajan, California
Victor Rangel, Texas
Akhil Rao, Delaware
Alexander Ratliff, North Carolina*
Ganesh Ravela, Ohio
Landon Reekstin, California
Margaret Regnery, Florida
Rebecca Reich, New York
Noah Riffe, Wyoming*
Alexandria Isabella Million Rinne,
Wyoming
Dylan Rispoli, Connecticut
Richard Rivera, New Jersey
Robbie Robison, California*
Matthew Roca, Virginia
Milena Rogalski, Massachusetts*
Peter Rotondo, New York
Bridget Rowe, Washington
Bennett Ruff, North Carolina
Lindsey Ruiz, Wyoming
Brooklynn Salo, Wyoming
Nikhita Santebennur, Wisconsin*
Craig Scharmann, New Jersey
Delaney Schmidt, Wyoming
Luke Schriever, Iowa
Aidan Scurato, Kansas
Brian Seelig, Texas
Catherine Seelig, Texas
Nivedhitha Selvaraj, Texas*
Marion Semana, California
Vani Senthil, Georgia*
Karina Seth, California*
Andrew Seto, Texas
Elizabeth Sexton, West Virginia

2018 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Dilan Shah, Georgia*
Heli Shah, New Jersey*
Riya Shah, New Jersey
Sylvia Shanklin, Wyoming
Suvan Shukla, Massachusetts
Jeong Min Si, California
Benjamin Silverberg, Virginia
Kiara Sims, Wyoming
Sierra Sinclair, Wyoming
Avalon Skinner, Wyoming
T. Laine Smith, Wyoming
Aiden Snorek-Yates, Massachusetts
Stephani Sommer, Wyoming
Francesca Jiyeon Song, California*
Joseph Song, California
Sydney Song, California
Joseph Soto, Colorado
Gautum Srinivas, California*
Meigan Starr, Wyoming
Ashay Stephen, Florida*
Kathleen Stephenson, Texas
Kesslee Stewart, Wyoming
Jeremiah Stogner, North Carolina*
Julie Street, Georgia*
William Stublen, Kansas
Nicolas Suarez, Florida
Sebastian Suarez, Florida
Sarah Sutton, Wyoming
Erika Swanson, Minnesota*
Blake Swoll, Ohio*
Laura Tham, Oklahoma
Margaret Thompson, Virginia
Nicolette Traa, New Jersey
Michael Tracy, Nevada
Juliane Tsai, California*
Lauren Tyson, Wyoming
Paul Van Eerden, North Carolina
Artemis Veizi, Virginia*
Jaime Velasco, California*
Sarvani Vemuri, Ohio
Nina Vendhan, Colorado*
Dhira Venkatramani, Ohio*
Hannah Wadham, Washington
Elizabeth Walker, Texas
Jiayi Wang, Washington
Kiara Watts, Florida*

John Wechsler, Connecticut
Christopher (Caiqi) Wei, California*
Vivian Wei, Indiana
Alex Weinstein, Florida*
James Whiting, Wyoming*
Hannah Whittington, North Carolina
Eric Wiener, New York*
James Willett, North Carolina*
Ray William, California
Rose William, California
Alexis Williams, Florida*
Ronnie Wilson, Texas
Dylan Wong, California
Joie Wong, California
Tifany Wong, California*
Alexander Wood, Florida
Katherine Wood, Colorado
Faith Wright, Wyoming
Angela Wu, Maryland*
Christopher Yoo, California
Daniel Yoo, California
Justin Yuan, Pennsylvania*
Michael Zelewski, Texas
Jason Zhang, Colorado
Andrew Zhao, Virginia*
Jerry Zhu, Arizona
Bradley Zimmerman, Wyoming
Mikayla Zimmerman, Wyoming
David Zou, California

Garrett Anderson

Palmer, Alaska

Advisor: Matthew Kirby

Affiliations: Civil Air Patrol

I volunteered in my community at a local senior home for veterans and Alaskan pioneers, to help run activities, have meaningful conversations, and assist with travel to various events throughout the year. Additionally, I helped run tech a/v for community events. For Personal Development, I worked to advance my leadership and mentoring skills by being active in the Civil Air Patrol cadet program and attending leadership learning events across the country. As a by-product, I earned the Civil Air Patrol Spaatz Award with the goal of using what I learned to help others. I spent two years training for strength and endurance to prepare for and test well on several physical fitness tests I had to take while applying to military service academies and for ROTC scholarships. This involved running and working out on a regular schedule multiple times a week. For my Expedition, I planned a 5 day, 4 night excursion across over half the length of the lower 48 states. I love driving and this was a new experience for me as I had not planned a long cross-country driving trip before and I got to see beautiful scenery and enjoy new experiences. The Congressional Award program really drove home the idea that everything worth having is worth fighting for; I was raised to be strong and work hard, but the whole program and the length of time and dedication it took provided a perfect example of how hard work pays off.

Tess Hopkin

Eagle River, Alaska

Advisor: Tirzah Fullmer

For Voluntary Public Service, I made handmade baby quilts for mothers traveling from rural Alaska to Anchorage to deliver their babies. The quilts provide these babies with a warm welcome and make the mothers feel at home. I just got a photo of the recipient of my last quilt, a baby girl, which touched my heart. For Personal Development, I worked to improve my singing abilities by taking private voice lessons and participating in several choirs. I performed in juried music festivals and participated in choral competitions, winning multiple awards. I also made the Alaska All-State Choir as a top-three soprano. For Physical Fitness, I set a goal to complete a half-marathon, even though I had never been much of a runner before. I started with short workouts of one or two miles, eventually working up to longer distances, until finally I was able to complete the 13.1-mile half marathon, running the entire distance. For my Expedition, I organized a four-day float trip on the Delta River in Interior Alaska. I planned the menu and the itinerary, helped prepare meals, and took an active role in rowing the raft I was on. The trip was an unforgettable journey into some of Alaska's beautiful, untouched wilderness. I am proud to have earned this prestigious award, but as honored as I will be to receive the medal, the greater rewards are the experiences I have had along the way.

Kitt Love Truls Bergqvist

Yuma, Arizona

Advisor: Francisco Vega

Affiliations: 4-H, Boy Scouts of America

As a homeschooler, I have learned much from my volunteering opportunities. Together with the Junior Optimist Club, I have volunteered throughout the community and interacted with various organizations. For my Eagle Scout project, I used my Optimist Club contacts to help me beautify the outdoor area at an adult day care center for patients with dementia. I started my own volunteer project at the Colorado River State Historic Park by helping to create a blacksmith forge where I could demonstrate and share with visitors the history of blacksmithing in 1876. It was an amazing experience when US Representative Paul Gosar visited my blacksmith forge to award my Congressional Award Bronze Medal. I am also proud of my accomplishments in 4-H archery, having won Grand Champion twice for Yuma County. I challenged myself to try new things, including Native Hawaiian dance, violin, and filmmaking. My advisor for the Congressional Award was also one of my karate instructors. My expedition was a five-day bike ride through southern Sweden along the Sydostleden bike trail. While challenging myself physically and enjoying the beautiful countryside and distinctive cultural and historical places on our route, I stopped to see petroglyphs, burial mounds and a stone ring.

Gala Palavicini

Chandler, Arizona

Advisor: Asli Karatas

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service as a Turkish Teacher Assistant for a local charter school. I worked with 6th - 12th grade students, organizing events and creating educational materials. For Personal Development, I worked as Congressional Intern at Arizona' Fifth Congressional District Office. I had the opportunity to assist staff with special district projects. Additionally, I learned how a district office works, what kind of problems my community faces, and what we can do to solve them. For my Physical Fitness I practiced Taekwondo four times a week, learning the techniques, doing cardio, and combat sparring. I started as a basic White Belt, and worked all my way up to advanced Purple Belt. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a hiking trip to Utah and Wyoming, to learn about geological formations and improve my hiking distance. While there, I hiked over 12 miles in 3 days and learned about the formation of hoodoos and hot springs. My overall experience in this journey has been beyond amazing! I learned new things and met new people, as well as proving that there is nothing more fun than hard work!

Jerry Zhu

Chandler, Arizona

Advisor: Peter Ma

Affiliation: HOBY

I volunteered at local after-school organizations for disadvantaged youth by helping organize activities and offering tutoring. For Personal Development, I expanded my artistic endeavors through self-study and competitive painting. For Physical Fitness, I improved my swimming abilities through weekly training at the local gym. Lastly, for my Exploration, I went to Washington D.C. to learn more about U.S. government and politics.

Ibukun Oluyi

Tempe, Arizona

Advisor: Ashely Coogan

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed more than 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at my local library. I assisted with a variety of library programs from registering children for the summer reading program to working at the IT help desk. For Personal Development, I worked as a soccer referee. I officiated youth soccer games throughout the city. For my Physical Fitness portion, I was able to achieve my goal and become physically fit in the process. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a five-night trip to discover Arizona's mining history by visiting two of the most famous mines in the state. I was able to wear miner's gear and descend deep into the mines to experience what mining was like in the late 1800s to the present. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal taught me a valuable lesson - that things may not always go according to plan, but you can find a way to achieve your goal.

Min Kim

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Advisor: Judy Costello

I served as volunteer helpline intern at the National Eating Disorders Association. I answered eating disorder information and treatment options via calls and online chats in a compassionate and calming manner. I offered encouragement and answered basic questions regarding body image. For Personal Development I mastered a violin piece: Concerto in C major, op. 48 I. Allegro molto e con brio, composed by Dmitry Kabalevsky. I practiced at least 4 hours per week, attended violin lessons, and heeded advice from my violin teacher. I improved my communication with the violin accompanist. For Physical Fitness, I succeeded in performing a handstand against a wall for 20-30 seconds, and I can now also hold a headstand without using the wall for a couple seconds. I am currently working on doing a headstand for 20-30 seconds without the wall. I planned and explored New York City's diverse attractions with two friends for my Expedition. Over the course of 5 days, we visited Central Park, thrift shops, Chelsea Market, and Times Square. We also saw Matilda on Broadway and explored Smorgasburg, Brooklyn Flea Market, and the Highline. I have developed new awareness about the needs of my community. I also have learned the value and results of teamwork, hard work, and persistence. I have become more open and excited to take on challenges as a way to improve myself as well as others. I look forward to applying these valuable skills and lessons.

Connor Getz

Granite Bay, California

Advisor: Steve Romeo

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work with the Boy Scouts of America and the White Stag Leadership Development Program. I worked on many Eagle Scout projects and taught leadership skills to youth every summer. For Personal Development, I explored the sport of scuba diving while getting to experience countless incredible dives that I will never forget. I also focused on developing my leadership skills and practiced these skills in several leadership positions within my Boy Scout Troop. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to join the wrestling team and increase my fitness level while increasing my wrestling skills. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-night backpacking trip into Desolation Wilderness in the high sierras. While hiking through the snow-covered mountains, I demonstrated my navigation, cooking, and survival skills learned as an Eagle Scout. My journey toward earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal allowed me to bring all my passions together and show myself what I am capable of.

Matthew Christian Lee Macres

Granite Bay, California

Advisor: Jeff Culbertson

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered at the Placer County Food Bank, Cycles for Hope, and St Vincent De Paul Food Kitchen. My Eagle Scout Project totaled over 181 hours of cleaning, painting, and organizing numerous other volunteers in the Beautification of my High School Athletic Stadium. To overcome a learning challenge, I invested over 120 hours with NILD Educational Therapy to fully attain my academic goals. I founded my High School Robotics Team and I invested 120 hours of training to receive my bicycle Mechanic Certification, allowing me to repair bikes for Cycles of Hope. I also swam for the competitive swim team for a full year. My interest in cycling caused me to commit to riding my bike three times a week (20+ miles) from my high school to home all the while keeping track of goal miles and goal times. I supported this goal with weight training, runs, and trail rides. A five-day backpack Expedition in Desolation Wilderness required permits, campsites, map routes, equipment, food, safety prep. Hiking over 33 miles with 45-pound backpacks, we crossed streams and traversed snow fields, as well as summiting Mt. Tallac, the second highest peak in Tahoe National Forest. Participating in the Congressional Award enhanced my passion for serving and leading others, by further opening my eyes to look outside of myself and seeing the needs of others in our community.

Nicole Margarita Macres

Granite Bay, California

Advisor: Jeff Culbertson

Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I volunteered at two thrift stores (St. Vincent de Paul and the SPCA). In both stores I organized, cleaned and merchandized the shipments that arrived daily. Thrift Store profits are used to find homes for abandoned animals, and to feed, clothe and shelter the homeless in our community. To be fluent in Spanish required hours of tutoring and a 30-day Spanish immersion program in Costa Rica. A passion for animals and my goal to be a Veterinarian, lead me to learn to feed and care for horses and to competitively ride, culminating in receiving a D1 and D2 certification in Pony Club. Running Cross Country for years, 100's of miles, and dozens of meets, led to a love for the sport. I also joined the Cornerstone Equestrian Team, where I trained, competed in show jumping, dressage, and cross-country with my instructor teaching me correct form, technique and discipline. Using mass transit (train/light rail/bus/shuttles) I traveled to Yosemite National Park. I visited museums, international hostels, and hiked well over thirty miles. Carrying all of our provisions in backpacks, I trekked thousands of vertical feet to see the most beautiful waterfalls in the world. Pursuing the Congressional Award Gold Medal was quite a time commitment, but the pay back is far more rewarding because I discovered new sports and interests and learned valuable skills that have affected my life greatly.

Victoria Violetta Macres
Granite Bay, California
Advisor: Jeff Culbertson
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I volunteered at two thrift stores (St. Vincent de Paul and the SPCA). In both stores I organized, cleaned and merchandized the shipments that arrived daily. Thrift Store profits are used to find homes for abandoned animals, and to feed, clothe and shelter the homeless in our community. Hours of Math tutoring allowed me to excel in Geometry and Algebra. Hours of Spanish tutoring allowed me to attain the Seal of Biliteracy. The culmination of fluency occurred during a 30-day Spanish immersion program in Costa Rica; where I lived, learned and laughed with the people of Costa Rica. Each year for the past four years I competed on the Granite Bay High School Varsity lacrosse team, as well as the Tenacity club lacrosse team. Tenacity is a year-round team that travels the country to compete. This incredible opportunity provided over 1000+ physical fitness hours. Using mass transit (train/light rail/bus/shuttles) I traveled to Yosemite National Park. I visited museums, international hostels, and hiked well over thirty miles. Carrying all of our provisions in backpacks, I trekked thousands of vertical feet to see the most beautiful waterfalls in the world. Throughout my Congressional Award journey, I have learned you have got to wake up with enthusiasm and ready to take on life, because you never know what other lives including your own you are impacting.

Tifany Wong
El Dorado Hills, California
Advisor: Curtis Gant, LCDR, US Naval Sea Cadet Corps
Affiliations: National Honor Society

In earning my Congressional Gold Medal, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service work with our County Teen Court as a defense attorney/prosecutor on over 35 juvenile cases; with County Youth Commission on youth related issues and with USNSCC honoring veterans, soldiers, and the public. For Personal Development, I completed the required service and coursework to become a Chief Petty Officer, the highest rank with USNSCC. I also continued my advanced piano study and won competitions at the national and international levels which lead to a performance at the Carnegie Hall. For Physical Fitness, I improved my golf skills greatly through practice, lessons, and joining my school's golf team. I also competed at multiple nationwide tournaments, and got a hole-in-one during a tournament. For my Expedition, I planned a five-night trip to the United Kingdom exploring the local culture and history. Through the Congressional Award, I became a more confident person and I am currently working with the California Legislature to establish a new law requiring all teachers to attend mental health training.

Nikhil Gupta

Gold River, California

Advisor: Bobby Martinez

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work with the Grants Advisory Board for Youth. I worked with other board members to review and approve grant proposals for youth-led projects in the area. We have donated over \$30,000 in the last three years. For Personal Development, I participated in Science Olympiad to improve upon my Engineering and Robotics skills. I competed in the Robot Arm and Wright Stuff events and am proud to have placed 1st in the nation in the Robot Arm event. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to improve my Tennis skills. I worked one on one with my coach to improve my accuracy and played at USTA tournaments in my local area. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a four-night camping trip in Ice House, California. While camping, I went on multiple hikes and compared wildlife in different camping locations. Earning the Congressional Award has pushed me to my limits and has made me more confident in myself and my capabilities.

Isabelle Lao-Ngo

Elk Grove, California

Advisor: Steve Tran

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Key Club

I fulfilled my desire to help others through volunteering under the direction of Red Cross, Key Club, and the Sacramento Zoological Society. I helped set and clean up at community events, distributed food, and participated in the Zoo Teen program to enrich the community's knowledge of animals. For Personal Development, I focused on learning new piano techniques while practicing to pass the CM Advanced Panel. Through hours of practice, I learned how to let melodies sing and became more confident in playing difficult pieces. Through Physical Fitness, I pushed myself beyond my limits to achieve a mile time under 7 minutes. I also improved my tennis serve and competed with my varsity tennis team in school matches. My Expedition/Exploration goals involved planning my family's itinerary from beginning to end in visiting the Island of Kauai. We took challenging hikes through lush rain forests, kayaked to secret waterfalls, and learned about the rich culture of the natives. The Congressional Award experience taught me goal setting and gave me the determination to overcome challenges by having passion for what I do.

Marion Semana

Elk Grove, California

Advisor: Gary Preto

In earning the Congressional Award, I volunteered at the Dignity Health Methodist Hospital every week for about a year. I also tutored my peers after school to help them understand topics they struggled with. For Personal Development, I did an internship at a local bakery for two years. I learned how to manage my time to finish all my tasks before my shift ends. As I kept working at the bakery, my passion for baking grew. For Physical Fitness, I joined my school's cross country and track teams. After two years, I have improved my mile time greatly and have also grown to love running. I also have made some great friendships along the way and experiences with the team. Finally, for my Exploration, I decided to go to France and learn about their culture. I traveled to Normandy to learn about World War II, Versailles Palace, and Paris within a span of six days. I truly enjoyed my time in France and got to practice my french and eat many baguettes. The Congressional Award was an unforgettable experience that has led me to expand my horizons whether it may be making new friends, learning about a new culture, or obtaining a new skill or hobby.

Sangeetha Bharath

Mountain House, California

Advisor: Evangeline Williams

Teaching chess, organizing and running extensive chess tournaments and camps: this is how I spent hundreds of hours volunteering at my local library. My self-directed chess initiative encompassed both summer programs and year-round learning for the children in my community. My Personal Development was equally involved—I dedicated more than four years to the practice of yoga. More than 200 hours of commitment translated into profound spiritual discovery, and within this time I progressed to an advanced skill level. My Physical Fitness goals involved a gradual training for a 5k, through which I ran and hiked consistently until I not only braved an uphill 5k course with confidence, but also set a personal running time record for myself. In order to complete the Exploration component, I conducted a 7-day trip to the United Kingdom to study literary, historical and monarchical traditions. I dealt with unexpected setbacks, planned ahead for myself and others, and deeply engaged with London and Stratford-upon-Avon's cultural artifacts. Choosing to embark on the journey of the Congressional Award pushed me to hold myself to higher standards, strengthening my leadership and dedication by encouraging effective communication and self-discipline.

Madeline Koontz
Brentwood, California
Advisor: Alka Anand
Affiliations: National Honor Society

Earning the Congressional Gold Award was an interesting and rewarding experience. I participated in over 400 hours of community service work by volunteering at a local hospital and coordinating fundraising events to benefit the American Cancer Society. For Personal Development, I took weekly piano lessons and performed at ten piano recitals over the past four years. For Physical Fitness, I was a level eight competitive gymnast and practiced 20-30 hours each week and participated in meets. Finally, for my Exploration, I studied architecture and historical events in Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown, as well as the pre-1906 earthquake historical area and structures in San Francisco. The Congressional Award inspired me to explore new places and learn more about myself and others.

Jaime Humberto Velasco
Brentwood, California
Advisor: Ignacio Navarrete

In earning The Congressional Award, for Voluntary Public Service, I completed well over 400 hours in the medical facilities of Kaiser Permanente and Alta Bates Medical Center. I started off as a volunteer, later recognized as a shift leader. Then I was transitioned into an unpaid surgical intern. In earning For Personal Development, I created a non-profit organization called "Educated Angels" through my parish at the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This organization provides free tutoring services to all communities for ages K-12th grade in all subjects, specifically STEM. I managed to lose 190 pounds over the duration of 2.5 years. I started off by training for my first marathon in Napa, California. I completed the marathon and one year later completed a 50 mile ultra marathon as the youngest male ever in Folsom, California. In June 2018, I was selected for a 100 miler in San Diego. For my Expedition, I went camping for one week near Huayna Picchu and Machu Picchu in Cusco, Peru. My medical brigade group from UC Berkeley and I managed to explore the wildlife, go river rafting, zip-lining, study Peruvian history and much more. After accomplishing such endeavors, receiving The Congressional Award Gold Medal has been such a high honor and privilege. I never imagined myself having completed such memorable, humbling and rewarding experiences. Not only have they been experiences, but they have motivated me to continue to help communities and prosper in becoming a medical professional and health research scientist in the near future.

Sienna Cowing
Alamo, California
Advisor: Alicia Phelps Ames

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I started a non-profit organization called The Danville Closet that provides new and nearly new clothes to foster children in the San Francisco Bay Area through partnerships with organizations like CASA, The National Charity League, and Berkeley Hope Scholars. For Personal Development, I co-authored a children's picture book of idioms that was published. For my Physical Fitness portion, I played club volleyball and started a running fitness program. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip to Washington D.C. to learn more about our country's history. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal was an incredible experience in discipline and setting goals.

Alexander Lieske
El Cerrito, California
Advisor: David Miller

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I performed many hours of volunteer service with the Civil Air Patrol, doing emergency services and inland search and rescue. I also volunteered at a local museum and a senior center. For Personal Development, I worked as a youth umpire for my local little league. I also learned how to sail, earned my U.S. Sailing skipper's certification, and participated in races on the San Francisco Bay. For Physical Fitness, I ran on my high school cross country and track teams. I dedicated many hours, made varsity as a sophomore, and lowered my 5k time by over six minutes. For my Expedition, I went on an eight day backpacking trip with Outward Bound. We hiked through an amazing part of the Rockies, and I learned many important backpacking, survival, and outdoors skills. Earning the Congressional Award gave me the incentive to seek out many awesome experiences that I may not have otherwise.

Cade Willson Myers
Walnut Creek, California
Advisor: Samantha Balboni

For Voluntary Public Service, I worked with 4th and 5th graders on completing their homework packet at the Monument Crisis Center. This organization provides assistance to families living below the poverty line. I also was a Camp Counselor for the Stanislaus County Summer Camp. For Personal Development, I founded the Las Lomas Ski Club at my high school and I recruited an advisor and members of all levels, and discovered there was a local ski bus that would give a special group discount to drive us to local ski resorts. I participated in Cross Country/Track at my high school. I was 1 of only 2 freshmen who went to the pre-season Tahoe elevation training. I succeeded in improving my times enough to be selected in the limited group, and even placed 19th in a San Francisco Golden Gate Park meet with over 300 runners. Organizing a trip is way more complicated than it seems. Making sure the car is loaded with all the gear you need, then figuring out the directions, timing and other logistics, especially on a budget. I completed my Expedition at St. Catalina, an island off the coast of Southern California and a great place to explore nature. The format of the Congressional Medal Award is a terrific structure to develop and follow through with multiple goals during high school. This process kept me on track to stay committed to my goals and I can look back on these experiences and see what I was able to make happen for others, and for myself.

Gautum Srinivas
Moraga, California
Advisor: Andrew Thompson
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered in a library where I organized books. I also volunteered at the Chabot Space and Science Center where I did demonstrations for children. For Personal Development, I worked on improving my study habits and scheduled my day so that I could get more done and study for the SAT. For Physical Fitness, I joined Cross Country and Track, and was able to greatly improve my times. Lastly, for my Expedition, I went on the Philmont Backpacking trip, where I backpacked 80 miles in New Mexico over 10 days.

Gabrielle Bernas

Palo Alto, California

Advisor: Linda Lee

I served over 500 hours at a local tutoring center and other non-profit organizations. I tutored low-income middle school students, facilitated summer camps in Nicaragua, prepped local community events, and more. For Personal Development, I participated in my school's business and Speech and Debate clubs and improved my public speaking skills towards a potential consulting career. Additionally, I assisted my mother in the kitchen weekly and learned how to create American and Filipino meals. For Physical Fitness, I trained with my coach and individually everyday to compete in a U.S. Strength Federation competition. I reached my goal by surpassing an advanced weightlifter's standards (170lb squat, 85lb press, and 220lb deadlift). Finally, I planned a seven day expedition for my family to explore Seattle and Canada. We kayaked in the Rose Bay, hiked to Mt. Finlayson's peak, experienced a Ferry trip across the Strait of Georgia, and enjoyed the second oldest Chinatown in North America and a 600+ feet view of Seattle. Earning The Congressional Award was self-rewarding as I got to engage with my community peers and adults and explore my interests towards a potential career.

Esha Aneja

San Ramon, California

Advisor: Siddharth Pande

To earn my Congressional Award, I spent over 300 hours assisting youth with special needs both at my high school and community. I choreographed various dances for them and helped out at various hospitals. Also, I was involved in the Each Mind Matters movement to raise awareness for the stigma associated with Autism. Dancing has always been my passion, so I spent more time focusing on it and developing it. I learned different dance forms, such as tango, jazz fusion, and salsa. For Physical Fitness, I decided to work on becoming a better Badminton player. I trained hard and worked on my footwork so I could compete in higher level competitions. I represented the state of California and won four medals nationally. Lastly, I planned a trip to India in order to explore its culture. When in India, I saw various forts with Mughal architecture and got to see the rich culture. I loved my experience earning the Congressional Award because I learned how perseverance and motivation can help me succeed with all my goals in life.

Samir Jain

Fremont, California

Advisor: Aditi Kapadia

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I tutored in a homework center at my local library for over 400 hours for my Voluntary Public Service. I helped children with their homework and supplementary work in math, English, and science. For Personal Development, I worked for pay at the Kumon Math and Reading Center, a for-profit educational institution. I learned the responsibility necessary to maintain a job, valuable interpersonal skills, and the value of money. For my Physical Fitness portion, I took tennis lessons two to three times a week and have since played on my high school's Junior Varsity team. I specifically set out to increase my rally for the forehand and backhand strokes, in addition to my serve. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned and went on a week-long excursion into Iceland. I visited stunning natural wonders such as thermal geysers, lagoons, and active volcanoes in the Golden Circle near Reykjavik, Iceland's capital. I greatly enjoyed the holistic process of earning my Congressional Award, and developed my skills and ability to set long and short-term goals.

Larissa Lai

Sunnyvale, California

Advisor: Ellen Wong

I volunteered at a local Japanese school, where I worked as a teacher assistant for multiple classes, helping teach students the Japanese language. I also helped at the Sunnyvale Sister City Association in their exchange program to send students from America to Japan and vice versa. For Personal Development, I began to take private lessons for piano and made extra efforts in preparation for the annual Certificate of Merit evaluation, where I made sure to practice every little detail required to receive the best possible score. Furthermore, I also took supplementary writing classes to improve my skills. For Physical Fitness, I joined a rowing team and participated regularly in long distance running workouts and land training with the rest of the team. I modified my daily schedule to accommodate morning water practices and local and regional regattas with my team to test out our skills, while balancing it with school. Lastly, I planned and prepared a trip to Hong Kong, where I would explore parts of an unacquainted region by participating in Hong Kong's Outward Bound Program alongside a group of peers who grew up locally there. Through this, I was able to get out of my comfort zone and practice my communication skills.

Juliane Tsai
Cupertino, California
Advisor: Sue Chen
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked towards creating a welcoming and fun environment at Monta Vista while serving as 2018 Class President. I planned events like Homecoming and Junior Prom to bring our class closer together. By doing this, I helped create a tightknit community at Monta Vista. For Personal Development, my goal was to help special needs kids learn social skills. I created an iOS/Android application as an interactive learning tool. The app had ten lessons, along with fun games to further reinforce the skills that were taught. I also held workshops at the special needs school to guide the kids through the app. For Physical Fitness, I built up my upper body strength by hitting the speedbag 3 times a week. I established a speedbag workout: eight 60 second sets, increasing my speed by 2 hits per set. Through this, I increased my punching speed to 80 hits a minute. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to New York City and Washington D.C. for my family. To make the most of our trip, I researched travel packages that included visits to the major landmarks. By purchasing the City Pass, I was able to explore the famous spots that I learned about at school. I am proud of myself for earning The Congressional Award because it challenged me to step out of my comfort zone.

Caelyn Carlson
San Jose, California
Advisor: Van Messer

To satisfy my goals for the Congressional Gold Award, I dedicated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to The New Ballet School. I assisted in teaching children ballet, helped promote the school in the community, and learned about the difficulties of keeping a nonprofit business afloat. For Personal Development, I lived in France for 2 ½ months. In my time there, I became a proficient French speaker. For Physical Fitness, I sought to improve my technique and artistry in dance. In the end, I ameliorated myself to the point where I was given soloist and principal roles in my ballet school's productions. For my Expedition, I planned a two week vacation on the Big Island of Hawaii with my sister, where we enjoyed the island's natural beauty. Through my participation in the Congressional Award Program, I was taught how much hard work and dedication goes into overcoming a formidable objective, and the time and work spent in accomplishing the Gold Medal will be invaluable to my future success in life.

Chelsea Leung
Saratoga, California
Advisor: Ms Sharon Juang

I volunteered at Book-Go-Round, a used book store operated by Friends of the Saratoga Library, as store operator, ran the store, handled customer requests and transactions. I also volunteered at Wisdom Culture & Education Youth camps as a counselor and at Music Teachers Association of California Convention. I took percussion lessons weekly and rehearsed and performed at Percussion Section of California Youth Symphony. Through these, I learned music theory and percussion performance skills and how to play well in orchestras especially in public performance settings. Through ballet dancing pirouettes en dedans and en dehors, pirouettes in attitude and pique pirouettes, I developed strength and flexibility in different muscles and limbs for extension like arabesque and improved my strength and abilities en pointe. Eventually my turns improved from 1 to 3. I researched, planned, and travelled from Saratoga, California to Hong Kong, China. There, I explored different types of events and cultural traditions, festivals and participated in local activities. I also learned a lot about the local language, transportation networks and local cuisine. I learned that anyone can contribute to his/her community, and being able to consider various view points and deal with unexpected situations has also prepared me for my future growth in academics, career and life development.

Raleigh Loughman
Campbell, California
Advisor: Maureen Kane

To earn my Gold Medal, I worked with MVLA soccer club and Bay Area Women's Sports Initiative to help cultivate the athletic talents of the next generation. I served as both a coach and role model working with young athletes from the ages of 8-13. For Personal Development, I started my 10,000 Hour Program to become a master in my sport by playing 1,000 hours of soccer per year. Through this program I became a current member of the U-20 Argentina Women's National Team and will be playing D1 Soccer at the University of Michigan in Fall 2018. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to become faster, stronger, and more explosive in preparation for playing college soccer. I completed strenuous workouts 3-4 times per week focusing mostly on strength. Through this process, I not only gained physical strength but mental strength as well. For my Expedition, I planned a seven day trip to the countries of Spain and France. While in Europe, we saw an FC Barcelona game, discovered Versailles Palace, and ate our weight in croissants! Earning my Gold Medal was a life-changing experience and it has helped me grow as an athlete, role model and most importantly, a person.

Tanya Matthew

Los Altos, California

Advisor: Jay Venkat

Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

I enjoy working with kids, so I focused all of my Voluntary Public Service activities on the kids in my community. I was a tutor through Reading Partners, I helped with various Boys and Girls Clubs of the Peninsula programs, and I was a Junior Auxiliary Volunteer at El Camino Hospital's Mother-Baby Unit. For Personal Development, I explored different career fields that interested me. I was an active participant in my school's Mock Trial Club and I interacted with medical professionals through the Valley Medical Center Explore Program. I also developed my baking skills by volunteering for the Cake4Kids organization. I have been playing field hockey since middle school so I continued developing my field hockey skills and fitness by playing defense for Los Altos High School and the San Jose Fly Field Hockey Club. For my Exploration, I led my family on a one week trip to Ecuador. We stayed with an indigenous family, learning about their way of life; we got to know the culture and the people of Saraguro, Ecuador. As the only one in my family who speaks Spanish, I was not only the trip leader but also the translator. The Congressional Award experience has pushed me to try new things and has helped me find my passions.

Joie Wong

Campbell, California

Advisor: Lucy Lee

Affiliation: National Honor Society

I completed my Voluntary Public Service at Humane Society Silicon Valley, Wisdom Cultural Education Organization and overseas service trips. For Personal Development, I trained to develop my leadership skills with formal training and practical applications. I have improved my performing art skills, including vocal and dance and have worked behind the scenes as technical crew and managing school musical productions. For my Physical Fitness, I pursued my love for dancing and synchronized swimming. My Exploration was a five-night Pacific Coast Highway road trip with family and friends. We explored selected cities, landmarks and culinary establishments along the panoramic backdrop of the Pacific Coast. I had a wonderful experience reaching all the goals I set for myself while earning the Congressional Award. I have gained insight and appreciation of third world society and my community's problems. It is through my active community involvement that I realize I can make a difference.

Jonathan Jackson
Gilroy, California
Advisor: Greg Schnorr
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I spent over 961 hours taking optional leadership positions and opportunities within my Boy Scout Troop to complete the Voluntary Public Service requirements for the Congressional Award. Such opportunities included leading meetings and campouts, and teaching merit badges. My Personal Development Goal was to improve in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) as well as improve my times on a down hill single-track mountain bike course. I practiced and trained for both at least once per week. I ranked up in belt levels within my MMA class and far surpassed my single-track time goal. I sought to improve my time in the mile for my Physical Fitness Goal. I participated on the Varsity Cross Country and Track teams at my school where I competed in races, workouts, and practices. By the end of the award, I improved my mile time from 5 minutes 40 seconds to 4 minutes 36 seconds. To achieve my Expedition requirement, I planned, led, and participated in a 50-mile canoe trip down the Sacramento River. The expedition taught me many lessons on how to respond during stressful situations and that the intended plan almost never happens. Earning the Congressional Award has shown me how much time I can truly dedicate to an activity in the pursuit of achieving greatness.

Kaelyn Jackson
Gilroy, California
Advisor: Greg Schnorr
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 700 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I served as a lifeguard and camp counselor teaching swimming, lifesaving, and boating at two Boy Scout Camps. I also helped build homes on Native American reservations with my church youth group. My Personal Development goal was to improve my cooking and horsemanship skills. I explored different methods of food preparation in the home, outdoors, and for large groups. I also attended a horseback riding camp and volunteered at a local horse program for the disabled. I met the Physical Fitness goal by joining the Los Gatos Rowing Club. I worked out, practiced 5 days a week, and attended several regattas during my three seasons. For my Expedition, I planned and hiked the Lost Coast Trail in Humboldt County, California. The group I led enjoyed breathtaking views and grueling backpacking terrain. Earning the Congressional Award taught me the dedication and passion it takes to achieve my goals.

Brandon Kim

Valencia, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

For Voluntary Public Service, I committed over 400 hours to the non-profit organization Global Youth Mission. I participated in environmental clean-ups, volunteered in orphanages and medical centers, and helped at community events for low-income families. I set the goal of improving my Korean speaking and writing for my Personal Development. I read Korean news articles, wrote letters to my family, and primarily spoke in Korean with family members. I improved my lacrosse shot accuracy from 40% to 60% for my Physical Fitness goal. I was able to improve my accuracy by playing regularly with my school lacrosse team and joining an off-season club team. In addition, I worked one-on-one with my school coach and practiced alone during my free time. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Italy with the purpose of studying the history and culture of a specific city. I chose to travel to the city of Livorno, which gave me a deep insight into Italian history and the comparisons between American and Italian culture. Completing the tasks for the Congressional Award has led to the realization of my future goals and ambitions.

Emmalyn Kim

Stevenson Ranch, California

Advisor: Albert Michael

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at the Capitol Area Food Bank for over two years, where I distributed fresh produce to low income families. I also volunteered at the Smithsonian Museum of American History in the Spark!Lab promoting STEM and with Volunteer Fairfax. For Personal Development, I pursued my art talent working on multimedia pieces and drawings to promote and exhibit. My skills developed and expanded into photography while documenting my artwork. I created a style and focus on tiny, environmental, origami sculptures which was recently honored with a Scholastic Art Award. To achieve my Physical Fitness goal, I played varsity lacrosse, varsity field hockey, and basketball for my high school and was named 2nd Team All-Conference Forward as a sophomore. I was the top scorer on both my basketball and field hockey teams and the only freshman to make the varsity lacrosse team. My Expedition involved a 590 mile road trip around California where we hiked and camped in Joshua Tree National Park, avoided jack rabbits throwing themselves across the road at 3am, surfed the Imperial Sand Dunes off the border of Mexico, and snorkled in Laguna Beach. My overall experience with the Congressional Award was a long one, but the feeling of accomplishment and achievement made it worth it. I will continue to volunteer, create, and explore the world.

Jagannathan Rangarajan
Thousand Oaks, California
Advisor: Martha Aggazzotti

I volunteered at Westminster Free Clinic, a clinic that provides free healthcare. I helped coordinate events for Sankara Eye Foundation, an organization hoping to eradicate curable blindness in India. I also am part of SERVE, an organization dedicated to servicing our immediate community. In order to achieve my Personal Development goals, I played my violin. I took lessons every Monday and was part of two orchestras: my school orchestra and a community orchestra: CVYO. Our school orchestra played every day while my community orchestra met every week. I have played competitive tennis for many years, taking private lessons every week and going to a clinic eight hours a week. I also took up running, making it a goal to run a couple times a week and stay in shape. For my Exploration, I went to Seattle, Washington and drove up to British Columbia and Vancouver in order to explore both the bright city of Seattle through City Pass and to see the sights of Vancouver and Victoria. I helped plan many of the events from the EMP Museum to the ferry to Victoria. This logging of hours made me realize the power of one individual to change lives through community service along with the ability to improve one's skills and physical ability through constant effort and work toward a goal.

Sofia Miera
San Marino, California
Advisor: Ariana Wall
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

Arts and recreation programs for youth was the focus of my 400 hours of Voluntary Service towards completion of my Congressional Award Gold Medal. I used my photography and dance skills to advocate and work with young dancers with Down Syndrome. For Personal Development, I joined my school's Drama department, participating in four years of musicals, joined Comedy Sportz Improv team and cabinet for International Thespian Honor Society. By my senior year, I was selected for two leads in musicals and wrote and directed a one-act play. My Physical Fitness hours were spent developing new dance skills, making my school's Dance Company. I also tried skiing and running my first half-marathon. My Exploration was a five-day immersion in a culture different than my urban one: an organic farm in South Carolina where I learned caring for farm animals and how to be more independent outdoors. Every stage of my Congressional Award Gold Medal helped me think about why certain goals meant something to me and how to have the most enjoyment while doing so.

Hannah Crow

Northridge, California

Advisor: Joann Dawe

My 400 volunteer hours were completed with hard work and passion. I engaged in many public services to benefit my community such as aiding teachers and peers, assisted in city hall gatherings, and engaging in the foster system by helping foster children. My Personal Development goal was completed by traveling throughout the U.S. and abroad and immersing myself in a new culture. I was lucky enough to learn customs, eat traditional food, and live like the citizens that occupy these different states and countries. My Physical Fitness was benefited and improved by my goal to educate myself in healthier lifestyles and to heighten my athletic level. I achieved this goal of 200 hours in intensive workouts and educational classes. I hiked the first two segments of the Colorado Trail to achieve my Expedition goals. Everything I needed was in a backpack on my back and for six days, I felt engrossed in nature. It was amazing! Through this experience, I have accumulated many skills in earning The Congressional Award: self-esteem, effective leadership, resilience, problem-solving, and collaboration. I am truly humbled by this award.

Ji Woo Han

La Crescenta, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

Voluntary Public Service, through Congressional Award, helped me to actively go out and help the community. Instead of serving others without a purpose, Congressional Award has taught me to love and enjoy serving my community and helping others. I have become part of Speech and Debate that has taught me a lot about myself, the world, and current problems. Through constantly researching about current controversial topics, I was able to educate myself. I also learned and improve my communication skills and public speaking. I constantly took the time to work out and train during my time working on the Congressional Award. This has not only helped me with my sports, kendo and tennis, but also motivated me to work out on a regular basis to become more active and healthy through the organized scheduling I have done. For my Exploration, I explored to study my ethnicity's history and culture over winter break. I traveled to Korea alone, where I learned more about the country's historical and cultural movement, along with the political protests occurring during the time.

Charles Park
La Crescenta, California
Advisor: Julia Son

To fulfill the Congressional Award Gold Medal service requirements, I worked with multiple community service organizations such as, the Los Angeles Food bank and skid row to help the financially unfortunate. For Personal Development, I worked at the Glendale City Hall as a student ambassador. I attended weekly meetings and worked with the city clerk. I now know how the city council works and the problems in my community that need improvement. For Physical Fitness, I worked towards the goal of jumping 5' 6" in high jump. I worked extensively with my coach and analyzed the differences between my form and that of professionals until I reached my goal. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day trip to Carpinteria State Beach. While camping, a few of the things that I enjoyed were hiking on the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Trail and tide pooling at the beach. Through the Expedition, I was able to learn essential skills such as cooking and improvising. Looking back, it has definitely been rewarding and I can say for sure that I have become more educated and mature through the process of obtaining the Congressional Award Gold Medal!

Haesung Jee
North Hills, California
Advisor: Sharon Ro

For Voluntary Public Service, I served people with mental or physical disabilities by volunteering at a therapeutic horsemanship center. I also volunteered at my local community center to teach the Korean language and Korean culture. Finally, I volunteered my artistic skills by teaching students calligraphy and cardmaking. In order to complete my Personal Development goals, I studied computer science algorithms, learned advanced programming, and trained to participate in computer programming competitions. I attended weekly programming classes and pushed myself to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In order to improve my health, build self-confidence, and improve my mental wellbeing, I practiced yoga and took fitness classes at my local gym. Though this was difficult at first, I am proud that I learned new yoga positions, breathing techniques, and gained confidence in my running ability. I immersed myself in the culture, sights, and experiences of the car-centric Los Angeles County using solely public transportation and walking to get around. I visited landmarks, historical sites, museums, and ethnic neighborhoods and was able to experience L.A. County in a completely different way.

Soma Chu
Encino, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work through Global Youth Missions. Through the club, I volunteered at an orphanage in Tijuana as well as my local community at the library and Korean class. For Personal Development, I took piano lessons once a week and got up to Level 8 of the Certificate of Merit tests. For Physical Fitness, I took tennis lessons once or twice a week and practiced on my own. For my Exploration, I traveled to Korea and explored the culture by going to museums and folk villages, as well as visiting a high school. I learned how to plan a trip and the activities for the week I was there. In the process of aiming for the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I have been able to further my skills and explore my role as a citizen of this society.

Emily Guyumjian
Studio City, California
Advisor: Julie Taylor-Vaz

I volunteered with Saving Lives Youth Coalition, a nonprofit organization helping youth by bringing community awareness to youth mental health and addiction issues. I helped educate many students in the San Fernando Valley on prevention issues. For Personal Development, I completed level ten of my piano training. I received the music achievement award with Branch Honors. I improved my dancing and choreography skills immensely, going from not being able to spin correctly to being able to do one of the most difficult moves in ballet with ease. I explored churches and monasteries in Armenia, immersing myself within the culture and language. I thought this was a great experience. Being part of this program made me realize a lot about myself and my own capabilities while immersing myself in the world of others.

Robin Hu

Tarzana, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I dedicated more than 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service in a local hospital, guiding patients, aiding in data input, and maintaining a welcoming environment. I also worked in coding a data sorting program and translating care instructions. For Personal Development, I independently became tri-lingual, progressing with my linguistical analyses of English, Chinese, and Spanish. I analyzed roots and syntax similarities between the three languages, and ultimately improved my speech, verbal, and comprehension skills. For my Physical Fitness goal, I significantly improved my cardiovascular endurance by running 2-5 mile distances daily, measuring HAIC levels as a standard of comparison. My efforts culminated in my Exploration- a five-day trip to Philadelphia, exploring the historical sites, cultural attractions and festivals, but also scientific hotspots and museums. Navigating Philly's public transportation systems and my limited budget, I explored all that Philly has to offer. Through earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I witnessed my multi-faceted capabilities in reaching all the different goals I had once thought too daunting.

Ishan Gaur

Rancho Palos Verdes, California

Advisor: Mitzi Cress

Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours volunteering at Habitat for Humanity. I worked at the ReStore, on builds, and on the management/marketing team. Over the summer, I also organized a donation drive that raised \$25,000 for Habitat. For Personal Development, I worked on my public speaking skills as a Lincoln Douglas and Policy debater, competing in Varsity in both and becoming ranked top 15 in the country for Lincoln Douglas. To improve my Physical Fitness, I trained in calisthenics and yoga. I increased my max reps in various benchmark exercises and developed a holistic competency in yoga. Last, I traveled alone to Dharamsala, in the Himalayan foothills, for my expedition. During the trip, I met with the Dalai Lama for a private audience, that I had applied for the previous year. We had an amazing conversation about poverty and education in developing nations. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal brought me closer to the human experience and instilled in me the burning passion to constantly improve.

Kevin Kim

Agoura Hills, California

Advisor: Judi Craven

For the Congressional Gold Medal, I volunteered at my high school's math tutoring center to aid my peers in any subjects they were struggling in for 4 years. For Personal Development, I participated in the US Naval Sea Cadet Corps and learned more about the US Naval branches. I also further developed leadership skills and time management, progressing in rank in the program over time. For Physical Fitness, I swam nearly every weekday at my swim club team to reach my goal times for certain events. I also participated in my high school swim team. Finally, for my Expedition, I toured Zion National Park for five days with a group of friends. We took care of ourselves and planned out the expedition from start to finish.

Bryce Palmer-Toy

Agoura Hills, California

Advisor: Judi Craven

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

For Voluntary Public Service, I spent several hundred hours tutoring math for free with my school's math honor society, a student organization. I also tutored students at the Boys and Girls Club at a local middle school. For Personal Development, I earned the rank of Eagle Scout with Bronze Palm in my Boy Scout troop. I spent hundreds of hours leading troop activities and camping trips, earning merit badges, and planning and executing my Eagle project, a goat pen and water supply for an animal rescue center. For Physical Fitness, I learned to 360 flip on a skateboard. I spent hundreds of hours learning intermediary tricks such as varial kickflips and 360 pop shove-its, practicing the 360 flip itself, and doing rehabilitative exercises after injuring myself several times. For my Expedition, I planned and participated in a five-day camping trip at Zion National Park with a few friends. While there, we hiked, cooked outdoors, and went birdwatching. Earning my Congressional Award was an amazing experience and encouraged me to pushed myself to new heights.

Blake Peters

Santa Monica, California

Advisor: Tom Crow

Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local library. I became a supervisor volunteer where I was able to guide new volunteers. For Personal Development, I took the practice of Christian Science to the next level by expanding my understanding of my religion. For Physical Fitness, I worked on building up my stamina by jogging. This enabled me to run Cross Country in College. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day, four-night adventure trip to Canada, which included kayaking and canoeing. I covered over fifty miles of the shore of Lake Superior. The experience I had with earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has made me a more selfless person and helped me realize that a true leader is the one who sets a quiet example, does the thankless tasks, and helps guide the ship when it wanders off course.

Chase Pinkerton

Manhattan Beach, California

Advisor: Lauri Reskinoff

I volunteered with the conservation group, Grades of Green, including serving in the Eco Leadership program. I made over 1,000 meals for the homeless and 248 hygiene kits so far with the Lunches with Love program. I also volunteered at soccer camps for the St. Sebastian Sports Project Los Angeles. I focused on developing my interest in technology by learning to code, teaching myself to build a computer, and applying my hardware and software knowledge in a professional setting as an intern for PeerStreet. I also got my first job at Pages: A Bookstore, where I have learned all facets of the job. My Physical Fitness goal was to advance from a beginning to advanced volleyball player. Training year round with a club team, I've developed advanced attacks and plays. This has allowed me to continue to make the highest ranked teams in the region, including placing in the top 5 at Jr. Nationals 4 years in a row. I planned a five-day, five-night exploration of northern France, Paris, and Brussels to experience the different cultures, including the food and architecture. I planned the itinerary, including the daily schedule. I learned how to adjust my plans when what I thought would work did not! This experience was great for me because it helped me to see how much I have grown as a person from when I started the program. In particular with my Personal Development goal, I went from someone who was interested in technology but really didn't know anything about it to actually getting a job in technology, where I did programming that was used for the company. This summer I will attend the California State Summer School for Math and Science (COSMOS) program at U.C. Santa Cruz, which shows how far I have come in my development in technology.

Eric Bui

Cerritos, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

I served my community in a variety of ways for my Voluntary Public Service. I am most proud of the volunteer work I performed at Crittenton Foster Care Services, as I was able to interact and connect with many children from very unfortunate backgrounds. For my Personal Development goal, I worked to improve my fluency in Spanish. I dedicated many hours to hone in my speaking and listening skills in order to carry on a conversation entirely in Spanish. My goal for Physical Fitness was to improve my overall skill in tennis. I practiced the sport for hours everyday, drilling with coaches and rallying with teammates. I also played matches against other players to gain significant amounts of experience. For my Exploration, I traveled to Vietnam. In Vietnam, I visited many historical sites and learned much about its history as well as modern day culture.

Samuel Jon

Cerritos, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at a nearby orphanage. I coordinated sports, crafts, and game events and participated in the activities while putting a smile on the kids' faces and providing them with the happiness they deserve. For Personal Development, I spent over 200 hours studying the Korean language in order to improve my ability to read, write, listen and speak in Korean. I am now prolific at the Korean language. For my Physical Fitness goal, I decided that I would spend of 200 hours improving my basketball skills, specifically my free throws. I was a 70% free throw shooter and gradually increased it 82%. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day trip to Seoul, South Korea. While exploring the country, I got to immerse myself in Korean culture and got the opportunity to eat really delicious food. I had an awesome experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and I am proud of what I accomplished.

Justin Michael Miranda

Cerritos, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Key Club

In the process of earning my Congressional Award Gold medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. Most activity took place at a local orphanage where I entertained and taught the residents a number of activities such as arts & crafts, board games, and sports. I strived to better my debate skills for my Model United Nations program. I worked tirelessly to improve my memorization, eye contact, and structure in order to shape myself into the confident debater I am today. For my Physical Fitness, I dedicated myself to improving my skills on the soccer field. I accomplished this by working on all aspects of the game with additional coaching and on my own, trying harder at practice and deepening my love for the game. For my Expedition, I decided to embark on a camping trip to Sequoia National Park. Throughout the trip, I went on hikes, photographed landmarks, and discovered my love for wildlife and created a memorable experience for myself. I had an amazing and unforgettable experience on my journey of earning the Congressional Award and I realized I am capable of anything.

Christian Park

Cerritos, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at Crittenton Orphanage in Fullerton. I worked with kids while educating them in leadership skills. For Personal Development, I took Korean lessons on the weekends while regularly studying on my own. I have now become a more cultured and fluent Korean speaker. For my Physical Fitness, I worked on improving my free throw percentage in basketball. Initially, I was shooting seventy percent from the field, but was able raise it to eighty percent. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five day expedition to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. While exploring Puerto Vallarta I was able to learn more about the culture, geography, and religion of the local area. Overall, it was a privilege to be able to experience this journey towards the Gold Medal as I have learned the essential skills of being a leader.

Matthew Park
Cerritos, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I volunteered at multiple places such as orphanages and the OC food bank. I collaborated with other people that I met at these volunteering sites to work together to serve the community. To complete my Personal Development goals, I was in a debate group known as the Model United Nations. This group allowed me to debate against other schools to help improve my public speaking. I was also able to work on public speaking when I practiced for my conferences. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I went to the gym to practice my shot for basketball. I also went to the park and played on my free time so that I would be able to improve my shot to become a better shooter. In addition to that, I attended basketball practices and games. To complete my exploration goals, I had to manage my schedule for what I would be doing at the Yucatan Peninsula. In addition to that, once I got to the Peninsula, I had to converse with the people there and it was difficult since I had to overcome language barriers. My overall experience of earning the Congressional Award taught me a lot of life lessons since I had to overcome obstacles that I thought I was not able to overcome.

Joseph Song
Cerritos, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local orphanage center. I worked with the staff and helped provide for displaced and abused children who were at the orphanage. For Personal Development, I dedicated multiple hour sessions throughout the week with my math tutor to perfect my math skills and comprehension. I am now an avid math student and understand more comprehensive of specific math concepts. For Physical Fitness, I practiced my three point shot as well as my free throws everyday at a gym or with my outdoor basketball hoop. I am now an intermediate three point and free throw shooter and have increased my shooting percentages in basketball games. For my Expedition, I traveled to Cancun to put my Spanish skills to the real test. I pushed myself out of my comfort zone to speak to Native speakers and practice my Spanish. I learned about their unique culture and environment and documented my journey.

Dylan Wong

Cerritos, California

Advisor: Elaine Kim

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours at an orphanage to play sports with kids who did not have a family. I tried to make their time as fun as possible, using Spanish I have learned from school to communicate with them. For Personal Development, I attended many leadership training sessions where I studied videos and texts to advance myself as a leader. To test my skills, I staffed at a National Youth Leadership Training session and passed on my knowledge to those younger than me. For Physical Fitness, I spent over 500 hours playing volleyball to better my individual skills and improve my school and club team. At first, I could only pass 10 balls per game, but after a season of work I passed 21.55 balls per game and helped our club team get 5th place in Junior Olympics. Finally, for my Expedition, I hiked 76 miles over the span of 12 days and 11 nights in Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. I experienced being in the middle of a lightning storm and learned how it felt like living without possession of modern technologies. Overall, I learned that I can create a productive and positive environment by being enthusiastic wherever I am, open to helping others and making a difference in the world I live in.

Isaac Chung

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Harry Kim

For Voluntary Public Service, I tutored children at the local community center in mathematics. I worked as an assistant at the rehabilitation center at the St. Jude Hospital. I also helped out with the exhibits at my local children's science center. All of my Personal Development achievements were academic. I prepared for a writing competition, studied vocabulary, and practiced test taking skills for my upcoming SAT. Being part of the cross country and track team required me to run at least an hour a day. My mileage ranged from 4-14 miles depending on what point of the year I was in. I was awarded most improved and held the third fastest times on the team. The Expedition aspect of the award allowed me to travel to many different places. I spent time in the Sequoia Mountains as well as the Canadian Rockies. Preparing these trips gave me insight into what it takes to plan a successful trip. The Congressional Award was a great way for me to grow in all aspects, and I became a more well-rounded person throughout this process.

Chase Jin

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Ryan Chandler, Sr.

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I served the community and earned the President's Volunteer Service Award multiple times. For Personal Development, I practiced to improve my score in the SAT Math 2 Subject test. For Physical Fitness, I trained to become better at pistol shooting. Lastly, for my Expedition, I planned a camping trip that consisted of backpacking up a mountain and camping out for five days.

Livia Johan

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To complete the 400 hours for Voluntary Public Service, I participated in a local student organization to clean up our neighborhood by picking up trash at nearby parks and beaches. In addition, I also helped tutor my neighbor's children in different subjects. For Personal Development, I began learning piano by attending lessons once a week and practicing daily at home. I was eventually able to audition and qualify for National Guild. I completed my Physical Fitness goals through swimming. I swam with a team and practiced daily, which enabled me to drop time from my sprints. I stayed six days in Colorado for my Exploration of the culture there. There, I was out in a more natural setting than California, and I even went fishing for the first time! The Congressional Award taught me that I can give my life more meaning by dedicating myself to doing the things I love, helping people, and going on adventures.

Neil Kamdar

Placentia, California

Advisor: Mark Stanley

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

My Voluntary Public Service consisted of attending Relay for Life events by the American Cancer Society to raise awareness and funds for cancer research. Additionally, I was a tennis instructor for incoming freshmen wanting to try out for my high school tennis team. For Personal Development, I greatly enhanced my public speaking skills as a member of a Toastmasters International Club where I delivered impromptu and planned speeches. I also attended a two week long STEM Robotics Camp and ultimately created an autonomous vehicle capable of navigating obstacles. I completed 200 Physical Fitness hours as a member of my high school tennis Junior Varsity teams, in which I was the Most Valuable Player and the Captain of the JV team and was a league champion for both years. Furthermore, I played club team tennis and won several tennis tournaments. For my Exploration, I planned a week-long trip, from excursions to hotels to airline tickets to Ontario and Quebec, Canada. It was amazing to see British and French legacies harmoniously intertwined as I experienced the unique culture and historical values of Eastern Canada. The experience was greatly enriching as the Congressional Award allowed me learn more about myself and my community by challenging me to go out and push myself to achieve a variety of goals I had set.

Michael Kao

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Robert Muleady

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I worked with local community organizations and my Boy Scout troop to serve members of my city and nearby areas. I truly enjoyed helping to take care of the elderly with food distribution or helping at local charity events, benefiting the community as a whole. For Personal Development, I learned to better play the piano. From months of work, I soon fell in love with classical music and repertoire. For my Physical Fitness goal, I began training for a half-marathon, having previous experience with running before. I now frequently train for half-marathons and marathons from this effort. I planned an immersive trip to France, choosing to stay in an apartment with city residents in Paris instead of traveling as tourists in a hotel. Through planning an experience myself and immersing myself into the language and culture of France, I learned more about the country and myself.

Justin Kim

La Habra, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliation: Key Club

In order to serve my community, I volunteered with Crittenton, a foster care organization that cares for trafficked adolescence from South America. I also took a trip to Quad Cities, Illinois to renovate a group home for adults with special needs. For my Personal Development goal, I pursued my love of music through the piano. After taking classes and at-home practice, I am able to play and read sheet music at an intermediate level. One of the most enjoyable activities was my athletic development. My goal was to lower my 100m time to under twelve seconds. Through dedication, I surpassed my goal and am currently almost running under eleven seconds. My Exploration to the Yucatan Peninsula was an eye-opening experience. The complexity of the ancient Mayan societies as well as their religious beliefs are some of the most unique. Through my achievement of the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I became someone who is willing to actively serve my community, a competitive student athlete, and a more cultured individual.

Minji Kim

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I helped my community through various Voluntary Public Services activities Through Future Young Leaders of American (FYLA) I provided educational prospects for students who could not afford tutoring and attended monthly park and beach cleanups. I have been able to improve dramatically through my efforts in playing a variety of pieces on my guitar. I taught children in my neighborhood how to play simple chords on the guitar and sang songs with them. I played tennis every weekend with my friends and neighbors, practicing my serves and accuracy. Though I have never planned a trip on my own, planning my own camping trip to El Capitan for five days was a great experience. I made a five day reservation ahead of time for a campsite and searched online for the basic supplies.

Joseph Lee

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Dan Moyer

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I regularly had the opportunity to serve food to the homeless. Also, I took part in clean-up efforts around the community, some including parks and beaches. I also spent time doing front-door donations to gather clothes for the homeless. I used my time in my Boy Scout troop to become a friend and mentor to my fellow scouts. I became an Eagle Scout shortly after completing my Eagle Project. I swam once a week to condition myself. In addition, I did personal training to make my body more fit by following my coach's recommendations. I spent five days and four nights in San Francisco. During my Exploration, I attempted to compare and contrast the city's traits with my city's traits. This experience had the most impact because I was able to explore cultural diversity within a city, which is quite unlike my suburban hometown. Completing the Congressional Award was fulfilling because it helped me become mindful of myself and the community at large.

Seungmin Lee

Placentia, California

Advisor: Daniel Mayer

I volunteered at the Youth Leaders of Orange County, where I taught elementary school kids math. For my Personal Development goals, I played the piano and took lessons weekly and also played the clarinet. I was enrolled in the Southern California Youth Philharmonic and was placed first chair in clarinet. In order to complete my Physical Fitness goals, I would practice and train with my coach in order to get better. In order to complete my Exploration goals, I went to South Korea and visited several historical landmarks. I was able to gain knowledge on the old history of South Korea.

Sydney Lee

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Joanne Noh

Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I played music for nursing home residents. I also tutored children at the Fullerton Boys and Girls Club. Additionally, I cleaned and renovated city parks. I took art classes to improve my visual drawing and painting skills for my Personal Development goal. For Physical Fitness, I joined the CF Dance Academy and took hip-hop dance classes. I also did power yoga classes. I planned a trip to San Diego for four nights and five days. I brought my mother, cousin and foreign exchange student. The Congressional Award has planted a drive in me to do whatever I can to assure my community that there will always be a helping hand.

Yongmin Lee

Fullerton, California

Advisor: Dan Moyer

Affiliations: NJROTC

I volunteered at my local park and beach cleanups to help improve the cleanliness of the community. I also helped create and distribute homeless packages to the nearby homeless shelter. I took advantage of the leadership opportunities that were given in the NJROTC program by reading books about leadership and interviewing servicemen to apply to my leadership experience. I worked under model leaders that allowed me to grow individually as an effective leader in NJROTC. I improved my overall fitness by practicing kendo for two days a week, each session consisting of three hours. I sparred with my peers to further enhance my kendo skills and to develop the values this martial art stresses. I had to acquire the necessary supplies in order to meet the goals and expectations of my camping trip. I encountered environmental obstacles during my time at the campsite that I was able to overcome by utilizing all of the supplies that I had in hand. The Congressional Award has given me an opportunity to push myself to the limits and develop individually as an effective leader and citizen.

Matthew Liao

Yorba Linda, California

Advisor: Ed Knutson

To serve my community, I volunteered at the UCI Medical Center. There, I assisted doctors in facilitating a caring environment for patients. I also volunteered as a rifle coach at my shooting range, where I helped youth develop marksmanship, taught them safety, and increased awareness for the sport. For Personal Development, I took weekly piano lessons and practiced on my own to advance my skills and learn progressively more advanced musical pieces from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary periods. To improve my Physical Fitness, I trained thousands of hours to improve my performance in the Olympic sport of rifle shooting. I vastly increased my scores and earned a spot on the U.S. National Junior Rifle Team, and represented Team USA at the 2016 ISSF Rifle and Pistol World Cup. I planned an extensive Exploration of Thailand to immerse myself in a fascinating new culture. I experienced new food, visited multiple temples, drifted through a floating market, and talked to locals to gain more knowledge about life in Thailand. Working towards the Congressional Award pushed me outside of my comfort zone and truly helped me grow as a person through many fulfilling activities.

Steven Lim

La Habra, California

Advisor: Sonja Diaz

For Voluntary Public Service, I assisted and tutored low income students who were struggling in the subject of math. Additionally, I held benefit concerts to raise money for cleft palate surgeries. For my Personal Development goal, I practiced piano daily for three hours to improve my piano skills while participating in multiple recitals and competitions. For Physical Fitness, I ran everyday and practiced pushups and situps to improve and max out on scores for the biannual physical fitness test. For my Exploration portion, I took a five night six day trip to Barcelona to learn about different cultures and monuments of the city.

Derick Ma

Yorba Linda, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

I accumulated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service through hosting and contributing to multiple canned-food drives. I also spent hours volunteering at Hope Center for the Arts to assist in teaching art to mentally disabled adults and build connections with with each and every one of them. For Personal Development, I worked to improve my art techniques through art classes and constant practice. After a few years, I completed a portfolio that helped me get accepted into some of the top art schools in America. As for Physical Fitness, I tracked my pull-up progress. I worked on developing stamina and increasing the amount of pull-ups I could do at once. Finally, for my Exploration, I took a trip to Beijing, China and recorded my experiences there. I stayed for over a week, while visiting historic landmarks, shopping districts and local high schools.

Tony Moon

Fullerton, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley
Affiliations: National Honor Society, YMCA

As an active member of Cooperation Act, I volunteer to help out with fundraising for countries in need. Just recently, we began raising money for victims and families of victims of the earthquake in Chile. In addition to selling chocolate bars, I also raise money through recycling. I attended a figure drawing class at Pasadena Art Center, which exposed me to the artistic view of drawing a human body realistically. I also attended drawing and painting classes on weekends and learned how to draw my imagination and convey the message behind my artwork. For Physical Fitness, I regularly shot at the archery range to practice my shooting distance of 60 meter and was coached by Ki Sik Lee, from USA national archery team. I found out that archery is all about scapula muscle. After getting a coach, I would shoot over 200 arrows to practice shooting. I traveled to different parts of Alabama, such as Birmingham and Monroeville, comparing my heritage with that of people in Alabama. Through this Exploration, I was able to experience the difference between city life and country life of United States. Overall, I realized that true value comes from actively volunteering for communities and continuously reaching for my goals.

Timothy Park
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

I spent my time at St. Jude Medical Center's Clinical Lab and Rehabilitation center to improve workflow and logistics. At the lab, this included delivering samples, organizing and filing paperwork, and at Rehab, I was assigned to assist patients and allow for communication between departments. For Personal Development, I occupied myself with learning computer programming and applying what I learned to real world applications and competitions. I studied Apple's Swift documentation intensively and sought advice from peers and teachers at school who were well-versed in relevant studies. For Physical Fitness, I aimed towards improving my golf game by playing consistently. I played at numerous Orange County and LA county courses regularly, such as Hacienda Golf Club, and competed in local tournaments every so often to maintain form while receiving instruction every week. I familiarized myself with Korean culture and visited several cities in Korea to experience both contemporary Korean culture as well as its roots. At the most basic level, I have gained soft skills necessary to communicate with other students and professionals in the industry under the purpose of giving aid and improving operations. There is no metric for community improvement; improved health, bridled optimism, and productive workflow may be treated as distinct measures to the any organization's operations, but they're not things I, as a lowly volunteer and student, am able to fathom. It is the small things that I have experienced — the encounters, the aid, the friendships, the immersion into my work — that lets me know I have made a difference.

Landon Reekstin
Yorba Linda, California
Advisor: Robert Martin

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked with several agencies including the All-American Boys Chorus, the City of Yorba Linda, Mary's Kitchen homeless center, the Butterfly House in St. Louis, and a special needs orphanage in Peru to complete over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work. For Personal Development, I focused on developing my musical skills through participation in vocal and instrumental programs including the All-American Boys Chorus, jazz band, and various musical theater productions both onstage and in the orchestra. For my Physical Fitness goal, I worked to develop my skills in football, basketball, and tennis. I greatly improved in all three of these sports, but especially in tennis, where I advanced from being a novice to a competitive player. For my Expedition, I participated in a six day rafting trip in Idaho with Outward Bound. I not only developed my leadership skills in guiding my group down the river, but learned how to live in the wilderness without the comforts of home, something I had never really experienced before. I enjoyed all aspects of the Congressional Award program and appreciate how it challenged me and helped me to become a more selfless leader.

Scott Kim

Temecula, California

Advisor: Gregory Alix

Affiliations: American Red Cross, National Honor Society

Volunteering for my community was more of a hobby than a requirement. By helping my community with friends and family, the work suddenly became more fun than labor-focused. While sticking to a weekly routine of volunteering on some days, the hours began to stack. Exploring new areas of which I had no experience in was not in my comfort zone. But by exploring more of the unknown, I had realized that there was never an end to what I could learn and excel in. Physical Fitness was very important to me, as keeping myself motivated and moving kept my body healthy. By playing multiple sports, as well as doing drills, I was able to keep myself in shape as well as happy. Exploring the history behind my ancestors was very eye-opening. To learn about what my bloodline struggled through and survived in order to create the life I have now : Impressive. The Congressional Award forces students to explore more than what our phone screens have - the outside world. The Award pushes students to become a better, more well-rounded person.

Sihan Chen

Irvine, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

I volunteered a total of 416 hours of service under the direction of Future Young Leaders of America and Chinese Club. I helped translate English documents to Chinese for parents of international students to read. In addition, I voluntarily assisted primary school students with their homework. For Personal Development, I spent a total of 325 hours in learning a second language --- Spanish. I self-studied new vocabularies, grammar, and many conventional phrases, I am now able to communicate freely with my neighbor who only speaks Spanish. Outside of school, I play tennis. In two years I have played 250+ hours with my friends and coaches. I self-planned a 16-day exploration trip to Tibet. I learned a lot about the Tibetan culture and their religion and explored many lakes and mountains, including Lake Nam and the Base Camp of Mr. Everest. Participating in the Congressional Award taught me a lot of valuable skills. I learned to step out of my comfort zone and to try out things I would have never experience.

Jenna Chu

Mission Viejo, California

Advisor: Melanie Maiona

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the U.S.

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I dedicated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to Discovery Cube Orange County and Ocean Institute. At these two non-profit organizations, I educated both the public and elementary school children about STEM topics. For Personal Development, I spent two years taking piano lessons to perfect five level 10 music pieces. Learning music is a long process, but I am now an advanced musician. For Physical Fitness, I improved my shot accuracy in lacrosse to 75%. I practiced up to two hours a day with my high school lacrosse team, and also trained independently through conditioning exercises such as cardio and weights. Finally, I took an Exploration trip to Taiwan to develop my language skills. Immersed in a completely different environment, I learned more about my family history and personal culture. The Congressional Award tested not only my physical, but also mental endurance to persevere through challenging situations.

Sang Chun

Irvine, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I volunteered in a non-profit organization named PAVA (Pacific American Volunteer Association). I completed activities such as beach clean up in order to help others. I am in the Crean Lutheran Orchestra and Mr. Pratt was able to help me sharpen my Violin skills. As I practiced more, my seating in orchestra was going up. I played in the Crean Lutheran Golf Team and worked with my coach to improve my Golf skills. My coach and I worked with alignment sticks in order to fix my swing. For my Exploration, I visited the Jeju Island in South Korea. It was extremely difficult to design all of the trip myself since it is the first time I am designing a trip, but I pushed through it and therefore made it possible.

Melody Lee

Irvine, California

Advisor: Michael Kim

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I held bi-weekly meetings on campus through an organization called Global Medical Missions Alliance. Students learned how to take vitals and even suture. I also planned several medical mission trips to Mexico, Honduras and most recently, Cambodia. For Personal Development, I worked on learning to love “wide.” I achieved this by hospice volunteering, nanny-ing, tutoring elementary to high school students, and seeking mentors. I now have a minor in Medical Humanities and hope to continue learning how to love and humanize people in medicine. For my Physical Fitness portion, I worked on getting myself out more by hiking regularly as well as working on my basketball shots to play better with my church friends. From maybe making a single shot from the free-throw line, I can now consistently shoot ten baskets in a row! Finally, I explored rural cities within the Philippines. This was a very new experience for me as I was born in the major city of Seoul, South Korea, and was raised in Irvine, California, another city most people consider a huge “bubble.” I learned of the incredibly hospitable culture there. The journey of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been very fulfilling in the ways I know it has helped me become a well-rounded, hard-working, more intentionally-loving student.

Kuanting Ling

Irvine, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

For Voluntary Public Service, I attended community clean-up events regularly and I also continue to sort, organize, and process food items that go to those in need. For Personal Development, I have studied textbooks and public speaking on my own time to advance myself as a presenter. To improve my Physical Fitness, I played basketball regularly. I spend a minimum of five times a week practicing my shooting, defense, and dribbling. Lastly, for my Expedition, I camped at the Pinecrest Center and explored the area.

Suyeon (Su) Kim

Irvine, California

Advisor: Daniel Moyer

As a member of Milal, I assisted kids and adults with disabilities. I also played games, completed art projects, and made crafts with the disabled kids and adults. I wanted to improve their quality of life. Following my passion and interest, I regularly spent time outside of school to practice the guitar, solve math problems, and read science journals. To get into varsity soccer team, I focused on footworks and shooting drills with my private coach over the summer. During the school year, I focused on strength and conditioning to get fit for the season. I visited TongYeong in South Korea to discover the rich culture and history of Korea. By planning out the whole trip, reserving hotels for the first time, buying plane tickets, and taking the plane by myself for the first time, I gained tremendous amount of independence and confidence in myself. I thank the Congressional Award because I became a more-mature young woman through my overall experience in earning the Gold Medal.

Karina Seth

Irvine, California

Advisor: Preeti Hurd

Affiliation: National Honor Society

To fulfill my Voluntary Public Service requirements, I aided in a lab at the University of California, Irvine, where I helped a graduate student and his principal investigator research the effects of dopamine signaling on subjects with chronic pain. For Personal Development, I worked in the local Youth Leadership Council at a nonprofit children's museum, Pretend City. As a part of the YLC, I developed my leadership and public speaking skills. To complete my Physical Fitness hours, I consistently worked to improve my long jump and high jump records in track and field. I practiced at our school's jump pits after practice and did my own strength training. My long jumps improved by half a foot, and my high jumps improved by two inches. For my Exploration, I planned a seven day trip around the Netherlands. My family and I traveled through Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Zaanse Schans, Rotterdam, Delft and Rotterdam. We learned so much about the unique Dutch culture and saw beautiful flowers, which the Dutch are known for! My experiences working towards the Congressional Award have heightened my capacity for learning and growth.

Caiqi Wei

Irvine, California

Advisor: Jason Wheatley

Affiliations: Key Club

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work with orphanages in Mexico, teaching them new science experiments and cooking delicious hot dogs with them. I also work at Discovery Cube to help kids learning new materials through different exhibits. For my Personal Development, I was involved in the International Bridge Building competition and successfully earned international 6th place out of fifty other competitors. I found interest in designing my own models, where I spent numerous nights and days creating the bridge image and bringing it to life. Even though I was not an athletic person, after I set my goal, I worked out every other day to get my body fit and to reach my goal. It also got me to control my food consumption, even after I still exercise daily to keep up my body fitness. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-night trip in England. While in the U.K., I experienced different cultures and saw different histories. Overall, I had a stunning experience in earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and learned that if I try and keep it up what I want to do, one day I can successfully complete my goals with passion and pride.

Daniel Park

Anaheim, California

Advisor: Mary Binford

For Voluntary Public Service, I worked in street missions and managed my street mission club, Precious People. Throughout the completion of the program, I spent to over 30 days of LA missions and implemented new services, such as haircuts, food, and clothes for the homeless population. For Personal Development, I practiced my writing skills online on Writing Company and wrote articles to my local news outlet. This was very helpful because my writing improved a lot and some of my articles were even published on the news. The Physical Fitness part of the program became a daily life habit of mine. I began to lift 5-6 times a week and improved my lifts. Not only did I develop physically, I developed mentally and became a stronger individual. Finally for my Exploration, I traveled to Barcelona, Spain and explored the ancient culture of the country. The trip, starting from the buying the tickets and ending to the flight back home, was very mind enriching. We visited museums, cultural parks, and cities to explore Barcelona's culture. The Congressional Award program allowed me to explore myself in ways I never would have pushed myself to. I am really glad I participated in the Congressional Award.

Edward Jung
Cypress, California
Advisor: Jason Wheatley

I volunteered at a local organization that had the ultimate goal of impacting under-represented minorities in neighboring countries. As an avid speech and debate student, For Personal Development, I spent hours on crafting my persuasive skills. Eventually, I found myself matching and surpassing personal goals. As I have been a soccer player for the greater part of my life, I find great pleasure in developing every part of my game. From the passes to the shots, I am constantly trying to improve overall accuracy percentages. Consequently, I became more than an individual; I become a team player. Embarking on a flight to South Korea, I explored ties to my cultural and ancestral roots. The Congressional Award is truly a landmark award that recognizes hard work and effort.

Joshua Moon
Buena Park, California
Advisor: Hyun Lee
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered at an organization called the Young Leaders of Orange County. Here, I tutored financially underprivileged students from second to seventh grade in math and vocabulary. I served as a team leader and the Vice President of this organization. For Personal Development, I founded the Chess Club at my school. I led meetings as the President of this club and even held multiple schoolwide tournaments. I played volleyball for my school for four years. I played JV my freshman year and Varsity during my sophomore, junior, and senior years. I served as captain for the last two years of playing volleyball. My Boy Scout troop, Troop 111, wanted to attend a summer Boy Scout camp as we had not done so for a while. Therefore, I, as the senior patrol leader, worked with my Scoutmaster to organize a one-week program at Camp Tahquitz with our troop of twelve scouts.

Alexandra Gomez
Costa Mesa, California
Advisor: Hulya Odabasoglu

For Voluntary Public Service, I collected donations for my local women's shelter by calling various stores for excess merchandise. I also volunteered with the same women's shelter as a donation helper and went door to door asking for possible donations. For my Personal Development goal, I became fluent in French through tutoring and practice. For Physical Fitness, I attended a dance class four times week. I also practiced my dance technique in the dance studio, for multiple hours a week. Lastly, I planned a five day trip for my family and to visit the Grand Canyon. I have gained the amazing opportunity to become an influential member in my community and have learned so much!

Tiffany Ngan
Huntington Beach, California
Advisor: Kevin Fairman

I spent Friday nights teaching children Karate at the local community center, spear-headed the Music Student Service League to bring music as therapy to senior citizens and volunteered at the pediatric unit at Fountain Valley Hospital throughout my high schools years for my volunteer services, My Personal Development goals included learning how to knit, then sending my knittings to the "Knit-a-Square" foundation that makes blanket for under-privileged children in Africa. By joining my school's ASB as my other Personal Development goal, I gained collaboration and leadership skills. Not an athletic type, I utilized the "moves" app, downloaded onto my phone, to keep track of my steps. By setting new goals at each level, I went up to 3000 steps/day and continue to increase. This was most helpful as I probably walk more than 10,000 steps/day now at UC Berkeley! Planning a two weeks trip to Turkey was tremendously educational. I grew up and matured along with my Congressional Award experiences; now ready to face the next phase of my life at UC Berkeley.

Robbie Robison

Newport Beach, California

Advisor: Richard Colarossi

Affiliation: Discovery Bound NLC

Through the process of achieving the Gold Medal, I volunteered at a local public library, served as a counselor in training at a camp in Colorado where I led hikes, mountain bike rides, did trail work, planned activities, did tons of dishes, and worked with campers. I even helped at an Air Museum. To complete the Personal Development segment of the Gold Medal, I set goals in different hobbies and interests of mine like Scuba Diving, Racing Drones, Motocross, and Religion. These goals really pushed me to be the best that I could in each of these areas. In achieving the Gold Medal, I not only became fitter, but I renewed my love for Mountain Biking while giving me a greater appreciation for the amazing place that I live in. The Expedition section of the Gold Medal pushed me to utilize my leadership skills by planning and executing a 5 day / 4 night trip of a lifetime up the coast of California and inland to Yosemite. It was an amazing experience and encouraged me to plan more trips in the future. Overall, this has been an absolutely amazing experience for me. I really appreciate how it pushed me to do things that I otherwise would not have done. I really noticed an improvement in my leadership skills and an overall boost in my self-confidence. Thank you so much!

Elena Crespo

Stanford, California

Advisor: Lisa Davey

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA

I mentored younger girls and facilitated service projects that improved education opportunities for children in Latin America. My projects included building a computer lab in Panama, a hearing aid lab in Bolivia, and a lending library in Nicaragua. I interned for the City of Del Mar and gained an appreciation for the trials and tribulations of local governance. I researched and developed policies on issues including homelessness and public safety. I incorporated bike riding into my daily activities, a decision that improved my cardiovascular health. Additionally, I began running to allow variety in my schedule. This allowed me to become healthier at a time when many new college students gain weight. I have always deeply identified with my Bolivian heritage, as I greatly resemble that side of my family and have often visited them. However, I spent two weeks in Germany and Poland meeting relatives on the other side of my family and learning about their culture. This experience has broadened my focus on the importance of holistic self-improvement and improved my ability to set goals in a variety of areas.

Brianna Jahangiri
San Juan Capistrano California
Advisor: Kelly Chapman
Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 public service hours. I founded my own charity, Participate 2 Educate, which donates school supplies to underprivileged children at local elementary schools, The Boys and Girls Club, and to orphanages in South America and the Middle East. For Personal Development, I served as a member of the San Juan Capistrano City Council on the Youth Advisory Board, representing the youth in my community and working to ensure their needs and concerns are heard. I have served on the executive board for the last two years. To complete my Physical Fitness hours, I joined the Santa Margarita Catholic High School volleyball team, and A4 Volleyball's club team. I am currently a member of the Santa Margarita Catholic High School Varsity Track and Field team, competing in the 800-meter run, Shot Put, and Discus throw. Finally, I planned a 5-day Expedition for five people and hiked to the peak of Mt. Whitney, the tallest mountain in the contiguous United States. Throughout this three year process, I have grown as an individual and have learned the ways in which hard work pays off. By dedicating over 1000 hours to this award, I have developed leadership skills and a love for serving others.

Luke Ciaglia Lindgren
Rancho Santa Fe, California
Advisor: Laurine Maldonado
Affiliations: Youth Service America

I participated in community service with a number of organizations. The two most memorable organizations are the Elfin Forrest Recreational Reserve, where I was the first under-eighteen docent, and Teen Volunteers in Action, where I served on the Leadership Council. I had a summer job, where I learned Python, C and C++ to sort microprocessor manufacturing data. After this job, I worked at a biotech firm implementing a patient database. I continued practicing Tang Soo Do at my dojo, where I had earned my 3rd Degree Black Belt. I won a study-abroad in Siena, Italy and extended the trip to explore more on my own. I was able to learn proper Italian, attend the Palio, drove a Vespa and learned how to make olive oil with my host family. The Congressional Award taught me how to be a more well-rounded person and expanded my interests to those that inspire me and benefit the community at large.

Nathan Bierle

Temecula, California

Advisor: Robert Rasband

Affiliations: Civil Air Patrol

I volunteered at a local horse ranch, Round-up Hope, which works with special needs kids as well as rescue horses. It was extremely rewarding to see both the kids and horses excel in their own ways. For Personal Development, I led an advanced robotics camp pushing both my leadership skills and the challenges with computer programming. I gained much confidence in both areas, allowing the entire camp to run smoothly. Through Physical Fitness, I pushed myself to my limits in cross training in swimming, biking, and running with my main focus on placing in the top five at a local 5K run, which I achieved. The training encouraged me to be more competitive and to put everything into each competition. The Expedition category pushed me to my limits through the planning and execution of a five day trip to Reno, Nevada for the National Air Racing Championships. It development my confidence in driving, making reservations, researching different areas, and understanding of aircraft systems. My overall experience in the Congressional Award Program helped me develop skills and gain knowledge for my life as well as learning to push my limits and believe in myself.

Dylan Esposito

Temecula, California

Advisor: Susan Bierle

For Voluntary Public Service, I completed my Eagle Scout project by restoring the school's garden at my elementary school. I also volunteered at the Feed America program in San Diego, California packing food for families in need of nutritious food. For Personal Development, I taught myself how to play the guitar. I researched songs I wanted to learn to play on YouTube and using my cell phone, I would practice with my guitar. Once I learned how to play the music, I played the songs to my high school teachers. My interest in swimming, particularly the butterfly stroke, drove me to completion in this area. By practicing many hours in the pool, I earned my personal best, a goal I had set for myself. My Exploration took me to Sacramento, California where I learned about the history, state government and architecture of the capital of my state. Standing in turn of the century style buildings, walking in restored train compartments and touring the state capitol building gave me a clear understanding of California's past. By participating in the Congressional Award program, I learned to set personal goals and challenge myself on many levels.

Jamie Kana
Poway, California
Advisor: Mary Erickson
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

For my Congressional Award, I completed 450 hours of community service in four countries. I helped develop sustainable coffee farming infrastructure in Costa Rica, worked with Haitian refugees and helped build a school in the Dominican Republic. The great thing about the Congressional Award is that it took advantage of the activities I was already participating in. I love all things musical so I was in the Glee Club, the Drum Line, the choir and also participated in my high school's musical performances! For my award, I continued my life-long participation in cheerleading. Starting with Flag Cheer in Pop Warner, I grew my skills through high school where I was a Base, Back Spotter and Varsity Cheer Captain. The Exploration component of my award was the most challenging. I planned a trip to New York City to experience high-density urban life and culture. It was even more crazy than I imagined! The Congressional Award challenged me to learn and grow outside of the traditional classroom and extracurricular activities!

Eric Bear
Golden, Colorado
Advisor: Mr. Miten Patel
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I dedicated 519 hours of Voluntary Public Service to Morgridge Academy, a K-8 school for chronically-ill children on the National Jewish Hospital campus in Denver, CO. I tutored students in STEM topics and devoted my Eagle Scout project to collecting school supplies and books from my community of Golden, my neighborhood and my school. I initiated and led an Experiential Learning program for the students in collaboration with Colorado Outward Bound, now a part of the curriculum with the goal of cultivating confidence in the outdoors, leadership skills, and teamwork. For Personal Development, I played an active role on my Mock Trial team for four years in high school, continually working on analysis of the case and public speaking; our team won the State Championship in 2017 and we went to Nationals. Finally, I played soccer on my school's Varsity team, competing as a Center Back and maintaining endurance and strength year-round for Physical Fitness, and backpacking a 70-mile Expedition with my fellow scouts on a 12-day Philmont trek cemented the importance of preparedness and accountability.

Chase McCleary
Colorado Springs, Colorado
Advisor: Stan Lambros
Affiliations: National Honor Society, YMCA

For Voluntary Public Service, I distributed meals, mail, and clothing to the homeless. I was also a Teen Court peer panel judge, a VocalID ambassador, and a Little League coach for underserved youth. Finally, I created a community service website, the first of its kind for any Colorado high school and easy to use for kids of all ages. I greatly improved my batting average and fielding percentage by attending clinics and playing on my school's varsity team. I also developed my speaking skills by competing on my high school's varsity speech and debate team and as an elected mayor as part of the Colorado Boys State program. Playing soccer year round on club and high school varsity teams and in various tournaments, I increased shooting and passing percentages as well as overall endurance. I spent a week on my own exploring Cleveland, Mississippi in an investigative journalism trip, studying reports of racial segregation at two high schools. I drove from Colorado and then biked through the city interviewing citizens of all ages, races, and genders. I published my findings online. I highly recommend to all high school students that they undertake the challenges of the Congressional Award based on what it has taught me about myself and about what I am capable of doing to make myself a better person and to help my community be a better place.

Evelyn Bodoni
Centennial, Colorado
Advisor: Ms. Lisa Wiese

For Voluntary Public Service I have co-established a non-profit organization, the Colorado Wheelchair Fencing Foundation. My main task within this organization was to coach wheelchair fencing to physically challenged children. I was involved in a myriad of activities for Personal Development. The most enjoyable one was preparing for the Colorado State Geography Bee and the United States Geography Olympiad. For the Physical Fitness requirement, I improved my technique in ballroom dancing: American Rhythm (Cha-Cha, Rumba, Swing, Bolero, and Mambo) and American Smooth (Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, and Viennese Waltz). In all these dances, I achieved proficiency in Gold Level III. For my Exploration, I travelled to Germany where I visited the Bavarian Castles of King Ludwig II and the fortifications on the Rhine Valley. While there are some similarities between these structures, it is the numerous differences that make them fascinating. My participation in the Congressional Award Program empowered me with confidence that I can get any project rolling and inspired me to achieve excellence at anything I put my mind to.

Joseph Soto
Aurora, Colorado
Advisor: Monique Taylor
Affiliation: National Honor Society; JROTC

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I was honored to help students from my neighborhood in Aurora, Colorado prepare for interviews, college essays, resumes, and scholarship applications. I also led volunteer events as a member of National Honor Society and Air Force Junior ROTC. To complete my Personal Development goals, I was fortunate enough to help lead a great debate team in high school. I was also Colorado's only White House Intern in the summer of 2013, and I also served as President of External Affairs, in charge of over a \$24 million budget at the University of Colorado. I incorporated walking into every part of my life and regularly walked three miles more than I normally would have without having set that as my Physical Fitness goal. To complete my Exploration, I was blessed enough to be able to travel to Minneapolis and spend time exploring the diversity of experiences and perspectives present there. I enjoyed the giant mural of Bob Dylan in downtown and Lake Nokomis especially. The Gold Medal may have my name on it, but the community of people that raised me allowed me to be able to earn this award in the first place, deserve so much of the credit. My mom helped me afford my internship at the White House. My father was always willing to give me free rides to school extracurricular events. Both grandfathers helped me fund my trip to Minneapolis. Teachers pushed me to write more and read more. Friends supported and encouraged me when I was frustrated into almost giving up. Monique Taylor, my adviser, was flexible with her time and attention in helping me with all of my goals over the past ten years. None of us reach success alone, and I am one of many testaments to that.

Jason Zhang
Highlands Ranch, Colorado
Advisor: Ellis Monash

To earn my Congressional Award, I volunteered for more than 400 hours at Brookdale Nursing home for dementia patients. I helped the staff entertain the residents. I played musical instruments and helped with bingo and other activities. I played the piano and took art classes on my own time. I improved my art and music skills and increased my patience and concentration. I swam for the Highlands Ranch Seahawks and for my high school swim team. I greatly improved my swim times and swam on the varsity team this year. I planned a camping trip through southern Colorado, where I took photos of wildlife, hiked, fished, and camped. I learned to chop wood, clean fish, how to start a fire and cook over it. I had a great experiences in the different activities and plan to continue with everything as much as I can.

Katherine Wood

Arvada, Colorado

Advisor: Katie Price

Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC, Girl Scouts of the USA

One of the most impactful places I was able to volunteer was when I went to Guatemala with the National Leadership Council. There, I volunteered at an after school program that taught kids English. The kids changed my life by showing me how even if you have nothing you can always share joy. For Personal Development, I improved my violin technique by taking violin lessons once a week and practicing on my own. To showcase my progress I auditioned for the all county and all state orchestras. For Physical Fitness, I trained and competed with my cross country team. I was able to decrease my 5k time throughout my time doing cross country. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a trip to Arizona and New Mexico, where we went to Canyon de Chelly and Chaco Canyon. We went camping, on hikes, and learned a lot at the National Parks. Planning this trip taught me about how much work goes into travelling. Earning the Congressional Award has been an amazing experience and has taught me how to be dependable and organized.

Dylan Rispoli

Windsor, Connecticut

Advisor: Suzanne Willette

Affiliations: HOBY, National Honor Society

During my Congressional Award journey, I had the opportunity to address the issue of food insecurity in my local area through my efforts with Foodshare, and to focus on youth development and empowerment by working with the Connecticut Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Organization (CT HOBY). For Personal Development, I focused on improving my public speaking and argumentation abilities, which led me to join and to fall in love with my school's Mock Trial program. To improve my level of Physical Fitness, I joined my school's cross country and outdoor track teams. I improved my 800-meter and 1600-m race times dramatically, in addition to running my first half marathon. For my Gold Medal Expedition, I organized a five-day camping trip in the White Mountains with my stepdad David. As my first ever backpacking experience, this trip ignited a newfound love for exploration and adventure in me that has inspired me to pursue new challenges and opportunities each day.

Paul Peruzzi

Greenwich, Connecticut

Advisor: Sunny Koo

To earn my Congressional Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service as both a founding member and President of Teen-Works. I helped disadvantaged children, provided emergency relief, and supported recycling and sustainability. For Personal Development, I learned the skills of beekeeping, organic gardening and healthy cooking. I designed and conducted a research project about the presence of pesticides in honey and pollen. In Physical Fitness, I participated in varsity and club swim teams, and I practiced daily weight training to improve my strength, muscle tone and overall fitness. For my Expedition, I planned a seven-night fishing expedition to Idaho where I learned fly fishing, fished on famous rivers and went hiking and trail biking. Overall, the experiences I had earning my Gold Medal reinforced my aspirations to make a difference and contribute to my community.

John Wechsler

Greenwich, Connecticut

Advisor: Tammy Livermore

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I co-founded a service organization, TeenWorks, with my two sisters. TeenWorks creates a volunteer network of high school and middle school students in the tri-state area who undertake various local, domestic, and international service projects. For my Personal Development I strove to broaden my financial accumen through internships at a hedge fund, trading floor of a major bank, and a Fortune 500 pharmaceutical company. This development prepared me to successfully earn a degree in finance and economics. Along with working on Physical Fitness in the gym to reach my goals, I trained five days a week as a lacrosse goalie honing my skills to lead my varsity lacrosse team to win three consecutive New York state championships. For my Expedition I planned a 5 day camping trip with my friends which taught me survival skills including catching fish, building and cooking over a fire, water filtration, pitching a tent, and navigation. This experience earning my Gold Medal taught me lessons that I will carry with me my whole life while at the same time creating value for my surrounding community.

Akhil Rao

Newark, Delaware

Advisor: Ms. Kristina Tulowitzki

Affiliations: HOBY, National Honor Society

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service at our local hospitals in Delaware. As a hospital volunteer I aided sick patients at Christiana Care and served our veterans at the VA hospital. For Personal Development, I took independent and challenging Creative Writing courses outside of school. I now craft creative essays and also write the monthly newsletters for the local Explorer Post. As for my Physical Fitness activity, I decided to train for Track. I began with one mile in 7:11 minutes, gradually increasing my speed to finish a mile in 5:58 minutes. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a five-night camping trip in the Acadia National Park. While camping, we went on several exciting hikes and biking trips filled with marvelous views of forested cliffs, mountains, lakes and wildlife. Participating in the Congressional Award was an amazing and enjoyable experience filled with incredibly special and meaningful moments that taught me endurance and inspired me to achieve so much more.

Sean Myers

Pensacola, Florida

Advisor: Greg Robichaud

I did the majority of my 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with my Army Junior ROTC (AJROTC) program and the Pensacola Police Department Explorer program. To name a few of the activities, I helped raise awareness for first-responders and assisted special-needs children within the community. My Personal Development goal was to improve my leadership abilities by leading my AJROTC unit. Throughout my four years in Tate High School's program, I was chosen to be the Battalion Commander and I have a true understanding of what it means to be a leader and how important integrity is. For my Physical Fitness goal, I wanted to be able to run a 5:30 mile and be able to bench my body weight. By the end of this program, I was running 6 minute miles and I was benching 130 lbs of my 140 lbs goal. The last part of my journey was an Expedition to Blackwater State Forest. During the Expedition, I learned how to make numerous different traps and several shelters. It was a very insightful experience as it allowed me ample time to reflect on myself. The Congressional Award program showed me what I can do when I set my mind to it, and helped to set a long-term goal throughout high school.

Diamond Jackson

Atlantic Beach, Florida

Advisor: Kathy Christensen

Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

In earning the Congressional Gold Award, I volunteered at several organizations completing over 400 Voluntary Public Service hours, including: USO, Habitat for Humanity, and the Humane Society. For Personal Development, I developed sewing skills making accessories and custom designer clutch bags. I also became a leader, empowering women on the Generation Wow Leadership Team and became immersed in different cultures in Metro-Town. For Physical Fitness, I trained for 5ks and accomplished 7. I did kinetic fitness and learned the guidelines of nutrition. Finally, for my Expedition I planned five days and four-night trip discovering different ecosystems in Panama City. I learned about endangered species and hiked where wild boar live. Through the Congressional Award program, I learned I am stronger, powerful and confident. I can do anything.

Jozie Martinez

Jacksonville, Florida

Advisor: Kathy Christensen

Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by coaching young girls in cheerleading for a local organization. I attended practice and games, helping choreograph dance routines and cheers. We placed 2nd in the nation for our division. For Personal Development, I worked on-site at a local Humane Society taking safety and training courses to care for the animals housed there. I also worked at a pre-school earning my CPR/First Aid and 45 Hour Child Care Certifications. For my Physical Fitness, I wanted to build muscle strength and speed to improve my performance in my varsity sports as well as maintain my fitness in college. My senior year I participated in bowling, softball, track and field, and flag football, lettering in all of them. During college I utilized the school gym. I spent 5 days exploring the different ecosystems in the Florida Panhandle for my Expedition. We toured the Gulf Specimen Aquarium, took a guided tours through St. Andrews and Torreya State Parks, and explored the local beach. These ecosystems were home to many aquatic wildlife. The experience from the Congressional award has granted me opportunities in pursuing a career in Animal Science and Medicine.

Mulleak Pitts

Jacksonville, Florida

Advisor: Kathy Christianson

Affiliation: for Humanity

For Voluntary Public Service, I helped build two-story apartments for Beaches Habitat for humanity. It felt amazing to be apart of building houses for people in need. I also, tutored K-5 kids at a local education center. To reach my Personal Development goal, I hired a tutor to pursue my dreams of playing the piano. I am now able to play some of my favorite songs. For Physical Fitness, I was motivated to enhance my speed to improve my mile time. I also played basketball for numerous amount of hours to help improve my skill level. Lastly, I planned a 5 day and 4 nights Expedition all across the West Coast of Florida, I took tours, hiked, explored caves, and was exposed to different types of ecosystems. In conclusion, I am very grateful to have the opportunity to be apart of the 2018 Congressional Award class. Not only has it educated me on the environment I live around , but it has showed me that I am capable of doing so much more then I limited myself to in the past.

Kiara Watts

Jacksonville, Florida

Advisor: Kathy Christensen

Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

In order to earn my Congressional Award , I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I tutored many children at local community centers. I also organized various activities for the children as soon as they got out of school. For Personal Development, I obtained my first job at McDonalds. This helped me gain good customer service and communication skills. This first job also helped obtain my second job at Publix. Physical Fitness was one of the biggest challenges for me because I am not athletic. I created a walking club to help me train for a 5K race. I devoted many hours out after school walking around a track. I also met with a nutritionist many times with my mother to help us pick up better eating habits The Expedition goal was to explore various ecosystems in Florida. The Congressional Award was a once in a life time experience and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Alexis Williams

Atlantic Beach, Florida

Advisor: Kathy Christenson

Affiliations: AmeriCorps NCCC, Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I spent countless hours working with children in the education center surrounding low-income families for Beaches Habitat for Humanity. From tutoring to creating a safe place for the children after school and even building Habitat homes. I also volunteered with the National Honor society in Jacksonville. For Personal Development, I participated in many theater productions and participated in a Junior Achievement financial literacy program. That led to me being a part of a self-made business, and participating in a fundraising event as a JA Girl's Emcee for multiple years. My Physical Fitness goal was to complete a 5k race and build endurance. Yoga, tennis, walking, having a personal trainer and swimming helped me reach my these goals. I feel great and try to remain active. I explored the many ecosystems of North-West Florida for my Expedition. I experienced things I've never done back home. This experience helped me discover my passion for education; I continue to volunteer around the University of Central Florida and I am actively involved in the Educators Rising (FEA) organization and the Education College Council while participating in the STEP program.

Abhinav Dhulipala

Orlando, Florida

Advisor: Hilmi Isikli

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

To accomplish my Voluntary Public Service goal, I volunteered with the Boy Scouts, VA, my rowing team, and the Orlando Science Center. At the Science Center, I taught children and helped maintain the exhibits. At the VA I chatted with patients and helped them navigate the E-vet system to get to their appointments. For Personal Development goals, I learned Spanish via Pimsleur on my long commute to and from school. I also studied rigorously for the SAT and achieved my targets for both. For my Physical Fitness goals I trained to achieve my goal split of 1:58 for a 2k on the erg. I practiced 3 hours a day, 6 days a week and eventually reached my goal. For my Expedition/Explorations requirement I completed the Philmont hike, a ten day high-altitude BSA adventure camp. I trained every week to condition my body for the high altitude. I also planned and made spreadsheets to buy the lightest and cheapest gear. Working on four separate program areas concurrently, along with a heavy course load at school taught me the importance of prioritization and time management.

Ashay Stephen

Orlando, Florida

Advisor: Thomas Hale

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I actively participated in every volunteering opportunity I could through my Boy Scout troop. This included being the color guard at memorial ceremonies, running fundraisers, and hosting 5ks. All of these activities helped enable me to be a better citizen. To achieve my Personal Development section, I played the cello as a soloist and with my school's string orchestra. I was selected for my school district's All-County Orchestra and won second place in the Orlando Music Club's concerto competition. I kept myself physically fit by rowing with my local crew team. Our team has 3 hour practices, 6 days a week filled with intense strength and conditioning training. I placed 3rd at the Florida State Championships. To meet my Expedition goals, I took a trip to Northern California. My family and I visited the Muir Woods, Yosemite, and Lassen National Park. We were able to rent a cabin and do day hikes to experience this diverse region of the country to the fullest.

Faiza Ahmed

Jensen Beach, Florida

Advisor: Samia Ferraro

Affiliations: Big Brothers Big Sisters, Key Club, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award, I volunteered over 100 hours at my local library and completed the rest of my hours volunteering for a nonprofit named Stand UP Foundation. For Personal Development, I explored music theory and learned how to deliver the best performance by playing piano. To complete the Physical Fitness portion, I aided my local rowing team as a coxswain, but also participated in workouts and trained to complete various 5K running races. Finally, I ventured to a local farm for my Expedition. I aided in the care of animals and spent time away from the city and its subsequent technologies. This award taught me to push myself to my limits and to be the very best that I can be.

Walker Atterbury
Palm City, Florida
Advisor: Barbara Clifton
Affiliation: American Red Cross

To complete the Voluntary Public Service portion of the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I spent over 400 hours with the American Red Cross Youth Group of Martin County. I helped organized soup kitchens, smoke alarm installations, and camps for kids aged 10-15 that taught disaster services and leadership skills. For my Personal Development goal, I pursued a part time job working with a local realtor office to learn marketing skills. I spent my time working at open houses and in the field learning how to deploy marketing aspects in various ways. My Physical Fitness goal was to increase my weighted my bar curl from 20 pounds to 50 pounds. To achieve this I spent over 200 hours at the gym working on my own, and with guidance from a certified trainer. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a four night trip to San Francisco, California. While in San Francisco I learned about how the city's cultural history has impacted the current social geography. Earning The Congressional Award really pushed me out of my comfort zone and in doing so I learned a lot about myself.

Ashley Banker
Jupiter, Florida
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Through the Congressional Award program, I've had the chance to serve the community by directing the production of The Diary of Anne Frank at a regional theatre. I also assisted in student productions, teaching children about the importance of theatre and helping them develop confidence. I developed myself as a person by improving my music skills. I participated in choir, improving my singing voice, and practiced the piano. I've become more physically fit through dance, improving my endurance and skill in tap and jazz. I also learned the fundamentals of ballet, improving my flexibility and strength. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Atlanta, Georgia, where I learned to schedule ahead and think on my feet. We visited museums, saw shows, and explored the city. By participating in the Congressional Award, I've experienced the satisfaction of hard work and perseverance, and I am forever grateful for this experience.

Trusha Bharadwaj
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida
Advisor: Jessica Burns

To earn my congressional award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local county park. I went there regularly to maintain and clean the park. For Personal Development, I took weekly dance lessons and practiced at home. I learnt basic dance steps and choreographed a routine that I performed at the dance studio. For Physical Fitness, I engaged in activities like rowing, running and lifting weights to improve my overall fitness level. I am now able to do 47 squats, 34 dips, and 31 push-ups at a stretch and hold a plank for 1 min and 24 seconds. For Exploration, I spent five days and nights at Blue Goat Dairy farm in Vale, NC to experience rural life and learn making goat cheese. I lived with the farm owners and shared chores at the farm including working at the cheese making unit. Earning the Congressional Award taught me how to manage schoolwork while engaging in extracurricular activities, a skill that will stay with me for a lifetime.

Gina Marie Carvelli
Port St Lucie, Florida
Advisor: Jennifer Trefelner

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at an elementary school. I assisted teachers in setting up their classrooms and performed office duties. For Personal Development, I founded my school's Spirit Squad in order to improve student participation in home basketball and football games. This past year, the school was featured in a news article for their school spirit. For my Physical Fitness portion, I had 419 hours of physical fitness which included strength training, flexibility exercises, and golf skill building. This resulted in nine girls golf high school career wins and I will now be playing on the Marymount University girl's golf team this August. Finally, for my Exploration, I completed a five day trip along the Indian River Lagoon. While hiking, boating, fishing, and four wheeling, I personally witnessed the significance and economic impact of the lagoon and its estuaries. This experience taught me to develop a strategic plan of setting goals, adhering to timelines, and improved my self confidence

Matthew Ewoldt

Jupiter, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: Key Club, United States Army

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered helping younger kids at a local elementary school and at my high school basketball summer camp. I also made blankets for children at Saint Mary's Hospital and made bags for the troops. To complete my Personal Development, I learned to wakeboard and get more experience on driving the boat. Additionally, I did weightlifting all throughout high school. For my Physical Fitness I played basketball on 3 different teams for 8th grade to the end of high school. For my high school team I was a 2 year starter on varsity and by my senior year I surpassed my goals and was elected first-team all-county in Palm Beach County. I visited San Francisco, California for my Exploration. I had a great time and learned a lot about the culture and history of the city. Overall the Congressional Award pushed me to reach higher goals than I thought I could accomplish. Each component of the award provides valuable life lessons and unforgettable experiences. Giving back to the community and learning and traveling to new places is something I'll never forget.

William Gao

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Dr. Jing-Yea Yang

I have dedicated my weekends to volunteering at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center. I have founded and lead two clubs: a club dedicated to organizing fundraising events for veterans organizations, and a club dedicated to educating elementary school students about environmental conservation. My Personal Development activity focused on improving my ability to play the violin. I have been a member of the Palm Beach Youth Philharmonic Orchestra for four years. I have performed at many different venues. For my Physical Fitness, I played competitive tennis as a member of my school team, as well as an independent player. I practice tennis regularly on my own. I have also dedicated myself to improving my fitness and strength by regularly attending a nearby gym. I did a two-week Expedition to China in order to learn more about the culture and to shadow doctors at the Peking People's Hospital. I visited Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanfeng.

James Goetschius

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Sam Silverman

Affiliation: Big Brothers Big Sisters

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I volunteered for Big Brothers Big Sisters filing grants and assisting with accounts payroll. In addition, I volunteered as a summer teacher for gifted underprivileged students in the local area. Finally, I volunteered at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. For my Personal Development activity, I completed academic coursework in Middle Eastern Studies and Ancient Greece and Rome. I also worked to master advanced Classical piano pieces such as Debussy's Clair de Lune. To improve my Physical Fitness, I trained for a 5K, embarked on an overall physical fitness program lifting weights and improving my stamina, and started rowing for a varsity program. My Exploration to francophone Switzerland included connecting with my personal genealogical roots and my interests in history and French. This program has helped me to have the confidence to explore my interests to the fullest, become organized in my life, and discover my long-term personal goals for the future.

Rockwell Howley

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Habitat for Humanity, Key Club, YMCA

For my Voluntary Public Service activity, I participated in several projects through my school. I made no-sew blankets for St. Mary's Hospital and cards for the troops. I also cared for foster dogs, taking care of them while they were waiting to be adopted. For my Personal Development, I created a fitness regimen for myself to improve my overall strength. For Physical Fitness, I played soccer and learned several new skills, along with improving my shot accuracy. For my Exploration, I traveled to Boston, Massachusetts. I explored the origins of America in the city. In participating with the Congressional Award, I have become more independent and a better contributor to society.

Corrigan Kirvin

Jupiter, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliation: National Honor Society

When working towards the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked with various organizations such as Bluewater Babes, raising money for families who have loved ones suffering from cancer, making blankets and cards for children in the hospital, volunteering as a camp counselor, and going on a mission trip to NYC. In order to achieve my Personal Development goal of raising my ACT score, I spent numerous hours prepping for the ACT by going to tutoring, taking practice tests, and learning strategies for taking the test. To complete my Physical Fitness goal of bettering my volleyball skills, I went to numerous practices, clinics, tournaments, and private lessons in order to advance my skills and become a better player on and off the court. My goal for the Expedition was to complete a five day four night exploration of the Abaco Islands in the Bahamas. To make sure that we fully explore all of the islands, I researched about the islands, booked activities and airfare, as well as booked a boat to use to explore the islands. Overall, the Congressional Award has been a large part of my high school career in the sense that it has helped me to grow and develop myself as a person and prepare me for the world.

Caroline Nolan

Stuart, Florida

Advisor: Amy Merrille

Affiliation: 4-H

To complete my Voluntary Public Service activities, I created an interactive science zone for my county fair that encouraged families to explore STEM activities. The area is the only one of its type in Florida and over 5,000 visitors enjoyed STEM activities. For my Personal Development, I did independent scientific research and competed in science competitions at the local, regional, state, national and international levels. My research has been recognized at all levels. For my Physical Fitness, I walked every day and logged a minimum of 10,000 steps every day. I spent a week exploring Washington, DC for my Exploration. I discovered a love for museums and international foods. The Congressional Award program was an amazing framework to help set and achieve my goals.

Kara Percival

Palm City, Florida

Advisor: Laura Bakkedahl

Affiliations: American Red Cross, YMCA

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at my local American Red Cross, where I was a leader of the Youth Group. We educate and train youth in public service, disaster response, and first aid. I also volunteered at the Humane Society of the Treasure Coast in the dog adoption area. For Personal Development, I made a plan to reduce my stress level and improve my concentration. This included Yoga and running. I also aimed to improve my cooking skills by choosing and learning new recipes and cooking them for my family and friends. I strived to improve my sailing skills by being an active member of the US Sailing Center of Martin County for Physical Fitness. I practiced and improved my skills and became a member of the Varsity A team. We participated in regattas around the state of Florida. For my Exploration, I planned and 8-day/7-night trip to the historic areas of Gettysburg, PA, Jamestown/Williamsburg, VA, and Washington DC. I learned about United States history, and viewed what life was like during different time periods. I gained many life skills while earning my Gold Medal. I feel I am much better prepared for what the future holds.

Margaret Regnery

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: American Red Cross, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I completed over 500 hours improving my own community and those in the Dominican Republic and Tanzania. I achieved most of my hours making no sew blankets for sick children, tutoring weekly at the Haitian Relief Center, conducting beach clean ups, and painting homes for the less fortunate. My Personal Development goals allowed me to explore all of my interests while discovering new ones. I fostered my passion for diving and the ocean while finding a hidden talent in photography, yoga, and cooking. For Physical Fitness, I spent countless hours in the gym, at the track, and on trails to build my strength as a runner. Through my dedication, I have successfully raced times that will make me competitive next year if I decide to run in college. My Gold Medal Expedition with Outward Bound to Big Bend, Texas was truly life changing. For eight days, I hiked and camped amongst strangers, including only one other girl. The award proved to me the hardest challenges are exactly what make us stronger. I will always consider the Congressional Award Gold Medal one of my greatest achievements.

Nicolas Suarez

Port St Lucie, Florida
Advisor: Viviana Rivero

In earning the Congressional Award, I worked over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by tackling tobacco use among youth at a statewide and national level via advocacy and lobbying efforts. My Personal Development was encapsulated through my improvement in flute playing and overall musical performance. I did this by continuously attending extra-curricular rehearsals as well as playing in a number of wind symphony concerts. For my Personal Fitness, I decided to aim towards increasing my endurance and strength capability overall. I did this by focusing on regimented weight training exercises as well as constantly working on cardio and stamina. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Spain so that I can expose myself to its beautiful culture in order to discover the roots of my hispanic heritage. Throughout my Expedition, I explored Spain by visiting various cities and exposing myself to its art, history, monuments, and gastronomy. The Congressional Award has made me into a leader who is driven to change people's lives.

Sebastian Suarez

Port Saint Lucie, Florida
Advisor: Claudia Angel

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with Students Working Against Tobacco, an organization that advocates against Big Tobacco. I participated in events around the state to educate the public about the dangers of smoking and marketing tactics. For Personal Development, I practiced my trumpet at least three times a week to improve my ability to play alone and in an ensemble. I have earned Superior ratings in Solo & Ensemble and Music Performance Assessments. For the Physical Fitness section, I began jogging to improve my health and lose weight. I gradually began to run longer distances and became healthier. For the Expedition portion, I planned a trip to New York City to learn about the diverse cultures that call it home. During my expedition, I was able to learn about the history of the city and its unique character. My experiences have allowed for me to grow not only as an individual but also as a figure in my community.

Alex Weinstein

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

For the Voluntary Public Service component, I founded my own service project, “The Blazer Collection Project”. For this I collected slightly worn blazers and professional attire and gave them to those who could not afford to buy their own. I also tutored math students through Mu Alpha Theta. For Personal Development, I founded an engineering club in my high school. We competed against over 500 different teams and this taught me a lot about many aspects of engineering. I also was involved in organizing and attending the Yale Model UN (YMUN) at my High School and attended the committee sessions at Yale University. For the Physical Fitness component, I learned to play golf. I was able to play with my friends, family, and hopefully one day I will use these skills in a business setting. I also worked weekly, with a personal trainer, to improve my strength and physical fitness at the local gym. For the Exploration component, I was able to explore New England. I learned about early American History in places I had never been before. I planned all the travel and destinations. I also saw how a Broadway Show is built at the production company and experienced an NFL practice game. While earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned many important lessons that will help me in all aspects of life.

Alexander Wood

Palm City, Florida

Advisor: Patricia Gage

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, predominantly at the humane society and at a local food pantry/thrift shop. I enjoyed walking dogs and serving clients. For Personal Development, I took drum set lessons and practiced to improve my skills. I was lead drummer in my school’s bands (jazz, concert, steel pan and rock), an accompanist in my school’s annual audition-only performing arts show, fill-in drummer in my church’s band, and member of Honor Band. For Physical Fitness, I regularly worked on my golf game and trained at the gym to build strength. Throughout my 4 years as a varsity player, I saw a consistent drop in my golf score. I really saw my hard work pay off my junior year, when I played with my team at the state golf championship. Finally, I participated in an Outward Bound expedition through the boroughs of New York City. This experience increased my cultural awareness and stretched me to become a more self-reliant planner and navigator. Working toward the Congressional Award Gold Medal helped me learn to set realistic goals and motivated me to persevere so that I could achieve them.

Mark Ellis

Wellington, Florida

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliation: National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I started a computer programming club at my local middle school. I had the opportunity to teach middle school students the basics of computer science. For Personal Development, I joined the school's math honor society. I became a much better student in math, and even was able to compete in a national math competition. I joined my school's swim team for Physical Fitness. I was able to foster a love for swim, and I plan to continue with it in college. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to New York City. I got my family lost on several occasions, but it brought us together more than ever before. The Congressional Award program has taught me how to goal set and follow through, and it will serve me well in college.

Jacob Givoni

Boca Raton, Florida

Advisor: Susan Lichtenstein

Affiliation: YMCA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed my Voluntary Public Service work at my local food bank. On Saturday mornings, I helped pack groceries and pass them out to people that needed them. For Personal Development, I learned more about the political process and issues during the 2016 election. I watched many debates, I signed up for email alerts from both campaigns and I made phone calls to remind people to vote. To complete my Physical Fitness goal, I earned my Second Degree Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do. In addition to competing in sparring matches, I had to learn several forms, as well. For my Expedition/Exploration goal, I visited Maine for five days and four nights. I immersed myself in a different environment and region of the country, and I completed some challenging and interesting hikes. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal was a fun, challenging and mind-broadening experience.

Sapphire Gibson

Naples, Florida

Advisor: Mandy Katzeff

Affiliation: United States Air Force

To complete my Voluntary Public Service projects, it was important for me to pin point the areas in my community where it was struggling. Later, I realized that it was my passion to teach young children about aerospace education, emergency services, and leadership training through Civil Air Patrol. Throughout my Personal Development journey, I realized that encouraging myself daily and continuing to encourage myself daily was vital to my overall success. I developed my musical skills in both violin and classical guitar, practicing and taking lessons. Slow and steady was one of my greatest motto's throughout my Physical Fitness journey. Setting small Physical Goals allowed me to achieve larger goals in the future. I worked on strength training through multiple avenues, including P90X, yoga, and the YMCA. Some of the greatest lessons I was taught throughout this process was determination, discipline, and perseverance. My Exploration helped me better understand different world views, cultures, and historical backgrounds. Intricate planning, fundraising, and time allowed me to travel to India and Dubai. The Congressional Award experience allowed me to determine both my personal strengths and weaknesses that have now prepared me to be a better leader in the future.

Nathalie Han

Miami, Florida

Advisor: Sara Samudrala

Over the past three years, I have been an active member of Symphonettes, where I performed my Voluntary Public Service. This is an organization composed of 80 high school girls that helps promote the arts in Miami-Dade County. I have also become involved with Achieve Miami, which helps children from inner-city schools develop reading skills. For Personal Development, I have dedicated myself to exploring the arts. I have learned how to sew, how to play the violin, and have attended ceramics classes. For my Physical Fitness goal, I joined the rowing team and was able to improve my 2k score on the erging machine. At the beginning of 9th grade, my score was a 2:20 split for every 500 meters, but by the end of 10th grade I was able to pull a 2:11.5 split for every 500 meters. For my Expedition, I went on a five days, four nights Outward Bound trip in the Everglades National Park. From this experience, I learned how to read a map and navigate the Everglades with a compass while canoeing. The Congressional Award has allowed me to learn a lot about who I am as a person and what I like to do because I have been exposed to new surroundings and have met so many interesting people.

Kimberly Beauvais
Stone Mountain, Georgia
Advisor: Sham Lee
Affiliation: Youth Service America

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked at a homeless shelter in the Atlanta area. I helped organize activities for the children in the shelter and create a welcoming environment during eating hours. For my Personal Development revolved around music. I practiced 30 minutes a day and prepared to play at a college level. I am now a more persistent and better violin player. For my Physical Fitness, I played tennis and worked on my serving skills. I now have more control over the placement of my shot and made my high school team. For my Exploration, I traveled along the East Coast. Specifically, I visited Boston, Massachusetts and Baltimore, Maryland. I visited historical sites and learned about life in this part of the US. Through participating in the Congressional Award, I feel that I challenged myself in many ways and my self-confidence has grown a lot.

Sravya Ambadipudi
Johns Creek, Georgia
Advisor: Cara Reilly

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked with organizations such as Vibha and the Foundation for Hospital Art along with Hospitals such as Grady Memorial Hospital and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta as a means of helping my community become a better place for everyone. I started off working on my Kuchipudi, a form of Indian Classical Dance. Once I started to compete in Piano, I was able to set attainable goals for my piano practice and used that as my Personal Development. I started off with the goal of earning my black belt in karate for my goal in Physical Fitness. Once I earned my black belt, I started setting goals in my traditional Indian Classical Dance practice. For my Expedition/Exploration, I went to a rural village in India to experience the change that education brought to the traditions and practices of that village. I was able to push myself to achieve things that I never thought I could achieve. I was also able to learn a lot about the world that exists beyond my bubble.

Caroline Brolly
Milton, Georgia
Advisor: Richard Spierto
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I performed Voluntary Public Service work through many activities with the Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta and the National Beta Club. I also volunteered at Lighthouse Family Retreat, where I served families with a child suffering from cancer. For Personal Development, I worked as a small group leader to two-year-olds at my church by leading lessons, activities, games and caring for the children. Through this experience, I learned patience and understanding, particularly with children who have behavior and attention issues. For my Physical Fitness portion, I trained for almost 1,000 hours as a competitive gymnast. I competed at several levels on the U.S.A. Xcel Gymnastics track and on my high school varsity gymnastics team. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a four-night camping trip at Lake Greenwood, South Carolina. While camping we went on hikes, photographed wildlife and cooked over a camp fire. I had a very rewarding experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and most importantly, I learned to set and achieve my goals.

Cameron R. Macdonald
Alpharetta, Georgia
Advisor: Matt Urbanawiz
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service hours in the community. I spent a lot of time helping at a local food bank. I also served as the Jr. Assistant Scout Master in a Scout Troop to help with organizing events and mentoring younger boys. A lot of my Personal Development hours were spent in an entrepreneurship program by the Junior Achievement Program. I served as the CEO and CFO in two different programs, as we started a business and sold it each year. I also enjoyed achieving goals in my Bible Study group before school each morning. I achieved my Physical Fitness goals in Basketball and biking. Our Basketball team did end up winning the championship. I biked many miles both before school and the weekend, and I could see so much improvement based on the number of miles I could bike. I helped to organize an 8 day canoe camping trip in another state for my Expedition. We canoed about 150 miles down the John Day River in Oregon. This was a difficult, but very rewarding experience. This program has helped me learn how to make very detailed goals, and achieve them!

Dilan Shah

Milton, Georgia

Advisor: Jennifer Yoo

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

Through my journey with the Congressional Award, I have proudly devoted over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service towards improving the state of education around my community. I worked to teach students of all ages and inspired them to strive for their goals and challenge the impossible. To enrich my Personal Development in music, I became a violist, joined an orchestra, created my own music, and performed in a string quartet. Today, I play some of the most challenge music and serve as the section leader for the highest orchestra group at my school. My goal for Physical Fitness was to run a 5K race in under 20 minutes. I trained by racing for my school's cross country team and progressively increasing the intensity and duration of my runs. Not only did I break a 20 minute 5K, but I also helped my team win a state title. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a 5-day camping trip to Lake Lanier. While immersing myself in the wilderness, I learned how to apply myself in nature and survive on minimal gear. The Congressional Award has allowed me to reach for the unreachable, attain the unattainable and succeed from what was thought to be impossible - the best is yet to come.

Vani Senthil

Duluth, Georgia

Advisor: Devi Selvakumar

For my Voluntary Public Service, I created a volunteer tutoring class to provide free help in the core subjects a few hours each week for almost three years. I gained a lot of experience with interpersonal communication, leadership, and mentorship while also fostering independent and self-motivated learners in my community. For my Personal Development goal, I developed one of my most treasured hobbies, writing, by diversifying my writing style and genre as well as competing in essay contests. I won multiple gold keys in Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and was published in two Creative Communication anthologies. I was a complete beginner when I first started playing tennis, yet over three years, I drastically improved the accuracy of my shots, learned game strategies, and shown special progress in my cross-court shots and serves. These improvements have also increased my confidence in my tennis. For my Expedition, I immersed myself in nature when I hiked up Stone Mountain, went camping, cooked over a campfire, kayaked, canoed, rode an electric bike, and visited natural museums all for the first time in my life. A challenging yet refreshing experience, I found all the activities thrilling and eye-opening. I had the chance to push my limits, develop my abilities, and try new experiences during my journey to the Congressional Award, and the incredible personal growth I've attained is invaluable.

Julie Street
Atlanta, Georgia
Advisor: Emily Horne

To serve my community, I focused on ways to help improve the lives of others. Highlights include establishing a local partnership with a national organization that sends care packages to the military, teaching adults digital literacy skills, and creating a music program for underserved children. For Personal Development, I worked to improve my musical abilities on the oboe through lessons, practice, and participation in the Atlanta Youth Wind Symphony and Metropolitan Youth Symphony Orchestra. I was selected as one of eight oboe players statewide for the 2017 Georgia 11/12 All-State Band. My Physical Fitness goal involved my love for mountaineering, and I worked on improving my hiking skills. I trained throughout the year by hiking and running, and over the course of three summers had the goal of peaking at least five mountains. I was able to exceed my goal by peaking over ten mountains! For my Expedition, I planned a five day hiking trip in the Rocky Mountain National Park. I researched trails, mapped out the itinerary, and hiked 32.8 miles. I also incorporated the study of Colorado wildflowers into the expedition, and documented my findings with pictures and a journal. By inspiring me to develop my interests and give back to my community, the Congressional Award program has given me the tools to make an even bigger impact on the world.

Sara Carr
Evans, Georgia
Advisor: Lindy Hamilton
Affiliations: Habitat for Humanity

For my Congressional Award, I volunteered at the local food bank, worked with the Humanist Disaster Recovery Team, and helped Habitat for Humanity. I also assisted the symphony with introducing instruments to kids, and I volunteered as an assistant violin teacher at local after-school programs. For Personal Development, I played in the Youth Orchestra of Greater Augusta, the Suzuki Strings Senior Ensemble, and their Chamber Ensemble. This developed my skills to become a professional musician. My Physical Fitness included ballroom dancing and pursuing multiple SCUBA certifications. SCUBA has allowed me to see a part of the world that most people don't. Ocean kayaking with Outward Bound was my Expedition, and I learned how to be a good leader and manage dangerous conditions on the water. I thank the Congressional Award for this opportunity to push myself to be a better person; it's been a humbling and rewarding experience.

Athena Su McNinch

Mangilao, Armed Forces Pacific

Advisor: Governor Ansito Walter

For Voluntary Public Service, I dedicated my time to various community and school organizations and participated in local fundraisers, including raising \$2,000.00 selling cookies for the Guam Chapter of the American Cancer Society. For Personal Development, I learned people skills while working as a barista at a coffee shop. For Physical Fitness, I made a fitness plan and stuck to it! I was able to improve my strength and endurance. For my Exploration, I went to Taiwan on a long and wonderful trip!!! The Congressional Awards is a way to focus young people's lives to serve our community!!!

Annie Cuentas

Post Falls, Idaho

Advisor: Kim Tabladillo

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, my hours for Voluntary Public Service were primarily for Kootenai Health Hospital and Harmony Horse Ranch. For Personal Development, I spent time in class and testing for hunter safety for obtaining my hunting license. For Physical Fitness, I intended to learn and perform new swing dance variations, but due to a shoulder injury, I did not achieve my goal; however, I did learn the Tango! Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a trip to Yellowstone National Park. We stayed in a cabin near the park entrance saw many amazing sights and animals! At the beginning of my Congressional Award, journey I was extremely shy, but after talking with complete strangers and involving myself in different activities, I am not quite as reclusive and am more comfortable talking to unfamiliar people. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and learned that if I put my mind to it, I can do anything!

Elizabeth Heisey
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Advisor: Lori Cuentas

I learned about my passion for volunteering through the Congressional Award. I volunteered with the local special needs group and at the hospital, and I quickly grew fond of it. I now serve on the leadership committee and the teen board in both the special needs group and at the hospital. For Personal Development, I was able to improve in my piano skills and in my faith walk with God. The Congressional Award taught me to make a schedule and stick to it, and to learn diligence. My parents and I were excited to see me grow through my goals in Personal Development. While I was taking regular dance classes and competing, I was able to set goals for myself outside of the dance studio to improve in my strength training on my own time. I grew as a dancer from having better agility, stamina, and endurance. I also saw my passion for dance grow. I planned a six night, seven day trip to New York City. I had to research every attraction and sight in the city, and find the best deals. I also had to book the hotels and flights, which was harder than I initially thought. I enjoy planning trips, and now I plan most family vacations. The Congressional Award taught me early that it is important to set measurable goals where you can see yourself improving; while this program is no easy task, I am thankful for every little detail because it has equipped me to succeed in life.

Breanna Luckey
Nampa, Idaho
Advisor: Laurel True

I volunteered for Karcher Estates retirement facility and St. Luke's hospital. During my time there, I discovered my love of health care, being a care giver, and the joy of bringing cheer to those in challenging circumstances. I discovered the joy of culinary arts-improving my cooking skills and learning new recipes along the way. I also learned to knit. I also joined the student council at my local community college, where I demonstrated leadership skills and helped make a difference for fellow students. With my volleyball team, I improved my athletic skills as well as the technical skills for playing volleyball. Planning the trip with my family down to Mexico was so much fun! I got to experience the desert environment of Arizona, as well as learn about the rich cultural history in the area. My favorite part was learning how to bargain. Without this award, I would never have had so many of the experiences I have come to treasure; looking back, it has brought so much into my life.

Zachary McCammon
Cascade, Idaho
Advisor: Lori Anderson
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I helped build tiny houses for people in Ensenada, Mexico. I also did numerous service projects such as working in the local food distribution pantry, home repair, firewood assistance, and creating 51 care packages for overseas military. For Personal Development, I worked two jobs, one at a local restaurant and the other job was preparing camp firewood bundles for the state park. I accumulated over 865 hours! I set goals for track and cross-country for Physical Fitness. I far surpassed my goals and expectations, qualifying for the state competitions in both sports. I did a snow campout using our snow machines. I also spent five days exploring Canyonlands, Arches, and Capitol Reef National Parks. I learned a lot about myself and found that setting goals really motivates me.

Kalynn Cotten
Rupert, Idaho
Advisor: Ty Shippen
Affiliations: 4-H, Key Club, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I hosted donation drives for the local animal shelter, cleaned highways, ran a canned food drive, and raised money and donations to provide Christmas for poor families in my area. For Personal Development, I worked on improving my musical abilities through both symphonic band and jazz band. For my Physical Fitness goal, I joined bowling club to both improve my athletic abilities and overall health. For my Exploration I planned and then experienced a trip to Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park. While there I enjoyed many hikes and observing wildlife and beautiful national formations. The experience I had while earning the Congressional Award was one of the best of my entire life because of how much I learned and grew as an individual.

Grace Pawelczyk
Frankfort, Illinois
Advisor: Jeanne Bern

I volunteered at My Joyful Heart, a local charity that aids needy children in the Chicagoland area. As the president of the teen board, I conducted food drives, organized meetings, and packed gift bags for the children. For my Personal Development I worked on enhancing my Mandarin Chinese skills. I started learning Chinese as a freshman in high school and supplemented my Chinese classes with Rosetta Stone and Chinese workbooks. For Physical Fitness I played lacrosse at both the varsity and club levels. I specifically worked on increasing my shooting strength and accuracy. Finally, for my Exploration I planned and executed a self-guided tour of our nation's capital. Through my participation in The Congressional Award program, I have learned the benefits of service, dedication, and hard work.

Ayse Eldes
Mt. Prospect, Illinois
Advisor: Colleen Carroll

For over a year, I volunteered at my local library to help with organizational and project preparation tasks for events at our library. I also volunteered for a local nonprofit to aid with the resettlement of Turkish refugees in my community. I learned that the small things make the most impact. For Personal Development, I dedicated my time to painting portraits of famous Islamic scholars. These large portraits can take up to three months to complete and detail. Time spent crafting my work has given me greater appreciation for beauty in every visage. As someone who is not necessarily an athlete, I set my Physical Fitness goals in a frame to improve my personal mile time. I did jogging and simple yoga exercises to improve my health. During the summer after my sophomore year, I spent a week exploring museums in Boston. This experience taught me to seek out the preserved historical treasures within the modern world. My experience with earning the Congressional Award has taught me to appreciate the small sacrifices we all make to better our society.

Aayush Agarwal

Naperville, Illinois

Advisor: Suresh Sharma

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

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service working at a local community hospital. I worked on numerous service events organized through scouting and the Eagle community service project for me and fellow scouts. I also volunteered as counselor in training at a Boy Scout summer camp in Wisconsin. For Personal Development, I attended the National Youth Leadership Training to develop my communication and leadership skills. I also advanced in playing guitar and performed at recitals in front of large audience. For my Physical Fitness portion I worked out at a gym 2-3 times a week with a personal trainer to build my strength, lose weight and improve endurance. As a result my strength and conditioning improved significantly and I lost over 10 lbs. I also learned to eat a healthy and balanced diet. I planned and completed a seven day trip to Austin, the live music capital of the world and a day trip to San Antonio for my Exploration. During my trip I explored the city, immersed myself in the diverse culture, and visited historic sites, art galleries, museums. I enjoyed different types of food and live music. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal was the most rewarding experience and I learned to be open to take on challenges, try new things and important skills like setting and achieving the goals.

Rohan Agarwal

Naperville, Illinois

Advisor: Suresh Sharma

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service working at a local community hospital. I also worked on numerous service events organized through scouting and the Eagle community service project for me and fellow scouts. For Personal Development, I attended the National Youth Leadership Training to develop my leadership and communication skills, and also advanced my skills in playing piano. For my Physical Fitness, I worked with a fitness trainer to create a workout routine to improve my strength and endurance. I also took yoga to improve my flexibility, posture, and reduce my stress and anxiety. For my Expedition, I completed a 75 mile high adventure backpacking trek over 12 days at Philmont scout ranch in New Mexico, carrying a 40 pound backpack over steep, rocky trails at elevations from 6,500 to 12,500 feet. This is the most exciting and challenging activity I have completed. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an incredible experience and I have become more mature, independent, goal oriented and well rounded.

Vivian Wei

Munster, Indiana

Advisor: Jessica Sanchez

Affiliation: National Honor Society

I volunteered at both a hospital and at local figure skating competitions. My duties at the hospital included delivering flowers, discharging patients, and providing emotional support. At figure skating competitions, I delivered results and distributed awards. For Personal Development, I worked various jobs as a waitress at a Japanese restaurant, an open skate guard at my ice rink, and a cashier at my school store. Through these experiences, I had the valuable opportunity to improve my communication and time management skills. For Physical Fitness, I set several different goals for myself to improve in different aspects of figure skating. I strove to improve in many different aspects (ice dance, moves in the field, as well as free skate) in order to become a more well rounded figure skater. For my Gold Medal Exploration, I challenged myself by exploring and studying various different architectural landmarks throughout the wonderful city of Chicago. Thanks to the Congressional Award, I've pushed myself out of my comfort zone and tried many activities I had never done before.

Grace Brown

Granger, Indiana

Advisor: Heather Short

Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

In earning my Congressional Award, I worked with the Knights of Columbus participating in their food drive program helping to identify needy families, collect and organize food, and make deliveries. I also worked with the Girl Scouts to install an outdoor information station at a local school. For my Personal Development hours I worked at two different dance studios doing everything from planning and teaching tumbling classes to working the front desk, answering questions, and organizing paperwork. My growth in the area of Physical Fitness was focused on my participation with my school's poms team. I was a member of the team all four years of high school, three of which I was on the Varsity team where, most recently, I was chosen to be the Captain of the team. On my Expedition to Hocking Hills, Ohio we camped in a traditional Native American tepee, went horseback riding, swam in waterfalls, hiked the State Park and cooked all our meals outside. By participating in the Congressional Award I have gained a greater understanding of what it means to give back to my community and insight into how to push myself to reach my goals.

Luke Schriever

Rock Rapids, Iowa

Advisor: Barbara Patton

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America

To accomplish my Voluntary Public Service hours I volunteered at many organizations and in many projects. I volunteered over 200 hours at a local nursing home. I assisted in building a new veterans' memorial. I worked on several building projects for the disadvantaged overseas. For one of my Personal Development goals I learned to work and carve leather. I also took a Water Safety Instructor class. I joined a Taekwondo school, went twice a week, and earned my blue belt. Finally to earn my 200 hours of Personal Development I practiced and learned cooking until I could easily cook over 40 different meals. My Physical Fitness goal was to compete in and complete a triathlon last summer. I trained several times a week and made the necessary preparations. I completed the triathlon and received first place in my age group. For my Gold Medal Expedition I planned and led a trip to the southwestern United States. I explored 10 national parks and monuments in Utah, Colorado, and Arizona. Seeing and exploring sites like Zion National Park and the Grand Canyon made this one of the coolest experiences of my life. I am glad that I did this program because of the valuable experience gained, and for the opportunities that I was presented.

Jacqueline Kincaid

Leawood, Kansas

Advisor: Dr. Siabhan May-Washington

Affiliation: YMCA

In pursuing the Congressional Award, I created a non-profit organization where I teach deaf and hard-of-hearing students how to play tennis. My work educating students of all backgrounds with other community non-profits also contributed to achieving 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. In Personal Development, I focused my efforts on anthropological studies and journalism. I published numerous local magazine articles, participated in a writing and design workshop at Columbia University, took classes at Oxford University in England, and studied culture and language in Havana, Cuba. Further, I recorded over 550 hours of Physical Fitness by playing tennis competitively. This entailed travelling to tournaments, attending clinics, lessons, and workouts. Lastly, for Exploration, I organized a 5-day trip to the Gold Coast in Long Island, New York. There, I studied turn-of-the-century history by touring 7 mansions of prominent families, such as the Vanderbilts and Guggenheims. Overall, my work on the Congressional Award programs exposed me to new people, places, and cultures. I grew in numerous respects throughout this journey and benefitted immeasurably.

Shaunak Lokre

Overland Park, Kansas

Advisor: Caroline Kill

Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

In earning the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by volunteering at my local retirement center, celebrating the birthdays of foster children with behavioral needs at the KVC hospital, helping out at my local urban debate league, and completing my Eagle Scout Project. In terms of Personal Development, I took lessons to learn how to play the classical guitar with a goal of mastering certain pieces. Also, I continue to participate in policy debate where we developed arguments in order to win at tournaments. For my Physical Fitness portion, I played soccer for my school and club soccer teams where we improved our record from the previous year. In addition, I took up running in order to improve my physical fitness. Finally, I planned a six-night trip to Spain where my family and I visited the cities of Barcelona and Madrid. In Barcelona, we visited the Picasso Museum and viewed the beautiful architecture of the Sagrada Familia Church. In Madrid we learned about the rich history by visiting the royal monastery. I had an incredible experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and learned that hard work truly pays off when you set your own goals and accomplish them. Through this experience, I have acquired many new skills that will carry me forward throughout my life.

Ariza Nanji

Overland Park, Kansas

Advisor: Caroline Kill

For Voluntary Public Service, I created an organization that provides English classes to high school students in Tajikistan. I teach live classes every Saturday night and conduct personal tutoring sessions with the students. The goal of the program is to help make the students college ready. As a national circuit policy debater, I worked hard to make the varsity team. I exceeded my Personal Development goal of earning at least 400 NSDA points. Through my goal I increased my words per minute rate and improved my level of research. As I prepared, I sharpened my critical thinking skills. I worked hard to increase my stamina through bike riding. My goal was to complete 40 miles within the span of 5 hours. Through my goal I learned how to preserve and be dedicated. I pushed myself to exercise at least 3 times a week. I went on a five day trip across the Katy Trail in Missouri. As I experienced life in various small towns, I learned about different lifestyles and cultures. I interacted with and interviewed locals in each community. The Congressional Award allowed me to develop as person, and provided me with the opportunity to learn new skills that will help me throughout my life.

Meghana Pthapati
Overland Park, Kansas
Advisor: Prasanthi Vasireddy

In earning the Congressional Award, I have completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local Saint Luke's Hospital. I helped provide patients with the care they needed and worked with the staff. For my Personal Development, I took art classes and learned new sketching and painting techniques. Now, I am able to paint and draw numerous objects. For Physical Fitness, I decided I would improve my swimming strokes so that I would drop time on my events. After practicing on my school swim team and working off season, I was able to decrease my time. For my Exploration I wanted to dive deeper into my heritage and culture, so I decide I will visit Hyderabad, India. While there I visited attractions and learned more about my heritage. In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I have learned how to allocate my time between what I am passionate about and what keeps me healthy.

Aidan Scurato
Mission Hills, Kansas
Advisor: Caroline Kill
Affiliation: National Honor Society

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I decided to dedicate time at various organizations that would open my eyes to problems in our world. I volunteered time to the sick, hungry, and less fortunate in general. I even used my business to run a shoe drive that collected over 200 pairs of shoes. I wanted to expose myself to the business world to learn about entrepreneurship and creating relationships. Through this challenge to myself, I created my own business that specializes in selling limited sneakers and apparel. With this business, I opened three temporary retail locations in 2017. For Physical Fitness, I challenged myself to improve my running and basketball skills. Over the course of the Congressional Award, I shortened my mile time by over a minute and made the varsity basketball team. My overall physical shape improved greatly through working on the Congressional Award. For my Exploration, I traveled to Chicago to learn about architecture and culture in big cities. In addition to this, I learned how local institutions support local organizations as well as the greater community. The Congressional Award taught me the essence of being well-rounded and how real world experience and insight can change your life.

William Stublen

Leawood, Kansas

Advisor: James Be

Affiliation: YMCA

For my Voluntary Public Service, I primarily served at a preschool for low-income and special needs children. I also volunteered at a local YMCA, providing child care for a monthly event called “Parents Night Out.” For Personal Development, I went through life guard certification and got a job working as a life guard for Olympic Pool Management. I also obtained a second job as part of the facilities team at a local church. For Physical Fitness, I joined a local rowing club, wanting to learn how to row racing shells progress towards competing in nation events. I started off not knowing anything about the sport of rowing and am now competing in International regattas. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day trip to Yosemite National Park. This trip involved backpacking for several days along the Old Big Oak Flat Road Trail into Yosemite Valley and several short day-hikes in Yosemite Valley and the surrounding area.

Davis Hale

Louisville, Kentucky

Advisor: Claudette & James Patton

Affiliation: Christian Care Foundation

Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal was transformational. As a saxophone player, I volunteered as a music instructor in urban public schools and enjoyed watching the youth develop music skills, build orchestral performance goals, and learn responsibility in caring for their instrument. For Personal Development, I concentrated on learning through my part-time employment and corporate training program about marketing, sales, customer relations, conflict management and compliance. To complete my Physical Fitness goal, I developed a stamina and conditioning program that would benefit my saxophone performance to include overall physical conditioning, lung capacity, flexibility, and hand exercises specifically designed for musicians to increase speed, accuracy and endurance. Finally, my Exploration experience included a two-week trip to France and England where I immersed myself in the French language, culture, and cuisine while participating in a specialized music course and competitive performances for saxophonists. The encouragement and support from my sponsor, the Christian Care Communities Foundation, has been important to my growth as a young adult and I will always remember the excited bright smiles of the elementary students I taught when they played their first notes on the saxophone. The journey and experiences of earning the Award have been truly unique and I surprised myself by overcoming self-doubt, exceeding my goals, and learning I can make a difference.

Anne Boggess

Lexington, Kentucky

Advisor: Sharron Wesley-Porter

Affiliation: HOBY, Key Club, National Honor Society

Sundays are my day of service, in the morning I take care of the special needs students through a program I helped found. Sunday evening and Mondays I teach children with special needs and disabilities to ride horses at Central Kentucky Riding for Hope. I have become more encouraging and confident in my everyday life because of the goals I have set. I love to support others and have a servant heart. Creating a community around me that grows and makes a positive impact as a group. For my Physical Fitness, I participated in varsity cheerleading, varsity swimming and running in my free time. All my skills have improved because of my determination to my goals. My times for running and swimming went down and tumbling skills increased. Traveling to Newmarket, England for my Expedition broadened my horizons and allowed me to see the cultural differences in my hometown's sister city. Staying with a local family allowed me to emerge myself with the local culture and be a part of everyday life in the European horse capital. My personal growth has been immeasurable due to this program and I am very thankful for this experience that pushed me to my best self.

Sarah Morris

Preston, Maryland

Advisor: Debbie McQuaid

Affiliations: HOBY, Key Club, National Honor Society, YMCA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 600 hours of Voluntary Public Service primarily with the Salisbury Zoo. I work with wild animals, serve as a wildlife interpreter, give animal presentations, and provide support for special activities and education programs. For Personal Development, I focused on becoming a long-distance swimmer. I earned spots at the National and State championships. For my Physical Fitness I focused on improving my skills, fitness, endurance and overall performance in field hockey and tennis. I am now committed to play both sports at the DIII level in college. For my Exploration I planned a seven-night trip exploring the Historic Triangle in Virginia and the Delmarva Peninsula, specifically the Underground Railroad trails. My work concentrated on the development of our nation, how the Underground Railroad worked and what freedom actually means. Overall, this was an incredible experience that gave me the opportunity to learn about our nation, particularly in the area where I live, develop important life-skills, hone my research and writing skills and most of all embark on a journey that I probably wouldn't have if not for working on the Congressional Award.

Anaya Moreland

Reisterstown, Maryland

Advisor: Maki Okamoto

Affiliation: HOBY

I earned the majority of my Voluntary Public Service hours by volunteering for Bridges and Irvine Nature Center. Bridges is a support organization for Baltimore City students. I was a summer camp counselor for two consecutive years. To earn my Personal Development hours, I worked part time at a dance academy's retail store. I also attended many academic summer programs at various colleges such as Brown University, University of Maryland, and McDaniel College. For Physical Fitness, I played sports for my high school including badminton, golf, and volleyball. I also went to volleyball camp at Penn State University for two consecutive summers. To accomplish the Expedition/Exploration requirement of the award, I started on the certificate level with trips to various locations such as Embassy Row in D.C. and the Eastern Shore of Maryland to explore the historical sites relating to Harriet Tubman. For the Gold Medal, I took a trip exploring historic Michigan.

Faith Melinda (Mindy) Burton

Ashton, Maryland

Advisor: Paula Kochis

My most rewarding experience was developing hands-on lesson plans weekly to teach 75 middle school students science as a Site Leader for the Adventure in Science program. I also enjoyed working with the Females in Science and Technology conference to promote STEM as a career to seventh-grade girls. I pushed myself beyond my comfort zone by leasing dairy goats and learning their care. This sparked my interest, so I competed in a state dairy quiz bowl competition. I also learned how to judge breeds of dairy cows based on their quality and will represent the USA at the international competition. As a freshman, I played softball on my high school's team, practicing fifteen hours a week and improving my batting and fielding abilities. Outside of school, I trained in tae kwon do, focusing on kicks, punches, and self-defense, to earn my first degree black belt. My Expedition transported me to the remote culture of Ocracoke Island, NC. I learned about the historical and societal significance of this barrier island. I visited the dune systems, climbed lighthouses, met descendants of the original inhabitants, and learned about the local dialect. The Congressional Award has taught me the value of mentorship for the purpose of helping others.

Abigail Gerstman
Waldorf, Maryland
Advisor: Corliss Johnson
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work through various Girl Scout projects, working with Veterans, and serving as the student chairperson for the non-profit Kids into Discovering Science. I volunteered at numerous STEM events and organized a hands-on STEM night at an elementary school. For Personal Development, I took violin lessons, mastering all three movements of Vivaldi's *Winter*. I participated in robotics, serving as the lead for design and construction, as well as designing propellers for my team for the International Submarine Races (ISR). For my Physical Fitness portion, I ran varsity cross country for four years and conditioned during the off season. Off season conditioning enabled me to successfully pilot our human-powered, wet submarine across the finish line during the 2017 ISR. Finally, for my Expedition I planned several camping adventures for my Girl Scout troop and spent two weeks in Panama earning my advanced SCUBA certification. While in Panama I volunteered at a sea turtle conservation site, helped on a pineapple and coconut plantation, and stayed with a family in Bocas Del Toro. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, earning this award has taught me about the world around me and my own potential.

Serheni'te Johnson
Waldorf, Maryland
Advisor: Jennifer Gerstman
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, Key Club, National Honor Society

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service while working at local food pantries and the Metro Warrior STEM Organization. I assisted with supplementing groceries for underprivileged families in my county and taught the Robot C programming language to school students. For my Personal Development I learned and composed musical arrangements for competitions and recitals. I am now an award-winning pianist. For Physical Fitness I decided to improve my aerobic fitness by running in local races. I completed 5K, 5-miler, and 10K races and culminated with the Army 10-miler race. It was a tough, but incredible experience. I planned a trip to Bermuda to experience how another culture celebrates the Christmas holiday. I learned about Bermudan history, Gombey Festival, building engineering to thwart hurricanes, and toured a historic lighthouse. I thoroughly enjoyed the Gold Medal experience because I learned a lot about myself. I strengthened weaknesses, gained a better understanding about my world, and enforced my Girl Scout commitment to make the world a better place through engineering.

Angela Wu
Rockville, Maryland
Advisor: Artit Serngadichaivit
Affiliation: National Honor Society

I have always felt that the best way to show my appreciation for life is to give back to my community. Whether it be teaching economically disadvantaged students in D.C. or orphans in Benin, or performing music at local senior centers, I find that sharing my love for what I do is super rewarding. I always want to make the most out of what I am given. My persistence to ultimately join the Maryland All State Orchestra, and also pass the Maryland state theory tests, has given me not only a better appreciation for music, but more opportunities to further build upon my musical foundation. Playing alongside 15 hardworking and enthusiastic girls has made my experience on the Wootton Varsity tennis team extremely rewarding. Our team was even able to make history as we became the first girls team in Montgomery County to win the County title for four consecutive years. I've been instilled with a wonderment for the world around me since a young age. With my family's support, I have been able to plan small family vacations to Dayton, Ohio, to large scale celebrations and trips to Vancouver and Iceland. I am really glad to be apart of the Congressional Award program, as it feels really great to have support for my community service.

Nicole Meister
Ellicott City, Maryland
Advisor: Michelle Bagley
Affiliation: American Red Cross

My Voluntary Public Service was centered on helping the younger generation. I spent a lot of my time in the Grassroots Family Crisis Shelter, organizing food drives, feminine product drives, and taking care of the young children. I also taught a weekly coding class to young girls! For Personal Development I interned at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory working on Marsupial Arduino Robots. Through this experience, I was able to obtain real world experience in the field I want to major in. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my mental state through a series of tangible and numerical goals. I swam daily over the summer and conditioned and played volleyball as much as I could. I loved the experience of playing on a team and working to give myself more confidence through fitness. For my Exploration I helped plan a week long trip to Austria and the Czech Republic, in which I was able to better connect with my German heritage. Through organizing my own trip, I was more knowledgeable on the historical sites and the trip was more meaningful. My experience in earning the Congressional Award has transformed me into such a different person. This journey was instrumental in impacting my high school career as it pushed me to try new experiences.

Matthew Mu

Cockeysville, Maryland

Advisor: Biraj Shrestha

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service through managing water polo games at my school, volunteering at a local hospital, and starting a hydroponics initiative. Through these activities, I was able to help my community. For my Personal Development, I worked as a lifeguard at two different pools as well as worked on my school's yearbook for over 3 years. I now have a firm grasp on interacting with people at jobs as well as the steps it takes to bring a book from creation to publication. For my Physical Fitness, I swam and practiced water polo for almost 10 hours every week. By the end, I had become the swim captain and water polo captain at my school. Finally, for my Expedition, I created a trip to Boston to better understand the historical significance of the city to America's founding. In doing so, I learned how to plan a week long trip by myself and stay in a completely different city by myself. I had a great time over the past two years earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal. It really brought the best out of me!

Milena Rogalski

Charlton, Massachusetts

Advisor: Carol Carter

To earn my Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of volunteer service work at my local animal shelter and at my local public library. At the shelter I assisted with daily operations and dog care and at the library I assisted patrons with their technology needs. For Personal Development, I concentrated in figuring out a career path that would make sense for me. I have discovered that in this area I am continuing to grow as I explore more areas and as my interests grow. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to make the volleyball team at my high school. I went from being being a total novice in volleyball to making the JV team and playing for my high school. For my Exploration, I spent a week in Colombia, South America getting in touch with my hispanic roots and understanding what being Latina means to me. I also learned about my background and family history. Overall, earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was a very valuable experience. I learned a great deal about who I am, the world around me and my heritage. It also gave me the confidence to know that I can accomplish great things.

Susanna Klicka

Rutland, Massachusetts

Advisor: James Hauri

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by assisting as a counselor at a summer camp and teaching children in China. I educated children about the various threats to our oceans at the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet and worked with kindergarten children in China teaching them English and sports. For my 200 Personal Development hours I participated in an EMT course and became certified at the national level. With my certification I worked with my town and at a local Ski Resort as an EMT. For Physical Fitness I worked my mile down from 12 minutes to below 10 minutes and successfully completed several 5k's and mud runs. Finally, I completed my Expedition by planning a week-long trip hiking through the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire. I learned how to camp and hike on a budget and I also learned perseverance on the some of the longest hikes I have ever completed. I have become a better individual through my wonderful Congressional Award journey.

Danielle Purinton

Sterling, Massachusetts

Advisor: Cathy Pisa

Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

In earning the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Habitat for Humanity Restore and my local food bank. I welcomed the opportunity to give back and met people from many walks of life. I learned about perseverance and the true meaning of a community. For Personal Development, I took weekly trumpet lessons, practiced daily and participated in an extracurricular jazz band to improve my chair position. I am now a first trumpet in my honors jazz band. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to train and improve my running and swimming time after sustaining a permanent leg injury. I significantly improved both times and became a certified lifeguard. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a five-day trip to New York City to explore my heritage at Ellis Island and study architecture from different time periods. I learned that the key to success is a good foundation which stretches beyond the physical structure and starts with your heritage. Pursuing the Congressional Award provided me with a sense of direction, improved self-confidence, and a focus that I had not experienced before, but will embrace going forward in my future.

Cameron Friend

Acton, Massachusetts

Advisor: Tina Watlington

Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

My Voluntary Public Service expanded in scope as time went on – from helping locally in my town’s food pantry and children’s science museum to helping build a community in Cambridge, building a house in Fitchburg and building stone steps on the trails of the White Mountains of New Hampshire. For Personal Development I advanced my cooking skills from simple scratch brownies to homemade pasta and “fancy” duck l’orange. Also, I pursued an entirely-new-to-me sport: shot put, where I moved from throwing a 10lb to a 12lb shot and still increased by 5ft. My Physical Fitness hours were easily completed by my nearly year-round soccer seasons; I developed my all-around skills, and went from getting exhausted mid-game to playing through an entire game with energy to spare. My Exploration took me and my family to travel Scotland. We explored the history of the Picts, Druids, the Jacobite Rebellion and enjoyed contemporary traditions of High Tea to haggis. Pursuing the Congressional Award gave me the structure to accomplish more than if I’d done it on my own, and in less time.

Aiden Snorek-Yates

Carlisle, Massachusetts

Advisor: Carl Sheasley

Affiliations: Discovery Bound NLC, Habitat for Humanity

In earning the Congressional Award, I completed many of my Voluntary Public Service hours working at a local food pantry. I helped stock shelves, serve meals, load bags into cars, and clean up when the pantry closed. I became friends with many of the guests and other volunteers during my time there. For Personal Development, I practiced my cello, took private lessons, and performed in a variety of orchestral and chamber groups. Through this work, I was accepted into one of the country’s premier youth orchestras. For my Physical Fitness goals, I trained to race for my nordic skiing team at the state meet and to become a better alpine skier. I used roller skis to train for nordic throughout the fall before the snow came. I started teaching alpine skiing this past winter which also helped improve my own form. For my Exploration, I planned a family trip to Ghana. We toured historic sites, bartered at local markets, wandered through the canopy of the rainforest, visited former slave castles, climbed a lighthouse in a coastal slum, and hiked to the tallest waterfall in West Africa. Achieving the Congressional Award Gold Medal opened me up to new experiences and new people, which gave more meaning to my high school years.

Miranda Fisher

Needham, Massachusetts

Advisor: Rev. Jerry Hogan

To earn my Congressional Gold Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at an organic farm in Atherton, California which involved growing and delivering produce to the community justice organization, Food not Bombs. Also, I assisted with the national literacy program, Read to a Child. For Personal Development, I studied studio art with a local illustrator of children's books, learned American Sign Language, and refined my poetry skills – three of my poems were recognized winners of the Boston Globe and Scholastic Art and Writing Program. For the Physical Fitness program, I trained with a running club, became a varsity member of the school cross country team and completed the Holy Half Marathon. Additionally, I obtained my life-guard certification and took up surfing. Finally, for my Expedition, I hiked the Appalachian Trail and honed my photography skills by taking pictures of wildlife and various landscapes. It was exhilarating and took a great deal of courage and confidence to keep hiking in an unusual hail storm that made the journey quite arduous. The Congressional Award encouraged me to set goals, develop my talents, serve others and enter into the joy of life.

Shahar Hartman

Brookline, Massachusetts

Advisor: Nicole Bent

For my Voluntary Public Service I volunteered to unite the Israeli American and the Jewish American communities in Boston through organizing activities for kids and teenagers. For Personal Development I greatly improved my digital and physical art skills by learning the Adobe programs and experimenting with different Art techniques. My Physical Fitness goal was to be able to do 75 push-ups and I did so by working out my pectoral, triceps, biceps and abdomen muscles to help stabilize me while doing push-ups. For my Expedition I hiked 67 miles on the Appalachian trail. I slept in a hammock and cooked all my food out of a portable stove and I carried everything on my back.

Caroline Gilmore

East Walpole, Massachusetts

Advisor: Rev. Jerry Hogan

Affiliations: American Red Cross

To achieve the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service for my community Recreation Department's Public Swim Program. As an Aquatics and Water Safety Instructor, I taught basic swim techniques and water safety to people of all ages. For my Personal Development goal, I obtained American Red Cross Lifeguard, CPR and Water Safety Instructor certifications. I mastered First Aid and AED training. I obtained a summer job at Longwood Cricket Club. I am now a confident and competent senior lifeguard. For my Physical Fitness goal, I set out to secure a spot on the NPL club soccer team. I became a stronger, fitter and more athletic player. With proper nutrition to fuel practices, I became a more explosive and more efficient player while also becoming a leader on the team. Finally, for my Expedition, I traveled to New Hampshire to complete a 5 day hut-to-hut hike of The Appalachian Trail. The hike was 6-10 hours per day on challenging terrain, but the surrounding beauty provided ample opportunity to study flora and fauna indigenous to the area. Pursuit of the Congressional Award has been a life changing experience. It allowed me to challenge myself, give to my community, and prove to myself that I am truly capable of accomplishing anything.

Suvan Shukla

Milton, Massachusetts

Advisor: Rich Guarino

I focused on volunteering for organizations that fight malnutrition around the world, such as Engineers without Borders and UNICEF. Recently I gave a workshop at a UNICEF Conference about using the power of storytelling to fundraise for worthy causes. My Personal Development goal was to become a better writer. At first, I wrote anonymously for websites. Over time, I became Editor-in-Chief of my school literary magazine. I publish my own short stories but I also take an active interest in getting others to do the same. For my Physical Fitness goal I obtained a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and more recently a green belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. For my Exploration I planned a trip to visit 3 of the world's top 10 active volcanoes which are located in Italy: Mount Vesuvius near Naples, Mount Etna in Sicily, and Stromboli which is on an island located off the coast of Sicily. Pursuing this award taught me about focus, time commitment, and discipline.

Amanda Coy
Saline, Michigan
Advisor: Susan Usher

I completed more than 500 hours of service on the State Board of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation Michigan Chapter for 3 years as Secretary and Youth Spokesperson. In this position I reached 6,000 youth through presentations and have raised more than \$14,000 for the organization and sent multiple youth to camp. For Personal Development, I served as an assistant for the Saline Middle School French Exchange Program helping prepare students for international travel, and I also lead the French Club at Saline High School as Vice President. I was awarded the World Language Award in French for my school. For my Physical Fitness goals, I continued to grow my baton twirling skills as a national champion baton twirler. This past fall I served as a US Twirling Ambassador to Peru for the International Festival of Springtime and was just chosen as the Newest “Girl-in-Black” feature twirler for Purdue University. For my Exploration, I planned a seven-day trip to California for my family. We toured San Diego, Palm Springs and Los Angeles visiting state and national parks including Mt. San Jacinto State Park, Indian Canyons Nature Preserve, and Joshua Tree National Park, toured Los Angeles and a movie studio. Completing all of these activities has given me a great sense of accomplishment and heightened my dedication and passion for community service.

Elijah Martineau
Lansing, Michigan
Advisor: Nancy Boyce

My service goals were nearly all met in the outdoors. I volunteered as a Junior Summer Camp counselor at my local nature center, did stewardship at the same location, and did trail work with both the Student Conservation Association and Idaho Conservation Corps. For Personal Development I chose to broaden my skills in leadership and photography. I participated in a weekly leadership program, as well as attended an international leadership camp. I was also able to work with two amazing photographers to further enhance my skills. I chose to focus on hiking and biking for Physical Fitness. Having hiked with my family since I was young, I chose challenging, long hikes to increase endurance and mental strength. I switched from a mountain bike to a road bike and focused on increasing endurance and speed. For my Expedition I took a week-long backpacking trip to Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior. Being on an isolated island in fairly challenging terrain was an amazing experience that I hope to repeat soon. Setting goals and achieving them feels great and I recommend this program to others!

Erika Swanson

Greenfield, Minnesota

Advisor: Mary Stahl

Affiliations: 4-H, National Honor Society

While earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, most of my Voluntary Public Service hours involved helping animals and teaching people about nature at the Three Rivers Park District and the University of Minnesota Raptor Center. For Personal Development, I helped my coaches start the first Minnesota State High School League-sanctioned homeschool team. I run cross country and track for this team, and I set training goals for Physical Fitness in these sports. I increased my long runs and summer mileage, trained to improve my race times, and earned a trip to the Cross Country State Meet three times. For my Gold Medal Expedition, I planned a four-night camping and canoeing trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. I planned our meals, navigated our trip, and helped canoe, set up camp, and portage to various locations. The Congressional Award was a challenge, but it helped me realize that I can push my limits and achieve the goals I set for myself.

Jackson Christ

New Albany, Mississippi

Advisor: Linda Mitchell

Affiliations: 4-H, Boy Scouts of America

For my Voluntary Public Service I worked with elementary children to encourage an interest in STEM by assisting with hands on science days where over 600 third grade children experienced science first hand in a round robin type setting. I also worked with the anti-bullying coalition in the schools. For my Personal Development I increased my knowledge of technology and software by working on new apps including video and editing applications. For my Physical Fitness goals I worked out with weights so I could build my shoulder strength and improve my backhand results in tennis. For my Expedition I planned and implemented a camping trip to Shiloh National Military Park where I hiked and explored the Shiloh Indian Mounds and the United States National Cemetery located there. Earning the Congressional Award has been a life changing experience for me as it has stretched me to try things outside my comfort zone.

Demi Doty

Tupelo, Mississippi

Advisor: Tina Turnage and Linda Mitchell

Affiliation: 4-H

I loved helping the elderly and the less fortunate by serving and preparing meals at Freedom Café as part of my Voluntary Public Service. I also gained valuable wisdom visiting with the elderly and homebound. I learned setting personal goals motivated me to actually achieve the goals. My Personal Development goals of taking piano and voice lessons for four years helped me achieve my dream of attending the prestigious residential Mississippi School of the Arts my junior and senior year. My Physical Fitness goal of training to run in “The Race for the Cure” was especially rewarding for me because my mother is a breast cancer survivor, and it helped me to become physically fit. I learned that planning an Expedition is much harder than I ever dreamed. I planned a trip to Washington, D.C., Monticello, Philadelphia, and Gettysburg where I traveled for seven days with my mother. I am grateful for the experiences I was afforded by completing the process to achieve the Congressional Award. Participating in this program has been an honor, and I have been blessed far more than the people I had the privilege of serving.

Shelby Lindsey

Shannon, Mississippi

Advisor: Linda Mitchell

Affiliation: 4-H

A large part of my Voluntary Public Service hours were spent helping feed the hungry through Blessing Bags and a local food pantry. I helped organize and carry out a program where bags of food were prepared and slipped into backpacks for students to eat on the weekends. I also tutored younger students. My Personal Development consisted of learning to speak Spanish. This not only benefited me but enabled me to assist Spanish speaking students at school. For Physical Fitness I worked with a tennis instructor to improve all my tennis skills especially my serve. I won my event in district and will be competing in the state tournament for the first time. The highlight of my activities was planning and executing a nine day Expedition to Yellowstone with my family for an in depth exploration of the area including rock climbing and numerous hikes. This experience has made me a better person as I have learned to set and achieve goals, conquer mental and physical challenges and give back through service to others.

Claudia Barney
St. Louis, Missouri
Advisor: Helen Gannon
Affiliation: St. Louis Irish Arts

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with St. Louis Irish Arts. I volunteered at their summer camp, teaching kids how to dance and play music, and I performed at places like libraries and retirement communities. For Personal Development I focused on improving my violin technique and style. I can now learn and play tunes much faster, and I am more confident in my abilities as a violinist. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to become a better dancer. To do this I practiced often, learned new steps, and worked on my stamina. Finally, for my Expedition I went to Ireland. In Ireland I was able to learn more about Irish culture while developing my style of playing and meeting new people. While working towards the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I had many amazing experiences that I would not have had otherwise.

Sophia Barney
St. Louis, Missouri
Advisor: Helen Gannon
Affiliation: St. Louis Irish Arts

The goal of my Voluntary Public Service was to spread Irish culture to my community. I achieved this goal by performing traditional Irish music and dance to a variety of audiences as well as teaching children how to Irish dance, play the violin and the tin whistle. My overall Personal Development goal has been to improve as a violin player. In order to do this I practiced often in order to learn new tunes, play at dancing speed, and improve my overall ability as a musician. My Physical Fitness goal was to become a more accomplished and more experienced Irish dancer. To do this, I practiced to improve my technique as well as to learn and perfect the different steps that I learned during dance classes. The goal for my Expeditions has been to become more responsible, gain more experience planning trips, and to learn more about Irish culture. To achieve this, I planned and went on trips to a camping site, Cincinnati, and Ireland.

Katheryn Elliott

Saint Louis, Missouri

Advisor: Helen Gannon

Affiliation: St. Louis Irish Arts

I volunteered at my dance school in teaching dance and music. I also volunteered at community events. In doing so, I helped to spread knowledge about the culture of Ireland. I attended weekly private lessons and several performances. I also participated in two non-musical school related performances. This helped me to expand my skills so I can continue to enjoy Irish music and dance even after I have graduated from Saint Louis Irish Arts. I attended weekly dance lessons and assisted with the teaching of younger dancers. I also attended supplemental training when they were offered. This enabled me to attain the level of Irish dancing that I aspired to when I began my training. My Expeditions involved a combination of settings that expanded my comfort zones while allowing me to serve my fellow human beings. They included a camping trip, a service trip to an area destroyed by a tornado, and a trip to help to restore a major city that has fallen on hard times. The Congressional Award was a great kick start to becoming an active member of my community.

Josie Moran

St. Louis, Missouri

Advisor: Helen Gannon

Affiliation: St. Louis Irish Arts

To earn my Gold Medal I volunteered with St. Louis Irish Arts. I assisted teachers in classes on Mondays and Wednesdays and assisted at the shows. I have learned how rewarding serving other people is and I love being able to bring joy and happiness to my community. My Personal Development goal was to become more accomplished on the tin whistle. I have taken weekly lessons and practiced at home. For my Physical Fitness goal I worked extremely hard to improve my dance abilities. I learned new hard reels and show choreography. Through much practice I have seen my skill level change and improved my dancing, strength and stamina. For my Exploration I travelled to Ireland. While here I was able to explore the beautiful country and learn about its culture as well as compete in the most competitive Irish music competition in the world.

Ashley Chiles

Kirkwood, Missouri

Advisor: Mary Walsh

I had a wide variety of volunteer experiences locally and in an underprivileged country that gave me broad experiences and allowed me to discover the aspects in life that should be considered truly important. For Personal Development I had the opportunity to build skills that allowed me to work with managers and adults in a way that allowed me to build trust and reliability. In my Physical Fitness goals, I became confident in my new healthy demeanor and this allowed me to truly appreciate myself. Through planning a multiple day biking trip across Missouri to exploring the Grand Canyon and all of the natural beauty the state of Arizona has to offer, I was able to make decisions that allowed me the power to completely enjoy and look forward to everything I got to experience. I have gained a new appreciation for not only myself as an individual, but also all of the things in my life that I take for granted on a daily basis.

Kaelin Dooley

Webster Groves, Missouri

Advisor: Helen Gannon

Affiliation: St. Louis Irish Arts

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work by performing at nursing homes, schools, community events, and at veterans affairs. As a student of Irish culture, I had the opportunity to share what I've learned about Irish dance and music throughout my community. For Personal Development, I took private flute lessons twice a week, and practiced on my own. My objective was to improve my technique, tone, and use of variations, and in doing that I qualified to compete in the World Championships of Irish Music in Ireland. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to increase stamina and improve my Irish dance steps in both soft shoe and hard shoe. To achieve this goal, I practiced both soft and hard shoe routines a minimum of 90 minutes a week, and I also performed core strengthening exercises 20 minutes a day. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip to Ireland to experience the culture, to compare the traditional Irish music in Ireland to the music I've learned in America, and to compete in Ireland. I experienced life in small towns, music sessions in pubs, staying in a hostel, and making new friends from a different country. I had a real learning experience through the Congressional Award and it helped me grow as a person.

Francesca Mauro

Kansas City, Missouri

Advisor: Caroline Kill

I partnered with Pets for Life to train and certify my dog as a therapy pet. I also facilitated a citywide drive to alleviate hunger and food insecurity in Kansas City. I worked with several tutoring organizations locally and abroad to help improve literacy. For Personal Development I worked to develop a deeper fluency in Spanish language and culture. I independently read and studied in Spanish and immersed myself in Spanish culture for two consecutive summers. I integrated my other passions and interests with my Spanish studies by attending dance and ceramics classes. For Physical Fitness I attended dance classes and danced competitively for my studio and school teams. I choreographed group routines and solos and performed them at the regional and state levels. I acted as a captain Junior and Senior year. For my Exploration I planned an independent trip to New York City to explore the dance scene on various levels. I attended intensive classes, met with renowned choreographers, and watched performances in various styles ranging from hip hop and Broadway to ballet and modern. The Congressional Award allowed me to tie together several of my interests and further pursue my passions while working towards a concrete end-goal.

Zeeshan Khalid

Lees Summit, Missouri

Advisor: Dr. Kill

Affiliations: National Honor Society, YMCA

I focused on medical, educational, and rehabilitation for Voluntary Public Service both locally and internationally. I worked at a hospital, nursing home, and YMCA to help maintain and improve public health, a charity school in Pakistan to improve education, and raised goods/funds for refugee families. For Personal Development, I learned how to translate the language of the Islamic holy-book, the Quran, into english so that I could better understand its teachings and messages. In addition, I read my own copy of the Quran which includes english translations to improve my skills. For Physical Fitness, I worked to improve my cross country skills in order to achieve a time of 22 minutes or less in a five-kilometer foot race. In addition to seasonal practices and races, my teammates and I organized off-season practices. I further improved my running by going to the gym. For my Exploration, I organized and carried out a trip to Karachi, Pakistan with the intention of learning more about my cultural and ethnic background. I visited historic landmarks and museums, tourist attractions, and a traditional wedding, and experienced every-day life as well. The Congressional Award has taught me many life skills, applying to both my personal and professional life, which I intend to use for the rest of my life. These skills include, among others, time management, organization, dedication, consistent hard work, empathy, and humbleness. In addition, my exploration sparked a new-found passion to improve Pakistan's education system and reduce poverty.

Rachel E. Moore
Kansas City, Missouri
Advisor: Dr. Charlene Dunfee

In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service in the spirit of increasing early childhood literacy. I worked throughout my city reading to young children and educating others about early childhood reading and literacy. In my Personal Development, I had the opportunity to complete the Missouri boaters license. I now enjoy driving boats when our family goes to lakes around our state. For my Physical Fitness, I focused on decreasing my mile time in the 5K (3.1 mile race). My initial time was a 10 minute mile, but now I am running a 7 minute mile. By planning an Expedition, I have learned to considering the needs of others when traveling. We are interdependent and must learn how to effectively lead others and set them up for success. I am very grateful to my mentor Dr. Charlene Dunfee and my entire family for encouraging me throughout this process, while having the opportunity to understand that serving others not only benefits the people you are serving, but also blesses you.

Kallista Noel
Oregon, Missouri
Advisor: Jane Hager

I volunteered at the Holt County Historical Society organizing family genealogy, assembling a museum, and preserving a historic school, church, and farmstead. At Mosaic Life Care I worked in guest relations. I gave directions to guest and helped those waiting on a friend or family member in surgery. For Personal Development, I participated in a local NASP team. I practiced the correct technique of shooting and competed in monthly archery meets along with teammates. For Physical Fitness, I trained for a 5k race. I began with strength exercises then gradually incorporated running. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip to Forsyth, Missouri to Lake Taneycomo. We fished, hiked, and went to Sheppard of the Hills Fish Hatchery. I experienced so much from earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, and learned that working hard to accomplish something is worth it.

Michael Tracy
Las Vegas, Nevada
Advisor: Rory Hauf

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours with the juvenile justice system through a program called Trial by Peers. I helped students charged with first-time misdemeanor offenses get a second chance at a clean record. I acted as prosecution or defense counsel on cases. For Personal Development, I exceeded 500 hours teaching students, with the goal of becoming a Senior Kenpo Instructor--a designation I needed for approvals to develop an original anti-bully program for latch-key children, suitable for inclusion in after school recreational or non-profit settings. My greatest challenge as a Kenpo martial artist of 15 years has been to slow down and be precise with my stances and target areas. For the Physical Fitness portion of my program, I mastered a specific and measurable goal in these areas, achieving my 4th degree Kenpo black belt in June 2016. Finally, to complete my Exploration, I visited Southern California and explored its WWII past through historic venues. Taking oral histories from my 100 year-old grandmother, mother, and the daughter of a Japanese-American war hero and Manzanar internee, I retraced the footsteps of my WWII era family. I feel my journey to the Congressional Award allowed me to focus a collection of goals into a vision of my future; and then gave me the structure I needed to get to it--the true reward of participation.

Esra Aydogdu
Henderson, Nevada
Advisor: Suheyla Sarisahin
Affiliation: National Honor Society

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I volunteered at my local hospital once every week. I also received hours under the direction of National Honor Society, including volunteer events such as Project Green, Three Squares, and Spread the Word. I worked to improve my overall speaking skills through my participation in Speech and Debate. I set up a daily schedule that would allow me to practice debate at home. I also participated in monthly local tournaments that helped me better myself overall. For Physical Fitness, I set up a schedule to ensure that I was physically active every week. I ran for 10-30 minutes almost every day. I also worked at home, and made sure that I stayed physically active even when I did not go outside. For my Exploration, I began planning a couple months before summer, as I found the planes we would be taking, the food we would be eating, and the places we would be exploring. When the time came, we went to New York and we followed the itinerary and discovered new cultures and places. I am very thankful for my participation in the Congressional Award, as it has allowed me to discover myself in all aspects and embrace them.

Akshatha Narasimhan
Henderson, Nevada
Advisor: Suheyla Sarisahin
Affiliation: National Honor Society

I volunteered at my local hospital in the pediatric ward. There, I helped maintain the pediatric floor and aid in patient care. I have also taken part in multiple volunteer events and worked with many local organizations to contribute to my community. I prioritized my growth in speech and debate by competing regularly and helping fellow teammates grow as well. I have also traveled and gone to camps to strengthen my participation in my events and to learn more about the national circuit. By practicing as much as possible, I have honed my skills. I created a tennis club at my school and worked hard with the coach to improve my skills on the court. I practiced with the club and independently with my coach to maximize the development of my skills. I also worked on stamina/cardio training so that my performance on the tennis court would benefit. I planned a trip to Europe so that I could enrich myself and my family in a new culture. My family and I traveled to France and Switzerland, where we enjoyed new foods, museums, and historic sites. We also visited many local spots to get more of an authentic sense of the different environments. Earning the Congressional Award has been a truly heartening experience, in which I have challenged myself, learned more about myself, and cultivated a new understanding of the world.

Dana DeMore
Freedom, New Hampshire
Advisor: Amanda Royce
Affiliations: 4-H

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goal, I worked at a local organization for children and teens with Autism, Epilepsy, and other developmental disabilities. Through teaching cooking, swimming, horseback riding, art, and music, I made an impact on the lives of local teens. For Personal Development, I took lessons on the acoustic guitar and ukulele. Since I started playing, I have performed in a variety show and shared my love of music with my friends, family, and the greater community. For my Physical Fitness goal, I started to run and train for a 5K. I joined my local running club, and ran multiple races. During my first semester of college, I joined my college's Cross-Country team, where I was able to improve my time dramatically. For my final Expedition, I completed a 24-day backpacking, canyoneering, and rafting Outward Bound course in Utah. This Expedition pushed me to my limits both physically and mentally; however, I am stronger and more confident for it. The Congressional Award has made a huge impact on my life, and has taught me that with planning, persistence, and passion, I am capable of far more than I realize.

Emily Craven

Windham, New Hampshire

Advisor: Lynn Lyons

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award I completed 400+ hours of Voluntary Public Service. My most rewarding experience was working for local Food Banks and Homeless Shelters for those less fortunate. I prepared and served many meals and organized food pantries. For Personal Development, I focused on improving my 2K erg time for my crew team. I did this by attending crew practice five days a week. I dropped 50 seconds off my 2K time. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to improve my swim times. I achieved this by practicing five days a week and I dropped time in the 100 Free, 50 Free and 100 Breast. I earned the most points of any female swimmer on my team at our State Meet; placing 7th and 10th overall. Lastly, for my Exploration I planned a trip to Paris and Barcelona. I organized activities that would immerse us in the culture: cooking classes, museum tours and meeting with locals. Learning to navigate each city via subway and communicating in French and Spanish was my greatest accomplishment. While earning my Gold Medal I learned to manage my time to accomplish each goal and it was worth every minute.

Josh Geldreich

Berlin, New Jersey

Advisor: Amei Geldreich

By participating in, organizing and volunteering multiple 5K walk/run fundraising events, parties for children in the foster care system, Chinese New Year celebrations, International dinners, and monthly adoption support group meetings for adopted children and their families I accomplished my Voluntary Public Service goals. I dedicated over 200 hours to develop my public speaking, debate, civics, leadership and fundraising skills as a founding member in the Tri-County High School Chapter of Junior State of America (JSA) for Personal Development. For Physical Fitness I spent over 200 hours improving my swimming skills through training and education, earned my life guard certification and obtained a summer position at multiple lakes. I have also been hired to work for an athletic club as a pool lifeguard. For my Exploration I spent five days and four nights exploring a state that I had never visited. I initiated, planned and executed my entire trip. I contacted the host, bought my plane tickets and researched the area to determine what specifically I wanted to learn about to compare and contrast rural Michigan. Earning the Congressional Award has been an ambitious undertaking that provided me with unparalleled opportunities to challenge myself to excel through dedication, determination and perseverance.

Zach Gill

Cinnaminson, New Jersey

Advisor: Rosemary Laberee

For Voluntary Public Service I taught math and public speaking to kids who would normally not have the opportunity to learn such subjects. For my Personal Development goal I led several student teams and clubs in areas of debate and public discourse to improve my social skills and leadership qualities. For Physical Fitness I joined a rowing team to improve my overall strength and increase my endurance. For my Exploration I planned and executed a weeklong trip in Europe, including travel and groceries. This experience has helped me mature in my decision making and planning. I feel more prepared for my adult life and have provided help to those in my community who needed it.

Nora Faverzani

Ocean City, New Jersey

Advisor: Tobi Oves

Affiliations: American Red Cross, Key Club

To complete my service goals, I organized and participated in many service events through the Ocean City High School Student Council and Key Club. I also created a volunteer tutoring program for middle school students at my local library and volunteered for the Greater Ocean City Theatre Company. My Personal Development goal was centered around strengthening my faith. I continued as a leader for the St. Damien Parish Ocean City Youth Ministry. This led me to grow closer in my relationship with my religion. To complete my Physical Fitness goal of being able to consistently performing many pirouettes. I achieved this by completing many technique classes, workouts and other dance classes. For my Exploration, I brought my foreign exchange brother to Washington DC. While there, I showed him all of the sites, and gave him a feel for American history and culture. Working toward the Congressional Award Gold Medal gave the last two years an underlying focus and has inspired me to continue in public service.

Raelynn Miller

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

For Voluntary Public Service I ushered patrons and worked the concession stand at the Levoy Theatre, volunteered at “Cookies with Santa” and “Pizza Bingo” with the Holly Heights elementary school PTA, trained young athletes at the Millville Track Club, managed track meets at Stockton University and lifeguarded at the HC Family Center. To meet my Personal Development goals I participated in the Millville Marching Band. This gave me initiative to better myself in my trumpet playing ability as well as learning how to march and play my instrument when the band performs. For Physical Fitness I trained and competed for Millville High School’s cross country team. In the beginning of summer I set goals to run longer distances and race during the season with certain times. From freshman year on, I ran personal records more than a minute faster than the year prior, this year at 18:39 for 5k. Finally for my Gold Medal Expedition I planned to camp at Parvin State Park in Pittsgrove Township. While camping I hiked and ran on the trails around the lake, collected leaves, identified constellations, and cooked meals for my family and I to eat the whole duration of the trip. I had a great experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and I am thankful for the many new doors it has opened for me. I would like to thank my family and the many friends who helped me on this journey.

Alexis Oliver

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

In completing the Congressional Award for the past three years, I have learned many things. I have become more patient and more organized. I also learned the importance of managing my time. I have also learned how to prioritize and help people. I have learned how to play alto saxophone and piano. I had over 600 hours of volunteering at the Riverfront Renaissance Center. For my first expedition, I went to Washington, D.C. and went to several museums including Holocaust Museum, and a Crime Museum. We also went to Arlington Cemetery. For my second year, I went camping along the Delaware Water Gap. While there we went to Bushkill Falls, hiked along the Delaware Water Gap, and went kayaking. My last year, I went to Eustace, Texas. I stayed in Eustace with family, and worked on their farm for five days. We traveled to Dallas to see the Sixth Floor Museum and The Holocaust Museum. While achieving my physical goal, I played high school field hockey for three years, I was on the high school swim team, and learned how to play golf while playing on the high school golf team. Throughout this, I have become more athletic and built up more physical endurance.

Anthony Olivio

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

I completed my Voluntary Public Service goal by taking time to go to different schools around my town and volunteer to help the kids learn and have fun. The teachers said that the kids were excited when I volunteered because they had more fun. I completed my Personal Development goal my cooking meals for my family and furthering my talent at cooking. I discovered a lot of new dishes as well as dishes I didn't even think I could make. I completed my Physical Fitness goal by working hard everyday at hockey practice on and off the ice. There was a huge difference in my play. I nearly tripled my points and I cant thank this program for pushig me to do so. I completed my Expedition by going to Washington D.C and went to different sites and learned about our nations capital. I am so glad that I got to participate in this project because I feel like it makes me more well rounded as a person.

Richard Rivera

Millville, New Jersey

Advisor: Lisa Gaudio

For Voluntary Public Service I volunteered at the Levoy Theatre where I scanned tickets, served as an usher and sold concessions. I also volunteered as a mentor for a summer youth program with the Original Hobo Band. To meet my Personal Development goal of improving my drumming skills I practiced at home and with an instructor. Through practice I have improved my technique and pushed my boundaries to perform advanced music. I wanted to increase and expand my workout routine to help with endurance for Physical Fitness. Through lifting weights, riding my bike and doing heavy labor in my yard I have improved my strength. Finally for my Exploration I travelled to San Antonio, Texas where I visited many sites in the city including the Alamo, the courthouse and San Fernando Cathedral.

Nicolette Traa

Linwood, New Jersey

Advisor: John Kennedy

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

The most involved volunteer work I was a part of was being a counselor at Leadership Excellence Direct Results (LEDR). Along with being a counselor, I also organized several American Red Cross blood drives, and tutored children in the Atlantic City community. For my Personal Development goal I worked as an ABA therapist where my duties included: providing behavioral, educational, and vocational-based services to individuals with disabilities such as Autism, nonverbal learning disorder, etc. This allowed me to explore a career in therapy while completing school. Through my Physical Fitness goals I became fit enough to complete a FitX intermediate level course. These are crossfit-like classes that test a person's strength and ability to complete a specific workout. Throughout my training, I progressed from struggling in the beginner's class to completing the intermediate class. Finally for my Expedition I helped organize and participated at Leadership Excellence Direct Results (LEDR) as a counselor for their summer program. Myself and other counselors were responsible for 30+ young adults and guided them on day trips exploring different career fields such as medical, technology, educational, etc. In participating in the Congressional Award, I have not only gained knowledge, but I have challenged myself, have a better understanding of the people in my community and many experiences have encouraged me to be more involved within my community.

Vidhi Jain

Toms River, New Jersey

Advisor: Patrick Lynch

In earning my Congressional Award, I spent hundreds of hours providing voluntary medical camps in poverty-stricken countries through my non-profit Share A Smile. These camps provided the locals with basic eye, diabetes, and blood pressure checkups, as well as glasses and cataract surgeries. For Personal Development, I took vocal lessons for 6 hours a week and competed in regional and national singing competitions. I was a semi-finalist at the 2017 nationals. For Physical Fitness, I trained in ballet, contemporary, jazz and pointe dance every week for over 2 years. I was able to grow from an amateur ballet dancer, to an advanced ballet pointe dancer. My Expedition was a trip to Iceland where I was able to experience the Nordic culture and appreciate the natural beauty. It was a learning experience to see a different culture and adjust to the extreme environment, but the highlight of the trip was seeing the Aurora Borealis lights. My journey in earning the Congressional Award has been so fruitful, teaching me resilience and developing my character as a person.

Sakshi Parikh

Toms River, New Jersey
Advisor: Heather Handzo
Affiliation: YMCA

For Voluntary Public Service I volunteered at my local YMCA as an aquatic leader and taught children of young ages how to swim efficiently. I observed them as they progressed to eventually join the swim team. I also gave my time at the information desk at the Community Medical Center and at my local library to review books. For Personal Development, I improved my skills and endurance with dancing. I also participated in the Garden State Philharmonic Youth Orchestra as a viola player and participated in various concerts and strengthened my skills enough to play a solo at my school. While on my high school tennis team, I participated in various matches and drills which helped to play a role in reaching my Physical Fitness goals. For my Exploration I planned and executed a trip to Spain where I learned an immense amount about their culture and the European way of life. I gained leadership skills through this process to help me grow as a person while dealing with several responsibilities and facing many obstacles. In earning this prestigious award, I have been able to pursue a wide variety of personal interests that also contributed to my community and I have truly matured through this program.

Sasanka Pitta

Toms River, New Jersey
Advisor: Heather Handzo

In preparation to complete my service goals, I volunteered at the Manchester Library and Community Medical Center in New Jersey for a total of four years. While I was volunteering at the hospital I was at the front desk for patient information and I was a buddy/activity helper at the library. To complete my Personal Development goals, I worked at the local McDonald's where I learned how to communicate with a wide range of people. This advanced my communication skills and allowed me to establish friendships with so many new people. To reach my fitness goals, I was a member of my school's varsity soccer team for four years. This helped me stay in shape and become a healthier person. Last summer I went to India to complete my Expedition and Exploration goals. During my trip I traveled to different parts of India where I went to some of the most unique temples that India has. Which led to my new understanding of Hinduism and the other aspects of the country. On the path to earning the Congressional Award, I was able to learn life lessons regarding acceptance, communication, health, and culture that I will carry for the rest of my life.

Heli Shah

Toms River, New Jersey
Advisor: Patricia Orlando

To earn the Congressional Award I volunteered at my local library organizing books and my local hospital answering calls, delivering flowers, and transporting patients. I also volunteered to organize and fundraise for an annual 5k which helps to donate to various causes in my community. For Personal Development I attended a robotics camp held at my high school to learn the basics of block coding. Expanding my knowledge for math also had a big part in Personal Development as I was introduced to various math topics over the course of many months. For Physical Fitness I took part in my girls tennis team at school during the fall season and took private lessons with my coach. For my Exploration I planned a trip to various cities in Spain to fulfill this requirement and learn about a new culture rich in its architecture and history. Overall, I think my experience in obtain the Congressional Award definitely made me a well-rounded person and encouraged me to do things, such as taking a trip to Spain, that I would not have done before.

Riya Shah

Toms River, New Jersey
Advisor: Patricia Orlando
Affiliation: Key Club

In earning my Congressional Award, I conducted over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, including volunteering at my community hospital, assisting both patients and nurses. I also organized an annual color run with my youth group in which we donated \$10,000 each year to various charities. For Personal Development, I began working as a tutor at a Kumon center. I developed responsibility and leadership, while also gained patience and the ability to work with and assist children. For Physical Fitness, I began tennis lessons. Through several hours of practice, I joined the high school tennis team where I have been playing for 3 years now. Finally, I conducted an Expedition to India in which I was able to visit several historical sites, including, the Taj Mahal. While on the trip, I got the chance to experience a new culture and several aspects of Indian history. I am grateful for all of the skills and experience that I have gained through my completion of the Congressional Award!

Craig Scharmann

Little Silver, New Jersey

Advisor: Mike DeCotis

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, YMCA

In order to attain my Congressional Award, I volunteered over 450 hours through my scout troop. During the summer, I spent two weeks at Forestburg Scout Reservation teaching young scouts how to swim and small boat sail. Throughout the two years, I also volunteered in various eagle scout projects. For Personal Development, I practiced my skills at becoming a strong leader. I just recently finished up my term as Senior Patrol Leader of my troop, which included being in charge of approximately 30 scouts. For Physical Fitness, I swam on my high school swim team for two years. At first I was not able to swim 100m without stopping. But, I quickly progressed to being able to swim 1000s of meters in a single practice. In the summer of 2017, I planned a camping trip to Monticello, Pennsylvania. While there, I went rock climbing, horseback riding, waterskiing, canoeing and more. It was a fantastic trip, and a memory I won't forget. I had a great time earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, as it opened up so much opportunity for me to experience.

Alexandra Hsueh

Morganville, New Jersey

Advisor: Shumei Kuo

Over the course of my high school career, I accumulated over 400 volunteer hours. I volunteered with many organizations including Centrastate Healthcare Systems to complete my Congressional Award. For Personal Development, I took several vocal lessons and went to many rehearsals for Concordia Youth Chorale. Through my lessons and rehearsals, I improved greatly in my sightreading and vocal skills. For my Physical Fitness requirement, I tried out for the Marlboro High School girl's tennis team. After a lot of practice and training, I made the team and continued to improve my tennis skills under my wonderful coaches. In order to complete my Expedition goal, I planned an 8 day family trip to Japan. Through the trip, my family learned about Japan's culture and visited several cool places, such as the Osaka Aquarium Kaiyukan, one of the largest public aquariums in the world. Working towards the Gold Medal has been an amazing journey for me and has definitely helped me become a better person.

Robert Greeley

Mountainside, New Jersey

Advisor: Valerie Dann

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

To earn my Congressional Award I focused on service that would enable people to enjoy nature. I built and maintained hiking trails in different states and I created a Memorial Rose Garden for two of the founding women in my town. For Personal Development I learned all about Robotics: how to follow manuals, how to build, how to program, and how to rethink problems. I joined my school's robotics team and learned the importance of personal responsibility but more importantly, the sharing of talents to work cooperatively. For my Physical Fitness, I experienced the art of fencing. I took lessons, worked out at a club, joined my school's fencing team and improved my technique and stamina. My greatest challenge was my Expedition where I backpacked for eight days in New Mexico. I am an avid camper on the east coast but this expedition took me to a climate and terrain which was different from what I was used to. I had to train physically and mentally; it was a life-changing experience. I have always known the value of service to others but the Congressional Award made service a way of life. I am proud to have performed over 600 hours and anticipate performing many more as the years progress.

Sofia Kwon

Warren, New Jersey

Advisor: Mae Jeanlouie

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed my Voluntary Public Service at Mane Stream, an equine assisted therapy center. There I assisted disabled clients in therapeutic and adaptive riding lessons for speech and occupational therapy. My Personal Development involved an afterschool job in my neighborhood. Each day after school I would walk, feed and play with Rex, a Norwich terrier; this taught me a lot about care giving and responsibility. For my Physical Fitness goal I worked to improve my golf skills. I increased the length of my drives, improved my consistency with my irons and with putting; this allowed me to lower my scores and has instilled even more passion for this game. For my Expedition, I hiked several of the Adirondack High Peaks, en route to becoming an Adirondack 46er. I also learned the skills to captain various boat on Lake Champlain. Working towards my Gold Medal has taught me many valuable lessons about determination and persistence; these will continue to serve me well in the future.

Gabriella Alicea
Clifton, New Jersey
Advisor: Holly Batista

To earn my Congressional Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at Oasis: A Haven For Women and Children. I worked on-site tutoring students grades K-5th in math and reading. For Personal Development, I attended music lessons once a week and studied on my own to learn how to play the guitar and piano. I am now advanced in music theory as well as can play both instruments. For my Physical Fitness, I became active in the combat sport of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I attend classes throughout the week and continue to advance. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a five-night trip to Puerto Rico living amongst locals and visiting historical sights. I had a wonderful experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and would recommend for everyone to be apart of this amazing opportunity.

Nishay Varma Bhatnagar
Livingston, New Jersey
Advisor: Phil Piscioti
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I completed over 500 community service hours. As Senior Patrol Leader, I led my troop in numerous service projects, including my own Eagle project, a personalized memorial service for Veterans. At Saint Barnabas Medical Center, I assisted at Concussion Clinics and transported patients. For Personal Development, I improved my piano skills. I was thrilled to receive the highest evaluation on the Music Educators Association exam. For Physical Fitness, I learned fencing. While I challenged myself at private competitions, it was the camaraderie of the fencing team I enjoyed the most. I was honored to be captain of my school's Epee Varsity Fencing team this year. I went on a 14-day trip to London and New Delhi for my Expedition/Exploration. I explored historical monuments and cultural sites, as well as modern structures including the Lotus Temple and the London Eye. The Congressional Award gave me the opportunity to serve my community, open my mind to new experiences and set high goals for myself.

Jeremy Nugent

Morristown, New Jersey

Advisor: Anthony Negrin

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I primarily volunteered at my town's volunteer ambulance corps. I would ride a twelve hour shift, every Saturday night. I also volunteered my time for John Corr Family Resources to help the underprivileged families of New Jersey. For my Personal Development goals, I became a New Jersey state certified Emergency Medical Technician by taking a summer class and passing the state exams. I also took the leadership position of a Campus Minister which put me in charge of many different service organizations and clubs in my school. My Physical Fitness goal was to train and prepare for the Army ROTC Physical Training Test. To do so, I lifted weights and trained at my school and at an outside gym. In addition, my yearlong, varsity athletic pursuits added to my training and completion of the PT test. For my Exploration, I decided to do a cultural immersion in the Bronx. I served and observed at St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, to experience the many different cultures that make up the community. I also spent free time exploring different parts of the Bronx. I would not have changed anything about my service or experiences, and participating in the Award has helped me reflect upon the impact of my actions.

Malvika Narayan

Monmouth Jct., New Jersey

Advisor: Joyce Kay

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

At the Plainsboro Preserve (an environmental education center) I volunteered in the summer camp, where I educated children about nature. By feeding the animals housed in the center, I improved my comfort in wildlife surroundings. This helped me assist in tours for the preserve. For my Personal Development goal I practiced weekly and studied towards taking Level 5 theory exam, and Level 5, 6, and 7 practical exams from ABRSM. I now have a deeper understanding of the art of music. In addition to running everyday after school with members of my team I focused on my areas of weakness by taking the initiative to do extra activities such as strides to help meet my Physical Fitness goals. Finally for my Exploration I visited the Niagara Falls area on both the American and Canadian sides. Through my participation in the Congressional Award, I have gained immense knowledge and built my character as I strive to be a greater person who can contribute to the world.

Shreya Krishnan
Dix Hills, New York
Advisor: Sushama Tangella

In achieving this award I have dedicated over 500 hours to the Hospitality Too Inc. Soup Kitchen. Every Saturday I provide essentials and prepare hot meals to those who are underprivileged in my community. Working with those who share the same goal as me has brought our locality together as one. For Personal Development, I had created a collection of artworks in the watercolor medium. Over the years I developed my skills in proportional drawing, painting techniques and color theory. Developing this skill took time but was worthwhile as I learned the importance of dedication and patience. As for Physical Fitness, I was able to lose weight through exercise and healthy eating. The two major principles I've learned from this experience was persistence and consistency. At first I was extremely self conscious and but now I am starting to feel much more comfortable in my own skin. In the Expedition portion of the award, I planned a trip with my family to Grand Cayman. Through various activities like kayaking and SCUBA diving, I got an immersive experience in aquatic activities and learned about the unique marine life at the Cayman Islands. By participating in this program, I have not only developed new skills in various aspects but have also gained knowledge about my community as well as myself.

Ryan Lawrence
Bayport, New York
Advisor: Susan Mullins

To receive my Congressional Award I volunteered in a hospital. I worked with a local organization to help struggling families in the neighborhood. For Personal Development I began working as a lifeguard each summer. I also began working a second job as a soccer referee. To become more physically fit I joined the basketball team where I became one of the best players in the league earning All-Conference honors. For my Exploration I traveled across the world to Europe to experience a new culture. I was able to see what it was like for other people to live in comparison to my own life. Overall, the Congressional Award pushed me to do things that I would have never done otherwise.

Christopher Czarkowski
Port Washington, New York
Advisor: Grace Pangbourne
Affiliation: American Red Cross

To earn my Congressional Award I helped disabled children with special needs learn sports and develop social skills to succeed in the world. I also raised a significant amount of money for the American Cancer Society over the past three years, as the 8th top fundraiser in Relay for Life in my town. For Personal Development I wanted to challenge myself and obtain my SCUBA certification while exploring shipwrecks in Key West, Florida. I had to overcome severe seasickness and dangerous weather. This experience helped me to re-examine how hard I can push myself, as sometimes I can be extreme in my goals. I was dedicated to my favorite sports, football and lacrosse and I knew I wanted to become a Varsity athlete in high school in both sports. My efforts paid off, and I helped my team reach the playoffs in our last season of football. In lacrosse, I won a New York State Championship. For my Exploration I travelled to Key West and obtained my Advanced Adventurer SCUBA certification, so I could deep-water dive to 100+ feet below the surface, exploring wrecks and conducting navigation. On this trip I learned how to protect the ocean and how to properly handle the animals in the sea.

Michael Bender
Wantagh, New York
Advisor: Michele Levine

I volunteered with many programs to better communities in need. I coordinated and distributed items that children in a low-income community would need. I initiated a tech class for senior citizens, guided and taught senior citizens in order to help them develop technological skills. For Personal Development I was interested in pursuing something outside my comfort zone that would help me relax and stay focused. I heard a lot about Yoga and decided to make it part of my daily routine. I continued with my love of baseball and everlasting pursuit to improve my game for my Physical Fitness goals. I set out to raise my batting average over the summer season. I hit off a tee each day which ultimately led to the improvement I longed for. For my Expedition, I participated in a Greek Easter. I was fortunate enough to have family friends that were more than happy to host me during the holiday and teach me the importance of Easter in the Greek community. My journey to the Congressional Award Gold Medal was a long one with many obstacles in the road; however, achieving this award taught me how to overcome obstacles towards the bigger picture. This is something I hope to bring to all facets of my life.

Sai Chandrasekhar
Flushing, New York
Advisor: Sushma Tangella

To earn my Congressional Award, I performed Voluntary Public Service with the Glen Oaks Volunteer Ambulance Corps, where I learned and used basic EMS skills and participated in community outreach activities. I also volunteered at a food drive, where I cooked and served food to homeless people from a nearby shelter. For Personal Development I learned computer programming skills at the American Museum of Natural History and utilized them with an internship with a scientist to build an algorithm that sorts DNA sequences into a database. I also worked as a Peer Health Educator at a community non-profit named Forestdale. For my Physical Fitness, I practiced Indian classical dance for several days a week in order to be able to dance with the senior team at my dance school. For my Expedition, I planned a camping trip for 5 days and 4 nights for more than 30 people, including lodging, activities and outdoor excursions and for the first time attempted ziplining at the hunter mountain at about 50 miles and 600 ft above the ground. The pursuit of the Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an incredible journey of self discovery and realization of my inner strengths.

Lindsey Chu
Bayside, New York
Advisor: Risa Harms

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal in Voluntary Public Service, I performed over 400 hours of work with the District 20-K1 Leo's Club. I was the District Club President for a year, and during that time, I served my community by leading and organizing events that help and empower those in need. For Personal Development, I spent over 300 hours practicing harp. I attended the Juilliard Pre-College Harp Program every week, which helped me advance my playing and win several International Music Competitions. For Physical Fitness, I spent about 65 hours improving my golf game. After school and on the weekends, I went to the driving range and golf course to improve my swing mechanics and solidly hit the ball. I was able to increase the distance of my shots by an average of 10 yards. For my Expedition, I spent about two months preparing and planning out a trip to Cancun, Mexico. I was immersed in many cultures, trying out different foods, observing wildlife, and learning the history of many ruins. My experience in earning the Congressional Award has helped me realize the importance of not only improving myself, but also improving the world around me.

Hruday Rajput

Forest Hills, New York
Advisor: Sushama Tangella

For my goal of 400 hours in Voluntary Public Service, I focused on helping people in need, whether it be feeding the homeless on the street or keeping people in nursing homes happy and in company. I also volunteered heavily at events in the cultural organization TLCA (Telugu Literary Cultural Association). My goal for Personal Development was to become fluent in vocal Karnatic (classical) music to explore my deep passion for music. I took weekly classes for 2 years to reach the advanced level of learning I am currently in. To achieve my fitness goal of losing weight, I made a daily workout plan for myself, which started off easy and quick, and over the course of the Congressional Award, I increased time and difficulty. I was able to complete this routine almost every day of the week at home with minimal equipment. For my Exploration, I took my family to Amish County, Pennsylvania and then to Bear Creek Mountains nearby. I was able to get a deep insight into the unique life of the Amish, and also have an intimate experience with nature to end the trip. Overall, the Congressional Award was an exciting experience that pushed me to work hard towards my goals, both short and long-term, while also developing a sense of maturity and responsibility.

Sofija Radulovic

New York, New York
Advisor: Margaret 'Peggy' O'Dowd
Affiliation: National Honor Society

My Voluntary Public Service was concentrated on helping disadvantaged youth. In this category, my goals ranged from helping several teenagers in Nicaragua have the means to graduate from high school to tutoring lower-income New York City students in preparation of high school entrance exams. Early on, my Personal Development goals were focused on working within student government at my school in order to represent my classmates in planning events and serving as a liaison to administration. In time, my goals became more connected with gaining employment and advancing in my workplace. Most often, my Physical Fitness goals were placed within the context of my commitment to gymnastics. Early on, I prepared to try-out for the team at my high school. Ultimately, the goals resulted in three successful years wherein my team stood on the podium at the NYC Citywide Championships. My Expeditions had a constant theme of connecting with nature. They ranged from kayaking through New York Harbor to spending a week in an off-grid home in upstate New York tending to chickens with a host family. These expeditions certainly pushed me outside of my comfort zone in a positive way! My experience in the Congressional Award has given me a more nuanced understanding of myself, greater confidence in achieving my goals, and an overall excitement regarding new experiences.

Kristen Blanchard
Staten Island, New York
Advisor: Robert Gullickson
Affiliation: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work by actively being involved with several organizations within my community. I helped plan a local parade, assisted senior citizens with snow removal, and taught softball fundamentals to younger girls. For Personal Development, I worked part time as a newspaper carrier. This job improved my social and work skills, as well as managerial skills interacting with the customers during the collection of payment. For my Physical Fitness portion, I was determined to bring my softball skills to a new level and to be able to play softball in college. I am so grateful that I achieved my goal as I will be playing Division 1 softball next year at Long Island University. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five- night trip to Colorado where I was able to explore an unfamiliar area. It was an amazing experience that I will never forget. I have learned many valuable life lessons and made memories that will last a lifetime while earning The Congressional Award, which has also shaped me into a better version of myself and has better prepared me for obstacles I may face throughout my life.

Rahma Ibrahim
Brooklyn, New York
Advisor: Dr. Abdulhakeem Alhasel

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 300 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at my local volunteer ambulance organization. I served as an emergency dispatcher and worked to provide free medical assistance to members of my community. For Personal Development, I joined a Girls Who Code club and learned how to code. I can now code using Python, JavaScript, and Actimator. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided I would practice my 3-point shots until I could make 25% of my shots. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-night trip in the upstate New York area. As we explored the area for our first time, we visited museums and witnessed horse races. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and learned that I really can do anything I set my mind to.

Frank Pizzella

Staten Island, New York

Advisor: Robert Gullickson

Affiliation: National Honor Society

I devoted my time to helping the less fortunate through soup kitchens, tutoring, and delivering food to the elderly. I have dedicated my time to not for profit organizations such as Meals on Wheels and the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation. For Personal Development I have worked a part-time job at a summer camp, managed an athletics team, and served in leadership positions at various clubs. To fulfill my Physical Fitness goals I have participated in multiple high school sports including: baseball, track and field, and varsity tennis. Finally, for my Exploration I visited Washington D.C. where I saw many political and historical buildings that are instrumental to our country.

Peter Rotondo

Staten Island, New York

Advisor: Robert Gullickson

To earn my Congressional Gold Award I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work by serving food at Assumption Soup Kitchen, delivering food to the elderly and handicapped through Meals on Wheels, and by organizing the Travis July 4th Parade. For Personal Development I took piano lessons and worked as a bus boy at two local restaurants, Pier 76 and Molo. For my Physical Fitness portion, I played Varsity football at St. Peter's Boys High School. Finally, for Expedition I took a 5-day trip to explore the culture of Washington, D.C. which involved visiting many museums, the Supreme Court, the White House, the U.S. Capitol, multiple monuments and mastering the D.C. subway system. This experience has taught me the importance of giving to others, and it has shown me that I can do anything I set my mind to doing.

Jakob Matala

Astoria, New York

Advisor: Barbara DeMaio

I served as a volunteer gymnastics coach at D.A. Sokol. I attended instructor training to teach young boys and girls basic exercises, and prepare them for competition. I am the class leader of the toddlers' program and I continue to coach at Sokol three days a week, after school and on weekends. I achieved several Personal Development goals including receiving mentoring once a week in reading and speaking Tagalog, the Philippine national language. I also took up a new musical instrument by attending weekly acoustic guitar lessons and practicing playing it daily at home. I learned recreational gymnastics at D.A. Sokol and trained twice a week in the men's events of Floor, Pommel Horse, Rings, Vault, Parallel and High Bars. I competed at U.S.A. Gymnastics Level 5 and participated in exhibitions locally and at Sokols in Chicago, Dallas, Cedar Rapids, and Pittsburgh. To explore the immigration experience, I visited museums/landmarks on New York's Irish and German settlers, Russian Jewish exiles, Japanese-American families, and Chinese laborers. I learned of historic immigrants influencing Philadelphia and Texas; and how various ethnicities co-exist in Singapore. By participating in the Congressional Award, I'm now motivated to set more goals in life. As a young adult, I want to keep growing and learning, and sharing my talents with others. Achieving goals in the pillars of Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness and Exploration inspired, challenged, and helped me develop and mature holistically.

Rebecca Reich

New York, New York

Advisor: Sarah Dong

I created four "Empowerment Through Fashion" fundraisers to benefit a community-based organization in Chinatown. The goal of the event was to build confidence in girls by giving them access to fashionable clothing and female mentors who provided career advice. For Personal Development, I completed internships in business and real estate in New York City, Los Angeles, and Segovia, Spain. I also took extracurricular courses at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in fashion journalism and public relations. For the Physical Fitness requirement, I focused on improving my tennis skills. I did not make my school's tennis team in 9th grade, but in my senior year, I played on the varsity team. I also worked on my overall fitness level in the tennis off season by taking spin classes at a local gym. I planned a 5-day trip to Tennessee, starting in Knoxville and ending at a homestead farm in the remote city of Eidson. I milked goats, made jam, made soap, and shot a gun. This experience was so outside of my comfort zone and so unique, I will never forget it! In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned so much about myself, others, and what I am capable of achieving. I also learned the importance of time management which enabled me to complete over 800 hours to qualify while also balancing school work and maintaining a busy social schedule.

Thomas Flynn
Astoria, New York
Advisor: Nuala Martinez

In earning the Congressional Award I exhibited over 400 hrs of Voluntary Public Service to DA Sokol, helping teach children gymnastics. In doing this, I learned how to control a group as well as how to spot basic gymnastics. As for Personal Development, I furthered my skill and experience as a piano player. I played in numerous concerts as well as learned a mix of both pop songs and classical music. I attended weekly private lessons and practiced daily on my own. As for Physical Fitness, I chose to attend bi-weekly gymnastics lessons as well as attended national competitions. I am now a level 5 gymnast and have won numerous medals in the sport. Finally, for my Expedition/Exploration, I was lucky enough to explore a new part of the country and see Seattle, Washington. I explored places like Olympic National Park, Boeing Flight Company and the Space Needle in Seattle. The Congressional Award Gold Medal has been a great achievement for me and has shaped me as a whole person by showing how to manage time, achieve goals and give back to society. I am a different person from having all of these wonderful experiences.

Thomas Fouts
Rye, New York
Advisor: Mary Welcher

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I served at Neighbor to Neighbor, a non-profit organization that collects and redistributes clothing, shoes, and food locally. In addition to working 5 hours every Saturday I also worked on individual drives to gather food, shoes and clothing. For Personal Development, I studied and practiced meditation for a year. I met with Dr. Chin every month and I practiced meditation twice a day. As I practiced meditation I saw the benefits, such as a lower resting heart rate, lower stress levels, and the ability to stay calm under pressure. I am a very competitive lacrosse player and for my Physical Fitness goal, I worked toward increasing my speed, shot, and stick skills and overall strength as well as my leadership skills on and off the field. To meet my goals I trained 4-5x a week doing strength and conditioning training. For my Expedition I researched, prepared, and planned a five-night trip to Southern Utah. I learned about the culture and the Native Americans as well as the geographical formations of the topography.

Priyanka Kumar
Latham, New York
Advisor: Amy Rasner

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at a medical research lab to 3D print human skin for burn victims and volunteered at my local nursing home. I also created a mental health awareness initiative with my peers and tutored children in a variety of academic disciplines. For Personal Development, I sharpened my computer science skills by attending the GE Robotics Summit and learning about python and artificial intelligence. I also became President of my school's newspaper and wrote articles for my school's political magazine to enhance my communication skills. For Physical Fitness, I increased my endurance and speed through cardio workouts, weight lifting, and soccer practices. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a 12 day trip in Europe where I got the chance to explore the culture and history of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic. Overall, the Congressional Award was an amazing experience that taught me the importance of developing my character and giving back to my community.

Sarah Antonevich
New Hartford, New York
Advisor: Ewa Lawrence

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at Utica Children's Museum helping with educational programs for kids, volunteering at my local healthcare center and Emergency Room, along with performing and organizing various benefit concerts in my community. For Personal Development, I continued and reached an advanced level in my piano and music theory studies. I completed all levels of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music practical piano exams and five levels of the music theory exams. Also, I finished NYSSMA exams with a perfect score. I achieved over 200 hours of Physical Fitness, participating on the Girls' Varsity Tennis and Track and Field teams. I was able to improve my serving skills, playing on a doubles team. As well, I trained for and boosted my sprint times and long jump distance by over two feet. For the Expedition/Exploration portion I planned a five-night trip to the island of Oahu, Hawaii to explore the diverse environments through a variety of hiking trails and kayaking. I walked on the North Shore sand one day and hiked through the muddy slopes of a tropical rainforest the next day. My participation in the Congressional Award program taught me to challenge myself in different fields, equally developing physically and mentally. It was a great experience and showed that through planning, hard work, and dedication anything is possible!

Julianna Fisher

Victor, New York

Advisor: Bernet Parkins

Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award, I helped create and run a Trivia Night fundraiser for my local Kiwanis Club's Relay for Life team to support the American Cancer Society. We had a fun time while raising awareness and money for Relay for Life, American Cancer Society and the Kiwanis Club. My goals for Personal Development dealt with my desire to sell my artwork in local boutiques. I expanded on the skills I learned in school to create unique artwork that would sell. I then had to learn to approach merchants and market myself and my work so that the merchants would sell them. To complete the Physical Fitness sections of this award, I started training for a 5k, I was not the fastest but I did cross that finish line, I then transferred my training and joined a college rugby club. Finally, to complete my Exploration I was a delegate to The Hague International Model United Nation. I studied international policies, politics, and cultures. The conference was a week long in the Netherlands. I worked with other delegates and lived with a host family. This was an amazing experience, to earn this award. I learned the importance of follow through and how to transfer skills from one aspect of my life to another.

Cobey Ledford

Sanford, North Carolina

Advisor: Mark Cronmiller

Affiliation: 4-H

I volunteered for various agencies in my community. One organization I enjoyed volunteering was Temple Theater, a community theater. I helped with a wide variety of projects from office work to painting. For Personal Development, I expanded my knowledge about the political process by paging in the NC House, serving in leadership with the Youth Legislative Assembly, attending a two-week long simulation camp on US Congress and the State Department and studied foreign policy. I achieved my Physical Fitness goals by increasing speed and endurance in swimming and improved my shooting scores as a member of two shooting teams. The most exciting part of this award was the Expedition I planned out West. I slept in a teepee and experienced some spectacular sights including Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon National Park, Sedona and the Las Vegas strip. The Congressional Award taught me how to set goals and make plans to achieve those goals.

Tanner Helmick

New Bern, North Carolina

Advisor: Crystal Heath

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

Having earned my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work with my Boy Scout Troop. I worked on Eagle projects and various other projects that the troop hosted for the community. For Personal Development, I took piano lessons twice a week for an hour, and then did my own studying. I can now play intermediate to harder pieces on the piano. For Physical Fitness, I participated in Tae Kwon Do and I achieved blue belt. I started practicing forms and sparring throughout the week and ultimately achieved my goal. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip across the country to various National Monuments. While on the expedition, I was able to discover different wildlife and cultures that make up our great nation. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal taught me to not look at myself because life is bigger than I am and to strive to achieve things that I have never done before.

James Willett

Asheboro, North Carolina

Advisor: Donna Patton

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, where I built a teaching garden which featured native grasses of the piedmont area of North Carolina along with producing a brochure which featured information about the plants in the garden. For Personal Development, I completed my Open Water SCUBA certification and earned my Basic Rock Climbing instructor certification. I also learned about Engineering and built a underwater remote operate vehicle (ROV) as part of the Young Engineers Of Today. For my Physical Fitness portion, I joined the Swim Team and Cross Country Team. I competed for two seasons on the swim team and improved my 50 meter freestyle time from 1:35 to under 50 seconds. My Expedition was planning 4 backpacking trips which culminated with a 10 day backpacking trip through the Sangre De Cristo Mountains in Northern New Mexico at Philmont Scout Ranch. I was challenged with over 100 miles backpacking with elevations from 6,000 -12,000 feet. It was a lot of work earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal. I challenged myself and learned new skills, but really learned more about myself.

Tyler Eagan

Concord, North Carolina

Advisor: Erick Reppe

The Congressional Award has been an experience that has motivated me and pushed me in all aspects of life. For Voluntary Public Service, I served at the local food pantry at my church. I learned organizational and management skills, and even improved my Spanish by speaking with many of the people. For Personal Development, I undertook hunting for the first time in my life. I took the safety course, researched equipment, and began hunting on my land for the first time that fall. For Physical Fitness, I took to heart my soccer team's offseason training program. I improved my skills and met goals such as running a mile in under 6 minutes, juggling the ball 200 times, etc. For Expedition/Exploration, I planned a 5-day fishing trip to Western New York. I researched, studied, and caught salmon, trout, and other fish that I just don't see in my local fisheries down South. The Congressional Award has taught me to step out and take responsibility for my own plans and actions.

Kayla Merriweather

Concord, North Carolina

Advisor: Ginger Throckmorton

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at Wings of Eagles Ranch, a nonprofit therapeutic horseback riding, and outdoor adventure center. I worked with children with special needs, serving as a side walker, barn worker, and camp counselor. I also volunteered at summer camps for homeschooled children. For Personal Development, I took piano lessons, played different styles of music, practiced sightreading, and learned music theory. I taught myself how to ride a unicycle. I conducted research, purchased a unicycle, and learned various skills and tricks. For Physical Fitness, I earned my black belt in Taekwondo. I learned new forms, sparring techniques, and how to break boards. I also participated in my first taekwondo tournament. For the Expedition, I planned my first ever backpacking trip. I learned about backpacking, backcountry camping, and basic survival skills. On our five-day trip, we hiked 40 miles and explored the Great Smoky Mountains. The Congressional Award has helped me to build confidence in myself and my abilities, develop diligence, patience, and perseverance, and accomplish what previously seemed impossible; through the program, I have gained skills and experiences that will aid me for the rest of my life.

Sophia Merriweather
Concord, North Carolina
Advisor: Ginger Throckmorton

I volunteered at Wings of Eagles, which offers equine therapy and outdoor adventure camps for children with special needs. I enjoyed working with children as a counselor and side walker as well as in the barn with horses. I also volunteered at summer camps designed for homeschooled children. For Personal Development, I focused on developing my piano skills by attending lessons, learning music theory, practicing sight reading, and memorizing advanced pieces. I also cultivated my love for literature by reading over seventy books in nine different genres. I choose Taekwondo for my Physical Fitness goal. I mastered forms, attacks, and sparring techniques, participated in tournaments, and advanced from a purple belt to a first degree black belt. For my Expedition, I trained for, planned, and completed a 5 day backpacking trip in the Great Smoky Mountains. My dad, sister and I hiked over 40 miles while carrying just under 40 lbs. We trekked over steep terrain, flat trails, and roaring rivers and enjoyed beautiful views of the mountain range. Participating in the Congressional Award has stretched me as a person, allowed me to accomplish seemingly impossible things, introduced me to a world of new experiences, and overall has been an incredible and unforgettable experience.

Jonathan Goforth
Matthews, North Carolina
Advisor: Taylor Caton
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In completing my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I logged my Voluntary Public Service hours through my Boy Scout troop and other organizations. I built several structures for my local VFW post, participated in US flag retirements, and participated in events to honor veterans. For Personal Development I improved my saxophone skills and competed in a regional Jazz Band competition. For Physical Fitness, I continued to play football and was a leader on my team. I exceeded my goal to gain 30 pounds of muscle and improved my max weight lift. For my Expedition, I planned a SCUBA diving trip to the Florida Keys. I managed a group of six Boy Scout families for eight days and participated in several dives, including one at night. Through the Congressional Award I have learned the benefits of a well-balanced life.

John Groggel

Charlotte, North Carolina

Advisor: Rev. Justin Rosser

In earning the Congressional Award, I completed my Voluntary Public Service as an ESL instructor, nursing home pianist, and an urban youth leader. I learned to value and respect the various members of my community. Personal Development for me meant determined study of the piano, culminating in performances of Debussy's Children's Corner and later Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G Minor. I have since moved on to more advanced piano. For Physical Fitness, I practiced my tennis serve until I could avoid double-faulting about nine times out of ten. I am now a capable tennis player and am continuing to practice my serve to increase its speed. My Expedition took me to Mexico, where I was immersed in that beautiful culture and made friends with its people. I was able to use my skills to teach piano in Spanish, my second language. I enjoyed helping students experience the joy of music. Because of the Congressional Award, I learned how to set and work towards long-term objectives. It has helped motivate me to continue setting goals and working for my dreams.

Alexander Ratliff

Monroe, North Carolina

Advisor: Amy Stogner

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work assisting home bound elderly by packing and delivering meals to them through my local Meals on Wheels program. I also volunteered with a local cat rescue taking care of and preparing cats for adoption. For Personal Development, I became proficient in several aspects of crime scene forensics identification by studying on a weekly basis and learning to identify various things that would be associated with a crime scene. I competed in a Science Olympiad Regionals competition and placed second in Forensics. Due to health issues, I had little physical activity or stamina, so I wanted to be able to hike 10 miles in elevated terrain. I worked weekly exercising and hiking and accomplished my goal in about 4 hours carrying a 15 lb pack. For my Expedition, I spent four nights and five days immersing myself in the lifestyle of an enlisted service member. I learned that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to with perseverance.

Jeremiah Stogner

Matthews, North Carolina

Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at the Carolina Raptor Center, educating people about the importance of wildlife and conservation. I also educated the public about history through my participation in World War II reenactments and living history demonstrations. For Personal Development, I learned about invasive plant species and control methods for them. I learned to identify over 100 species and joined the Science Olympiad team, using my knowledge in competition. For Physical Fitness, I decreased my 5K running time. I was able to reduce my time by more than five full minutes. For my Expedition, I backpacked over 50 miles of the Appalachian Trail. I covered 9-18 miles a day and learned how to plan an extended trip myself and how to adjust to changing circumstances along the way. Through the Congressional Award I learned perseverance and how to stick to a goal even when the basic enjoyment of it has run out.

Alexander Ruff

Forest City, North Carolina

Advisor: Steve Holland

For my Voluntary Public Service I helped out at some of the schools in the area and a baseball park to obtain all of my hours necessary. All of these really showed me how fortunate I am to have what I do have. My Personal Development included extending my knowledge of the guitar in more than one aspect. I have played bass guitar along with acoustic electric guitar at my church to the congregation. For my Physical Fitness, I built my muscle mass and strength a noticeable and measurable amount. Also, I increased my sprinting time along with my longer distance run. For my Exploration I went to San Francisco, California. I'm glad that is where my family and I went. The trip was so interesting to see how other people can live in such a close proximity, yet lead absolutely different lifestyles. The overall experience of my time put in has left me with more than I thought I would ever get out of it. By that I mean just to see how fortunate I am on a daily basis to know that food is easily accessible, to having someplace that I could go to workout and just have an overall good time. The friends that I have made along the way, along with the mental growth that is quite evident, will be a big boost coming down the road.

Hannah Whittington
Denver, North Carolina
Advisor: Elizabeth Packman

I focused my Voluntary Public Service activities on helping children excel in and develop a passion for literature and the arts. This included volunteering at an elementary school, serving as the Asst. Stage Manager for a play, demonstrating in tap classes, and organizing my own service trip to Guatemala. To fulfill the Personal Development requirements, I committed to exploring and achieving success in a new extracurricular activity: theatre. I participated in productions, took voice and piano lessons, and attended summer programs and workshops. For the Physical Fitness category, I worked toward honing my skills in dance. To do this, I attended several weekly classes in ballet, tap, jazz, modern, and pointe, took occasional private lessons, became a member of the ballet and tap companies, and participated in performances. Finally, for my Expedition/Exploration I spent a week in Europe visiting Belgium, France, and Germany. I explored both famous and lesser-known landmarks while immersing myself in the cultures of different countries. Through earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned the important of passion and perseverance and how these traits can have positive impacts in the lives of others.

Daniel Bonomo
Mooresville, North Carolina
Advisor: Nicole Christinat

I volunteered with local elementary, middle, and high schools. I also helped at various community events within my neighborhood. I also created a “technology day” at the local senior center to teach senior citizens how to troubleshoot and use technological devices. My Personal Development took me through my certification to become a soccer referee. I learned the laws of soccer and how they should be applied. I also learned what the duties of a referee are and how to put them into practice. I also started learning how to speak Italian. For my Physical Fitness, I was a member of my high school soccer team for 4 years. I was also a member of the indoor and outdoor track team for 3 years. For my Exploration planned a trip to New York City and Niagara Falls. My family explored New York city for three days. We then drove up to Niagara Falls to see the waterfall. The Congressional Award helped me become more passionate about serving my community and pushed me to explore ideas outside of my comfort zone.

Lucas Bonomo

Mooreville, North Carolina

Advisor: Nicole Christinat

Affiliations: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I worked in Brasil helping ESL students with their english. I also helped my community through beautification and volunteered at my senior center to help seniors with their technological needs. For my Personal Development goals, I refereed soccer. I reffed kids from as young as 6 to as old as 18. For the Physical Fitness, I played soccer for 4 years. I played for the middle school and the High school JV team. I also played on two different club teams. For my Expedition, I traveled to Brasilia, which is the capital of Brazil. There we explored the city and saw many of the unique sights that it has to offer. We also hiked through the surrounding hills and mountains and bathed in many waterfalls. I am very proud of my accomplishments, and I am happy that the Congressional Award gave me the opportunity to achieve this.

Laura Bozovich

Greensboro, North Carolina

Advisor: Jeri Whitfield

I spent the first years of my Voluntary Public Service hours working with a local retirement community and assisted living focusing my time on activities geared to improving the memory and life of local residents. The last year I worked teaching children of refugees math and reading skills. I am planning on pursuing a degree in medicine at UNC Chapel Hill in the fall so I focused my Personal Development on working in a local pharmacy to learn more about medications and how health care providers work together to improve patient care. I focused my Physical Fitness on running goals for both cross country and track. I was able to achieve my time goals in both sports and go on the become cross country runner of the year and earn all conference and all state honers. My Expedition was a week long trip to the Tetons in Jackson Hole and Yellow Stone National Park. I spent several weeks planning the hikes and daily activities, including researching hotels and flight arrangements. I was personally rewarded by my involvement in the Congressional Award, it made me realize the importance of giving back to my community and staying focused on my goals.

Nina Christensen

Mooresville, North Carolina

Advisor: Tina Krohn

Affiliations: Habitat for Humanity, National Honor Society

To achieve my Voluntary Public Service goals I worked with my local teen court program, at the local habitat for humanity restore, and with several clubs within my school. Within these opportunities, I sought ways to better my community, and I found that I had a true passion for giving back. To complete my Personal Development goals I began to study yoga and meditation. I've always had an interest in ways of balancing my life and yoga provided an excellent way to do this. I practiced either yoga or meditation nearly every day. To reach my Physical Fitness goals I pushed myself harder than I ever had before. I took any opportunity that I could to go to the gym, and while there I strived to become stronger than I was before. My gym regime became a form of self-discipline and it gave me a new confidence in my ability to push myself. To complete my Exploration I traveled with my family to Washington DC. While there, I examined the rich history that the city offered within its monuments, museums, and historical locations. I then reflected and connected my observation to what I was learning in my US history class. My overall experience with The Congressional Award has taught me my own strengths and abilities, and the beauty of giving back to a community; my involvement helped me realize my actions could bring unimaginable good, and that the only thing that was holding me back was the limitations I placed on myself.

Paul Van Eerden

Greensboro, North Carolina

Advisor: Ben McIndoe

My Voluntary Public Service work involved the creation and promotion of free courses for students on life skills topics, through Free Think University, and work helping to serve at local food pantries, nursing homes, and in the Haiti relief effort. My Personal Development goals centered around the development of memory skills, and Portuguese language acquisition. My Physical Fitness goals involved strength conditioning and endurance training, including a Pump-and-Run event in Ohio, which prepared me for adventures in nearby national parks as well for trips afar, to Haiti and Brazil. The highlight of my experience was preparing for a cross-cultural trip to Brazil, including personal development goals of becoming conversational in Portuguese as well as preparing for and recording many adventures in the exploration of a lifetime. I am the 6th of 11 children – the “middle” child – so I have learned it takes effort and intention and getting out of my comfort zone to stand out and live life with a capital L!

Swati Bhageria

Loveland, Ohio

Advisor: Megan Brenner

Affiliations: National Honor Society

My biggest achievement was creating Venetian Volunteering, a website meant to encourage teenagers to volunteer for causes which they are passionate about. Along with this, I volunteered at my library and helped plan events, as well as helped organize humanitarian aid at Matthew 25 Ministries. For Personal Development, I pursued an Indian classical dance called Kathak. I spent countless hours learning the music theory behind the dance, the history of the dance, and of course the dance itself. At this point, I am only one exam away from having the equivalent of a college degree in Kathak. For my Physical Fitness goals, I pursued tennis and worked on improving my game. I worked to improve specific aspects, as well as improving my general fitness. For the Expedition portion, I planned a trip to China with my family. We visited Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing, Xi'an, Suzhou, and Shenzhen. This trip was one of the most amazing of my entire life; not only did I see an absolutely breathtaking country, but I enjoyed its beautiful culture and history. Overall, earning the Congressional Award is one of the achievements that I am most proud of in that I learned both about myself and about the beauty of life.

Vismaya Manchaiah

Springboro, Ohio

Advisor: Sreekanth Mopuru

Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award I volunteered at various places throughout my community. I worked at my local food pantry, community events, and at different schools in my district. I also set up a lending library at my local food pantry for my Girl Scouts Gold Award. For Personal Development I took piano lessons and improved my piano playing skills specifically through sight reading and by learning about music theory. As for the Physical Fitness section I trained to run a 10k race. I built my endurance by following the plan I had laid out to prepare me for the race. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a trip to St. Louis and Oklahoma City. We visited the Gateway Arch and the different sites of Oklahoma City that make the city unique. The Congressional Award was a great experience and it taught me how to go after my goals with perseverance and determination. It showed me how I can improve myself one step at a time.

Ganesh Ravela

Mason, Ohio

Advisor: Maneesh Sheth

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

Consistency was the key in order to reach my goals, not only for volunteering but for the other aspects of this award as well. I had to work at least 4 hours a week for 2 years to get my goal, and that is exactly what I did. I volunteered at different places, but mostly at hospitals and blood drives. Personal Development was all about helping myself grow, and I did this while helping others grow. Most of my Personal Development comes from tutoring and teaching. I gained a solid understanding of multiple different topics while also helping others gain a better understanding. For Physical Fitness I trained every day to reach my goal of running a mile under 6 minutes. My training was not only limited to running but also playing different sports such as soccer and basketball. After two years of training, I have exceeded my goal and can run a mile in just over 5 minutes. For my Exploration I went on a trip to the east coast with the hope of exploring some of the large cities on that side of the United States. I visited Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and New York on this journey. I learned about the history of these cities as well as visited famous landmarks in each of them. The journey to earning this medal is one that I would not trade for anything. The confidence, responsibility, and commitment I attained is invaluable. It also gave me the habit of volunteering which I will continue to do so in the years to come.

Blake Swoll

Franklin, Ohio

Advisor: Jonathan Hancock

While pursuing the Congressional Award I accumulated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a local non-profit restaurant called One Bistro. I worked as a chef's assistant helping prepare meals for the community both in the restaurant and on a food truck during charity events. My Personal Development goal led me to learn how to design and build custom guitars through an audited STEM class at a local university. I have finished several designs of my own and look forward to building and playing more in the future. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my 5k time by five minutes. Through various training methods I surpassed my original goal and improved my time by nearly ten minutes. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned and completed a five-day backpacking trip through Daniel Boone National Forest. The hike was not without its difficulties, but the experience was worth the effort. I am so grateful for the opportunity to earn the Congressional Gold Medal.

Sarvani Vemuri

Mason, Ohio

Advisor: Dr. Ganesh Yadlapalli

To complete my hours for the Voluntary Public Service, I served as an intern at the Ohio Innocence Project, an organization that works to secure the release of wrongfully convicted prisoners in Ohio. I also tutored neighborhood kids and served as a member of my school's community action team. To complete my Personal Development goals, I worked on my leadership skills as Student Congress President of my school's student body of almost 3,000 students. I improved my abilities to delegate tasks, compromise, and effectively work with a large group of students and teachers. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I worked towards a 2 hour solo debut Indian Classical dance performance and put in many hours throughout the week for almost 2 years to work up my stamina. I completed the performance successfully in front of about 400 guests. For my Exploration goal, I visited Washington D.C. and spent multiple days touring the historic monuments and museums that educated me about the country's history. I have learned much from my journey to earning this award and have blossomed into a well-rounded student and individual.

Om Desai

Centerville, Ohio

Advisor: Hitesh Trivedi

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

I focused on volunteering at two places: the local soup kitchen and the local hospital. I served lunch and coffee to those less fortunate three Sundays a month at the soup kitchen. At the hospital, I cleaned patients' rooms and helped to check in patients in order to treat people more efficiently. I focused on improving in Boy Scouts and Science Olympiad for my Personal Development goal. In Boy Scouts, I have improved by four ranks from when I first started this award. In Science Olympiad, I have helped my team come in 6th place in the nation in 2016, and 4th place in the state in 2017 and 2018. I have been improving my golf skills to complete my Physical Fitness goal. When I started this award, I had just been introduced to golf and shot in the 130s and 140s, not very good. Now, through years of practice and improving, I shoot in the lower 90s and sometimes high 80s. Finally for my Exploration I planned a family trip to Spain to explore a new culture. While in Spain for a week, my family and I visited many different cities within Spain that are culturally different from one another. I was exposed to many aspects of their culture including their food, history, architecture, art, and music. Overall, the Congressional Award has turned me into a more well rounded person with many different experiences that will be useful later in life.

Dhaivat Pandya

Dayton, Ohio

Advisor: Ven Swaminathan

I volunteered at a variety of hospitals and a nursing home to help me diversify my experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the medical field. It was eye-opening and has helped me realize just how important that field is. For Personal Development, I have committed myself to getting better at my golf game and learning how to cook. I am now one of the top-ranked juniors in Ohio and have competed well at many national events over the years. I can also cook a variety of dishes in all different cuisines. For my Physical Fitness, I have devoted myself to exercises that will help lengthen and soften my muscles. In doing this, I have become flexible and stronger at the same time, which has helped reduce my injuries through golf and has helped me hit the ball farther as well. For my Exploration I also successfully planned a trip to Costa Rica. Being interested in Latino culture, this was a fun trip for me to plan. It showed me how hard it is to plan a vacation that is enjoyable for everyone. The Congressional Award has been an integral part of my youth in helping me mature into a young man and learn life skills that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

Dhira Venkatramani

Xenia, Ohio

Advisor: Hitesh Trivedi

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

To achieve the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by tutoring inner-city children, preserving wetlands, and making handcrafted items for charity. I also educated senior citizens and teenagers on identity theft and how to protect their online identities. For Personal Development, I studied Spanish on my own, learning the higher level verb formations of the language. Additionally, I practiced for the PSAT and SAT, picking up on test-taking skills and new concepts that improved my aptitude for performing well on the tests. Under Physical Fitness, I decided to improve my tennis skills so that my first serve percentage and the number of winners I hit during matches would increase. After practicing several times a week and joining leagues to play matches, I was able to measure my progress and achieve my goal. For my Expedition, I visited several national parks in the western United States to learn about their formations and wildlife. After exploring Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, and more, I was able to immerse myself in my surroundings. Overall, the Congressional Award has made me more involved and connected with my community and with various aspects of my own life.

Matthew Oh

Dublin, Ohio

Advisor: Chung Kim

Affiliations: National Honor Society, Youth Service America

Through my nonprofit New Kicks for Kids, I donated new shoes and school supplies to children in central Ohio. What started out as helping children in homeless shelters later expanded to helping refugee families and children affected by domestic violence. I also built bathrooms in Peru one summer. For Personal Development, I played the violin in four different orchestras and earned multiple music awards that led me to performances at Carnegie Hall and Walt Disney World. I am currently a full-time member of a professional orchestra where I play side-by-side with world class musicians. I regularly trained to improve my table tennis skills and competed in many tournaments around the country. My goal was to improve my rating by 500, but it actually improved by almost 1000! I am proud to have organized the first Table Tennis tournament for high school students in Ohio. I visited South Korea to learn about the Korean War. I went to the Demilitarized Zone to observe the border between South and North Korea, went on a five-day trip to Busan to discover the UN Cemetery, the market formed by people who had fled their hometown among others. I thank the Congressional Award for motivating me to achieve and exceed my goals. I was able to achieve things I wouldn't have been able to achieve during my busy high school years. I pushed myself to earn volunteering hours but one thing led to another and I earned many recognition awards for my public service. I was just giving back to my community and working to raise awareness for poverty alleviation, but it felt that I was getting so much in return, such as satisfaction and new friendships. The biggest surprise was when the 911 Tribute Museum in New York asked me if they could use my photo in their Seeds of Service exhibit. My nonprofit, New Kicks for Kids is featured next to the incredible firefighters of the 911 tragedy.

Toby Chen

Solon, Ohio

Advisor: Justin Passov

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service working with the Cleveland Veteran Affairs Medical Center through a service program based on three core values: Care, Compassion, and Connection. I interacted with Veterans to provide physical and emotional support and learn about their stories. For Personal Development, I learned to play the Piano by taking lessons once a week as well as practicing everyday. I decided to measure my progress through taking the ABRSM piano exams. I completed all eight examinations. I am now able to play advanced piano pieces and enjoy playing as a hobby. For the Physical Fitness portion of the Congressional Award, I decided that I would join the swim team and earn a varsity letter in all four years of my high school career by achieving specific time standards. I trained during the season and during the off season with my highschool and club team. Finally, for Exploration, I organized a trip to China. Through this trip, I fully immersed myself in Chinese culture by learning about Chinese history, attending high school in China, organizing a summer camp, and living with my cousins. I experienced what it was like to truly live in China Earning this award gave me a way to expand my horizon and motivated me to challenge myself in different aspects of my life. In the end, I learned invaluable life lessons and discovered passions that I will continue throughout my life.

Laura Tham

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Advisor: Amy Schieper

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I spent my Voluntary Public Service hours working with my local food pantry and tutoring children through the Tulsa Reading Partners organization. For my Personal Development, I invested over 400 hours in developing my speech and debate skills. In that time, I received multiple first-place awards and been invited to nationals in my two years of competition. Within Physical Fitness, I spent more than 200 hours training in martial arts. I improved greatly in strength and endurance. After years of dedication, I earned my black belt in Taekwondo. For my Expedition, I planned a six-night trip to Israel. During that time, I learned the about the cultural background of the Israelis and learned how to navigate, plan, and communicate with the locals. The most enriching part of the experience was the immersion into the Israeli community. The opportunity I have had to participate in the award has played a significant role in developing my devotion, my perseverance, and my character.

Alexiya Lee

Astoria, Oregon

Advisor: John Souza

Affiliations: 4-H

My Voluntary Public Service experiences made me more aware of the needs of other people. I acquired and provided books to the Homeless Lunch Program to provide comfort, entertainment and an educational resource. I helped at the County Fair as a 4-H clerk, judge and co-leader of an art and photography club. For Personal Development, I achieved skills in playing chess by DVD, random matches and joining a community chess club. I assembled an element collection and performed experiments on phosphorus, gadolinium, hydrogen, iron and uranium and constructed a website on the Elements of the Periodic Table. My Physical Fitness goals included hiking trails in the Pacific Northwest: the 6 mile Fort to Sea Trail, the 12 mile Tillamook Head Trail and climbed the 3000+’ Saddle and 1600’ Neahkahnie mountains. I also visited various wetlands in Oregon and Washington and developed and practiced a yoga routine. For my Exploration, I took a ten day train trip to Grand Forks, North Dakota, where I saw a new landscape, weather, culture and attractions. As a person with autism, the Congressional Award experience, along with 4-H, in setting and achieving goals, prepared me for College and lifelong learning and made me more aware of possibilities for a successful future.

Rachel Luther

White Salmon, Washington

Advisor: Heather Laurance

Affiliation: Discovery Bound NLC

My goal was to promote education about being healthy and active. To achieve my goal, I volunteered at an outdoor summer camp where kids learned about nature while hiking, biking, rafting, caving, and rock climbing. I also tutored elementary aged kids in reading. For Personal Development I wanted to learn more about the origins of my religion. I did this by reading biographies about its founder, Mary Baker Eddy and reading some of her prose works. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to lower my mile time. I participated in cross country and track at my high school as well as doing off-season training. For my Expedition, I planned and executed a nine day trip to Southern Utah to mountain bike, learn about the desert, and hike. I loved participating in the Congressional Award, it pushes me to grow in so many areas of my life.

Sophia Boquist

Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Advisor: Michelle Cathers

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at a non-profit therapeutic riding center, a local Boy Scout camp, and various outdoor spaces. These service activities gave me a first-hand role in improving my community. For Personal Development, I completed at least one requirement of the Venturing Ranger Award (an award that focuses on developing wilderness survival skills) per month. I am now experienced in outdoor cooking, backpacking, First Aid, and more. For the Physical Fitness portion, I trained 5 days a week with my school's diving team and competed in meets. When the season was over, I prepared for a strenuous backpacking trip and my first 5k race by running and strength training at least 3 days per week. Finally, for the Expedition I planned a 5-day trip to climb the three highest peaks in Pennsylvania. We had gorgeous views from all three mountains, encountered native wildlife (including a timber rattlesnake), and camped and cooked under the stars for 4 nights. Earning the Congressional Award has been a great experience and has taught me that anything is possible with hard work and dedication.

Christopher Lee
Wexford, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Meghan Mayhew
Affiliations: Key Club

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I mentored younger students in computer programming, and organized and led a programming competition for middle school students. I independently studied math and chemistry concepts outside of my classroom curriculum. In order to improve my Physical Fitness, I concentrated on my golf skills, improving my overall strength and endurance as a member of my high school golf team. I planned a trip to Yellowstone Park for my Expedition. After hiking, I returned home with an appreciation for nature and increased confidence in my ability to adapt to a new environment. The Congressional Award Program has catalyzed my personal development and helped me acquire important life skills of goal setting, leadership, physical fitness, and exploration.

Matthew Hladczuk
Jenkintown, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Craig Meister

To earn my Gold Medal I prepared meals as well as raised funds for Face to Face, a homeless outreach program in Philadelphia. At Briar Bush, our local nature center, I cared for the grounds, tracked bird migration, and brought underprivileged high school students for a field trip. For Personal Development, I started my own lawn business, Best Lawns. (<http://www.bestlawns.org>) I cared for numerous properties throughout the year and have learned how to successfully run a business. For the Physical Fitness goal, I ran throughout the year and accomplished my goal of reducing my cross country and track times. I successfully brought my mile time down over 45 seconds to a 5:09. Finally, for my Exploration, I immersed myself in the cultures of Megeve, France and Prague, Czech Republic for almost one week. I spent my time experiencing the architecture, food, and history of both regions. During the process of earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I accomplished many things I never thought I could. It was a valuable experience and I really enjoyed it.

Jennifer Levito
Dresher, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Ms. Sinead
Affiliations: American Red Cross, YMCA

I volunteered as soccer coach for the Upper Dublin Soccer Club for the past few years helping young athletes build the confidence they need to succeed in the game of soccer. I worked one on one and in small groups on the fundamentals of the sport and team building skills on and off the field. For my Personal Development goal I have been working to improve my techniques for scanning pools, knowing how to swiftly and properly tend to a patron in the event of an emergency, and practicing the preventative values a lifeguard holds outside of the aquatic department of the Ambler YMCA. By running a mile before practice, shuttles during practice, and focusing on fundamentals on my own time I worked to accomplish my Physical Fitness goal. I had the chance to be a part of Saint Basils Varsity Soccer Team and work along side my team to have the opportunity to play in the Pennsylvania High School Girls State Finals. For my Exploration I was fortunate enough to plan a trip to Maui, Hawaii where I could share my knowledge of the island with my younger siblings and acquire more information about the island and its surrounding ocean. Along the trip I was able to experience world renound dive sites that are home to many endangered species. I have had the chance to grow in many aspects of my life and am very thankful for those in my life that have helped to support me on this journey for a Congressional Award. I have gained skills that will be carried on through the next four years of my life.

Justin Yuan
Monroeville, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Lotus Xu

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I volunteered at Forbes Regional Hospital and at various nursing homes around my community. I served the greater community at large by helping the hospital staff with clerical tasks that allowed them to better serve their patients. I also served as a tutor for younger students who were studying for the SAT's. For my Personal Development I worked to improve my clarinet playing ability. Through practice and attending private clarinet lessons with my teacher weekly I saw much improvement. I wanted to improve my groundstroke in tennis and my ability to run to the ball as well as place my shots on the court. To help reach these Physical Fitness goals I practiced with a tennis coach and participated in drills to improve my speed and stroke accuracy. Finally to meet my Exploration goal I travelled to Yunnan, China to experience the culture and traditions of the various ethnic minorities living in that area.

Andrew Lockhart

Fort Mill, South Carolina

Advisor: Adam Johnson

For my Voluntary Public Service, I prepared dinners and baked cookies at the Ronald McDonald House in Charlotte. The smell of fresh cookies baking made families feel at home during their stay. I was thankful to play a small part in easing the stress on families facing medical crises. I have always enjoyed engaging in unique activities. One of my Personal Development goals was to learn to do freestyle soccer. By watching YouTube videos and spending countless hours practicing, I learned multiple-revolution and juggling tricks, and edited and posted my videos online. For Physical Fitness, I joined a year-round swim team when I was almost 13, and I set goals to achieve North Carolina State cuts and one Senior Sectional cut. I earned not one, but six, 15-18 year old sectional cuts and a Futures cut as well. I am excited to get the opportunity to swim NCAA Division II next year. My Exploration was visiting the “Holy City” of Charleston, South Carolina. Through visiting Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie, Boone Hall Plantation, The Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon, the USS Yorktown, and other historical sites, I learned a great deal about the history of my home state. The Congressional Award program pushed me to set and achieve much bigger goals than I would have ever done on my own.

Allison Quintanilla Plattsmier

Nashville, Tennessee

Advisor: Merrill Jackson

For my Voluntary Public Service goals, I served as a DoSomething.org Ambassador. I participated in four large service projects: A textile/fabric recycling initiative, making Valentine’s cards for seniors in Meals on Wheels, making birthday cards for homeless youth, and leading a gun violence prevention initiative. For my Personal Development goals, I completed an internship with the National Society of Leadership and Success and started a new chapter of the organization at Vanderbilt University. I also taught myself Spanish and Italian. For my Physical Fitness goals, I trained for two sprint triathlons and one intermediate triathlon. I also set out with the goal to lose 30 lbs and achieved this goal through a combination of boot camp, running, and CrossFit. My Exploration covered seven cities in Italy. In this trip, I was able to immerse myself in a new culture and learn how to navigate new systems and new languages. The Congressional Award allowed me to put my passion into action.

Greta Kowalski
Clarksville, Tennessee
Advisor: Andreas Bunjor
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In order to earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Volunteer Public Service work through being a student athletic trainer in my high school. I assisted our school's athletic trainer by attending games and assisting the athletes with stretching, taping, and first aid. For Personal Development, I furthered my leadership skills through staffing national Boy Scout leadership courses, such as National Youth Leadership Training, National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience, and Kodiak. I am now fully comfortable with speaking in front of large groups. For my Physical Fitness, I decided to get my mile time down to 6 minutes. I worked with my track coaches in order to participate in practices that would enable me to do so. For my Expedition, I planned and led a ten day backacking trek at Philmont Boy Scout Ranch. I went with other scouts in my council, and talked with the adults and our ranger in order to safely and effectively conduct the trip. Overall, the experience has taught me to set goals for myself, and to reach for seemingly impossible achievements; there is value in taking time in order to fully accomplish and learn from goals rather than just striving to get them finished as soon as possible.

Cullen Malone
Tyler, Texas
Advisor: Rocky Gill

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I spent hundreds of hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Smith County Historical Society completing research. I helped the museum with renovation in preparation for the WWI centennial exhibit and volunteered with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. For the Personal Development portion of my goals, I concentrated on music. I took guitar and piano lessons, performed in recitals and have advanced to occasionally playing piano for my church. I also practiced vocal performance with the local Voices of Faith Choir and I am participating in chorale. The Physical Fitness section was challenging. I pushed myself to limits I was not sure I could reach and completed a few longer walk and runs as parts of my goals. For the Exploration/ Expedition, I planned and took a cross-country trip to visit the center of the 2017 eclipse. The planning, travel, budgeting and preparation for this once in a lifetime trip will forever be among my favorite memories. Working toward the Congressional Award Gold Medal has been exhausting and exciting. I am thankful to each person who took their time to help me.

Andrew Seto

Tyler, Texas

Advisor: Grace Trindle

For my Voluntary Public Service, I completed the majority of my hours with my local science museum, The Discovery Science Place. Serving there was such a blessing as I enjoyed teaching and mentoring the youth of our next generation. Then, for my Personal Development, I took Chinese language lessons to connect with my heritage. I am glad to acquire this skill early as I know it will be invaluable as I grow older. For Physical Fitness, I decided to try a new sport: swimming. I had had no previous experience with swimming, but I'm glad I took a shot in the dark since through hard work and determination, I went to the state level of swimming within my first year of joining. Lastly, I planned a trip to China for my family to go as tourists for my Exploration. Against common sense, my parents trusted me as an eighth grader to plan a two week trip across the country of China. In the end, I'm glad that I committed myself to this amazing experience of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal; to others indecisive about going for the gold, I challenge you to put yourself outside of your comfort zone.

Teddy Lewis

Spring, Texas

Advisor: Holly Lewis

Affiliation: National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service work, I helped work with the National Park service in Colorado, fed the hungry through Manna, and did various projects in my community through CATSS. For Personal Development, I attempted to become a more prolific reader by reading at least 15 books per year, and also learning how to play guitar by teaching myself. For Physical Fitness, I practiced at the sports I participate in and put many hours of extra work into improving myself in soccer and baseball. I also went to the gym multiple times per week in order to help increase my strength for these sports. For my Exploration, I planned a family trip to Argentina by myself. We went for a week and a half and explored such places as Buenos Aires and Punta del Este in Uruguay. Participating in the Congressional Award allowed me to not only improve myself in some areas that I had always wanted to but never taken the initiative to, but also help my community and the people around my in my city. This experience allowed me the make a huge change in many different aspects of the world around me, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Andrew Aboujaoude

Allen, Texas

Advisor: Nicole Farah

I served the homeless in the Orlando area by providing them food, companionship, and free blood pressure screening opportunities. Additionally, I served at the Orlando Regional Medical Center and had the opportunity to help victims of the Pulse Massacre in the subsequent days. For Personal Development, I spent time conducting research on malaria and learning molecular biology techniques that allowed me to discover new drug targets for this deadly disease. This made me a better scientist which gave me the opportunity to lead research studies on homeless health and UV radiation effects on genes. For Physical Fitness, I focused on improving my golf game through many ways of training, so I could hold a good game. Although I could now score pars and sometimes birdies regularly, I am proud to say that I was lucky enough to hit a Hole in One on Hole 7 at the Bay Point Golf Course by Jack Nicklaus recently. For my Expedition, I went to Oahu, Hawaii, where I got to see and learn about a variety of things. Particularly, I spent time at the Pearl Harbor exhibits learning about WWII and even successfully hiked the Diamond Head Summit. Additionally, I snorkeled extensively, observing native fish species. While earning the Congressional Award, I have seen many things that I never thought that I would see and have done things that I never thought that I would do.

Martín Montalvo

Bellaire, Texas

Advisor: Patricio Healy

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I volunteered at Labre Project, an organization that feeds and helps take care of homeless people in Downtown Houston. I also helped my church in non-religious activities such as clothing/food donations. My Personal Development goals involved learning how to play piano and drums. I was able to pass the level 4 ABRSM piano test because of how much I practiced. There was a Physical Fitness camp that I attended throughout a summer that allowed me to improve in my Physical Fitness goals. Keeping a consistent schedule helped me complete my goals. For my Expedition, I organized the first five days/four nights for the backpacking trip at Philmont Boy Scout Ranch. This involved time schedules, information on each activity throughout the day, and teaching about the local environment at Philmont. The Congressional Award as allowed me to improve in all facets of my life to become a better person than I was yesterday.

Brian Seelig

The Woodlands, Texas

Advisor: Carmen Masuelli

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered around my community through Air Force JROTC, serving the local women's shelter, and food bank. I also work with National Charity Roundtable working with children at an after school program and assisting the elderly at meals on wheels and bingo. For Personal Development I worked with the Boy Scouts of America earning merit badges and learning new skills to ultimately earn my Eagle Scout. I also improved my percussion skills through lessons and practice earning a position on my high school drum line. For Physical Fitness, I spent two winters learning to snow board and improving my skills. I also spent time on my bike working to improve my distance endurance. For my Expedition, I participated with my Boy Scout troop in a high adventure to Northern Tier. Over the course of five days, I paddled 28.2 miles and portaged 2.6 miles, for a total trip distance of 30.8 miles. It was a great experience and I would recommend other people take on the challenge too.

Catherine Seelig

The Woodlands, Texas

Advisor: Carmen Masuelli

Affiliation: National Honor Society

Volunteering was my favorite part of The Congressional Award because I spent hundreds of hours giving back to my community and making a difference. I volunteered at several organizations including Meals on Wheels, the Children's Museum, food pantries, Senior Care Bingo, and school events. To complete my Personal Development goal, I logged my practice hours for playing flute. I am very passionate about music and always achieving more. I love to create music with other talented musicians and make others happy with the music we play. I played volleyball and ran track during high school to complete my Physical Fitness goals. I put in many extra hours outside of practices so that I could continue to get better while doing something that I love to do. For my Expedition goal I planned a trip to Hawaii. There my family and I explored new places and tried new activities such as surfing, snorkeling, visiting Pearl Harbor, and hiking beautiful trails. We also tried local foods and had the chance to learn about Hawaii's habitat and native species. Working towards earning The Congressional Award Gold Medal has helped me develop as a person and learn to set goals for my future.

Nivedhitha Selvaraj
Spring, Texas
Advisor: Sriram Ramani

I spent over 400 hours volunteering for youth education. I tutored math, worked at my local library, and recorded audiobooks for a nonprofit called Learning Ally, recording textbooks for students with learning disabilities. For Personal Development, I learned French, and I also learned web design and programming. At the end, I turned my high school resume into an interactive website which I coded from scratch. For Physical Fitness, I strengthened my muscles and worked towards performing more pull-ups. As an Exploration, I planned and booked a 5-day stay in Tokyo, preparing with introductory Japanese lessons. While my sister and I were there, we learned a lot about the culture and compared the city to our home of Houston, Texas. My experience with the Congressional Award has been invaluable to me because I can do so much more than I realized if I make goals and work steadily toward them.

Alexander Carter
Austin, Texas
Advisor: Willard Hanzlik
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Discovery Bound NLC

For my Voluntary Public Service, I focused on food insecurity, primarily volunteering with Mobile Loaves and Fishes to deliver food to the homeless and less fortunate individuals and families of Austin, Texas. I also worked with the National Leadership Council to add a kitchen to a nursing home in Antigua, Guatemala. For Personal Development I kept-up with current world events by reading the Christian Science Monitor and analyzed how I local community efforts can impact larger world news. I also learned more about my religion by working with my mentor to read Science and Health and discuss the book by sections. I competed in golf, football, and track during middle and high school for my Physical Fitness goals. I worked to improve my golf form and lower my score. To complete the Expedition requirement I backpacked for 10 days in New Mexico at Philmont Scout Ranch with a crew from my Boy Scout troop. We covered about 70 miles and peaked mountains. I found all aspects of working toward the Congressional Award to be insightful and rewarding.

Eesha Nayak

Austin, Texas

Advisor: Janani Janakiraman

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

For my Voluntary Public Service, I utilized my technology skills to help the Volunteer Healthcare Clinic's digital presence - I built their mobile-responsive website and optimized the sites to rank high on Google searches. I created a series of videos to help the organization recruit and retain volunteers, and raise funds. I have been learning to play the acoustic guitar for the last 8 years. For my Personal Development, I polished my guitar skills through many hours of practice and gave my first solo concert to an audience of over 100 people. I was mentored by my music teachers for this concert. For my Physical Fitness goal, I improved my basketball skills and coached a team of elementary school boys at Town and Country (local sports club). As my Expedition, I planned a trip to Eastern Europe, a part of the world I had never visited. I planned our flights, hotels, routes and activities, as well as travel by public transportation during the trip. This included a visit to the filming locations of Sound of Music, one of my favorite films. Working towards earning the Congressional Award helped me find a match between my interests in technology and utilizing the skills to serve my community. I learnt that you are never too young to make an impact!

Priya Ramamoorthy

Austin, Texas

Advisor: Vandana Nayak

Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

For my Voluntary Public Service activities, I worked at a non-profit clinic that provides community care as well as in a hospital setting. I also conducted hands on robotics workshops for K-12 students to get them excited about STEM. For Personal Development, I shadowed doctors, took first aid and CPR lessons, watched medical documentaries, learned how to suture, and prepared for my MCAT exam. In addition, I took coding lessons to learn about Arduino micro-controllers and used the knowledge to teach others. For Physical Fitness, to manage my shoulder and back pain, I learned yoga and incorporated it into my daily exercise regimen along with aerobic exercises. This has helped me go on 2-3 mile hikes up mountains. For my Expedition I planned an eight-day trip to Japan with my family. I learned to navigate in a place where I did not know the language. The experience of earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal has helped me gain a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence in my own abilities.

Talon Lewis
Amarillo, Texas
Advisor: Mark Wolfe
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I logged over four hundred hours of Voluntary Public Service while working at the Washington Avenue Family Service Center, posting flags on flag days, and participating in many conservation and community projects with the Boy Scouts of America. I earned over 200 hours of Personal Development while playing cello with my high school orchestra, Amarillo Youth Symphony, private lessons, and string camps. My favorite events are the annual All-Region orchestra, SW Music Festival, and the UIL State solo and ensemble competition. I completed 200 hours of Physical Fitness by working in my home gym three days a week. I am also a member of my high school Cross-Country team and my Navy Junior ROTC Physical Fitness team. I planned a High Adventure outing for my Boy Scout troop to Key West, Florida for my Expedition. My troop and I spent a week deep sea fishing, sailing, paddle boarding, exploring the cultures of Key West, and completing conservation work on Munson Island. The Congressional Award Gold Medal has expanded my horizons and helped me think globally. Through this process I have gained strength, talent, and an awareness of serving others. I have visited places and done things I had never imagined possible. I have learned independence and a better understanding of life management. I can do anything I set my mind to.

Joshua Daniel Prochaska
College Station, Texas
Advisor: Debi Haskins
Affiliation: 4-H, Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

I served on projects with the Rotary Interact Club, RYLA, Protectors of the Pride and the local food bank. I was a founder in a school club called Protectors of the Pride to provide food for those in need. I served through Boys Scouts of America to install a floor in my local library. For Personal Development, I took a STEM class for college Algebra at the local community college as a junior in high school. I took additional classes to strengthen my math and science skills. I went to various tutors to perfect my math skills. For Physical Fitness, I took tennis lessons, played on my high school tennis team, played USTA tennis and played for an academy to increase my abilities in tennis. I worked out regularly at the gym and cross fit to improve my physical fitness. I went to Grand Cayman for my Expedition. I studied the marine habitat in the many reefs surrounding the island. I learned invaluable lessons and benefits of service to others through the Congressional Award experience.

Arshia Batra
Houston, Texas
Advisor: Deepa Iyengar
Affiliation: National Honor Society

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I completed tutored underprivileged children in India - one of my most humbling and gratifying Congressional Award endeavors. Additionally, I had the opportunity to conduct research and serve patients in a hospital. While aiming to complete my Personal Development goals, I was encouraged to step out of my comfort zone and learn leadership skills in order to lead my class as class president. Additionally, I pursued music through refining my skills in playing the saxophone, which was a very rewarding experience. Through the Congressional Award's Physical Fitness section, I was able to complete over 200 hours to reach my goal of improving my dance technique while practicing healthy lifestyle skills. Not only did I learn these skills, I also discovered one of my biggest passions in life and completed my first solo dance debut! Finally, the Congressional Award Exploration gave me the opportunity to travel abroad to London, England and immerse myself in the rich history and culture of Europe. It truly brought the stories and history in textbooks to life and was one of the most special experiences of my life. The rewarding Congressional Award experience has truly given me the opportunity to push my limits and learn more about myself by setting goals and evaluating my strengths and weaknesses.

Elizabeth Walker
Abilene, Texas
Advisor: Rosetta Moore

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours at a local soup kitchen, City Light Ministries. I helped prepare and serve hot meals for the hundreds of guests who came in daily. For Personal Development, I performed data entry for Medical Reimbursement Solutions, a medical billing company. I became familiar with diagnosis coding and patient accounting. The experience gained will serve me well for my goal to work in the medical field. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my archery score average. With 50 points being the highest score achievable for one round, I went from shooting an average of 37 points to an average of 45, ultimately allowing me to compete at state-level competitions. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a five-day cave-diving trip across Texas and New Mexico. I explored four beautiful cave locations, learned many interesting facts, and saw one of the rarest cave formations in the world. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was an invaluable experience that taught me the importance of stepping outside my comfort zone to experience the world and to serve others.

Aayush Dave
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Harish Krishnarao
Affiliations: YMCA

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at my local YMCA. I worked with summer camp counselors for three summers and led fundraising efforts to contribute to the YMCA's charitable cause. For Personal Development, I played the violin at home, with my teacher, and at Hindu temples across Houston. I performed for friends and family alike. I played tennis with my dad, brother, friends, and tennis coach Fernando Herrera for Physical Fitness. I also trained for and ran three half marathons. For my Expedition, I traveled to Colorado to experience Native American culture firsthand. My family and I visited Native American landmarks, monuments, museum exhibits, and restaurants. I cannot thank all of my advisors, coaches, and teachers who helped me to achieve this great honor. The work they do is truly unbelievable.

Suhani Gadkari
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Kerry Cox
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I volunteered during my summers at a camp that allowed kids with disabilities to be able to have a summer camp experience. I worked one on one with many different types of kids and acted a companion, teacher, and someone they could trust. During the year, I volunteered at a senior citizen home. For my Personal Development, I did an online art class that taught me many new skills in a subject that I was passionate about. I also taught different badges to my Girl Scout Troop. I joined my cross country and swim team for Physical Fitness. I had practice everyday and would compete in meets around the Houston area almost every weekend. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Switzerland for my family and we eventually went on it during the summer. It included sightseeing, trying new food, and activities including sledding and parasailing.

Vanshika Jhonsa
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Raksha Mehta
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed my Voluntary Public Service hours at my local nursing home. I played enriching games with the residents and also helped to coordinate fun activities. For my Personal Development, I participated in an online Spanish course and did self-studying. I got a Gold Medal on the National Spain Exam and can now hold a conversation with a fluent Spanish speaker. To better my Physical Fitness, I took private tennis lessons and attended tennis training camps over the summer. I ended up making it onto the varsity tennis team at my school! Lastly, for my Exploration, I planned a trip to Spain's most popular cities. We got to experience the beautiful and lively culture of Spain, and I even got to use my Spanish skills to communicate with locals. My experience with The Congressional award has been fulfilling and I am grateful that I had a chance to pursue it.

Akhila Moorthy
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Harish Rao

For Voluntary Public Service, I completed more than 400 hours of volunteering at St. Lukes hospital and Theatre Under the Stars. At St. Lukes I helped the nurses and receptionists with small jobs such as answering phones, and at T.U.T.S. I also helped special needs children with activities. For Personal Development, I dedicated myself to improving my singing and acting skills. I participated in my school choir and did extra musicals and rehearsals. For Physical Fitness, I practiced traditional Indian dancing. In the end, I completed a long two hour performance on stage of what I had practiced. Finally, for Expedition/Exploration, I planned out a five day trip to Puerto Rico and went with my family. It was an amazing experience, as I saw so much interesting wildlife and learned so much about a different culture. Overall, striving to achieve The Congressional Award has given me many qualities, such as compassion, diligence, and determination.

Leela Moorthy
Pearland, Texas
Advisor: Harish Rao

I dedicated my weeks to a non-profit theatre organization meant to spark a sense of music and art in special needs kids. In addition, I completed over 400 hours volunteering on the general medicine floor of St. Lukes Hospital. The Congressional Award Gold Medal also encouraged my passion for singing and performing musical theatrical songs. For Personal Development, I received vocal training for one year, and performed on stage for the school shows two years in a row. For Physical Fitness, I dedicated my time to Bharatanatyam, which is a traditional Indian folk dance. The Congressional Gold Medal inspired me to complete my Arangetram, which is a solo performance that marks a milestone in a Bharathanatyam dancer's career. For my Expedition, I planned a four-night trip to New Orleans and embarked on an adventure rich with ancient culture, delightful cuisine, and rhythmic jazz. I had the unprecedented experience of experiencing jazz concerts live. The Congressional Award opened a world of opportunities to explore my interests and develop valuable leadership skills.

Divya Ramamurthy
Manvel, Texas
Advisor: Lata Krishnarao

For over four years, I volunteered at a retirement home, a performing and visual arts center for disabled children, a camp for children with cognitive or physical challenges, Keep Pearland Beautiful, and Teen Court. Through the Personal Development section, I was able to develop my personality and character through a leadership and cultural class that I attended every Sunday. Once I turned 13, I was able to give back to this organization by becoming an instructor. I planned many philosophical discussions, yoga demonstrations, and cultural events. My goal for Physical Fitness was to increase my stamina, strength, and discipline in classical Indian dance in order to complete a 2-hour solo performance. I practiced nearly every day and took dance classes 1-4 times a week. In the summer of 2016, I completed the solo performance successfully. I wanted to learn more about the diverse cultures, traditions, and history of Texas for my Expedition. I traveled to Houston, Austin, and San Antonio. I was able to immerse myself in each culture by seeking out adventurous activities, restaurants, museums, and tours of the buildings in the city. The Congressional Award made a lasting impact on my life because it pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me explore my potential.

Joseph Campbell

Colleyville, Texas

Advisor: Raymond Walker

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

For the Voluntary Public Service section of the award, I chose to assist a nonprofit organization called the American Legion with numerous tasks around their facility like building a new stage for them. For the Personal Development section of the award, I participated in a weekly SAT/ACT prep course to improve my overall standardized test scores. For the Physical Fitness section of the award, I decided to work on personal training by setting personal physical goals, making a plan to achieve those goals, and executing my plan. For the Expedition/Exploration section of the award, I helped organize and complete a 5-day leadership hiking/camping experience at Lake Texoma using the Kodiak Challenge as the journey's foundation.

Ronnie Wilson Jr.

Fort Worth, Texas

Advisor: William D. Covington

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked as a Teen Court Attorney with the Fort Worth Teen court program. I served for 5 years at the down town court house location defending and prosecuting teenage minor offenders. For my Personal Development, I played football. When I graduated into a charter school with no football program, I started to play golf. I played through the first tee of Fort Worth and excelled and completed their program. Not being apart of a football program anymore I worked with my Physical Fitness coaches and had them write me a program that I could continue to work out on a daily bases and improve in my physical fitness. For my Expedition, my Dad and I toured the Mississippi Delta. As an Eagle Scout I've always looked for challenges. I decide to take on the challenge of the Congressional Award. I felt it would be a great goal to complete, and also it would be a great way to give back and appreciate my community.

Michael Zelewski

Southlake, Texas

Advisor: Tim Green

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

Most of my Voluntary Public Service work was completed through my church on mission trips, day camps, and outreach programs. I also did work through a non-profit resale shop building furniture, setting up the store, and selling items. Finally, I worked with my Boy Scout troop on conservation projects. My Personal Development hours were primarily completed through the Boy Scouts of America. I acted as the top youth leader in my troop of around 130 boys leading campouts, training sessions, and other programs. For Physical Fitness, I started playing ultimate frisbee and attended weekly practices learning the fundamentals of throws and plays. I also spent time running as training to recover from a knee injury. For my Expedition, I planned a backpacking trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. I spent five and a half days on the trail and hiked about 100 miles. One of my favorite things about that trip was when we hiked Mount Baldy, the tallest mountain in Philmont at 12,400 feet.

Katie Stephenson

Austin, Texas

Advisor: Leisl Criswell

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

I have spent all of high school as a member of Key Club volunteering at local events and creating service projects. I served as Lieutenant Governor of Division 24S my senior year and worked on the TX-OK District Board as District Project Committee Chair. For my Personal Development goals, I dove deeper into my interests in photography, videography, and music. I learned about creating quality images and videos. Practicing my violin weekly helped me accomplish my goals. For my Physical Fitness goal, I practiced on my own to increase the amount of yards I could hit and decrease my stroke count in golf. I also shortened my mile time throughout a year by over a minute and increased the maximum amount of weight I could squat. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Washington, DC with my Mom for a week. I researched museums, restaurants, monuments, and tours. We spent the week exploring the city and learning about the history of our country through the Smithsonian Museums and many monuments.

Isabella Davila

Laredo, Texas

Advisor: Corina Melendez

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at local weekend camps for Girl Scouts of Greater South Texas and as counselor at Camp Bayview also working alongside them GSGST. I worked one-on-one with the girls helping them develop self-confidence. For Personal Development, I continued with my art lessons 2-3 times a week. I also worked with a local artist in her art studio as an instructor for the classes. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided I would continue developing my tennis skills. I began by setting goals for myself like being able to jump-serve and advance a level. Finally, for my Expedition I planned a five-night camping trip at Camp Huisache. While camping we learned how to cook different meals over a fire, cleaned up campsites, and learned how to shoot bb guns. I truly had an excellent experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and learned to grasp any opportunity provided to us by life.

Estrella Carbajal

Dallas, Texas

Advisor: Jennifer Cortez

Affiliation: AmeriCorps NCCC

For my Voluntary Public Service, I participated in a nonprofit in the Dallas area, Reconciliation Outreach. I planned and participated in many events in the community on many different topics, including combatting domestic violence and promoting self-esteem in children. For Personal Development, I interned with the Hispanic Youth Symposium at Southern Methodist University. I learned many skills and participated in organizing a program I am passionate about. For my Physical Fitness, I worked tirelessly to become a better volleyball player. I made the A team and learned new strategies for my sport. For my Exploration, I traveled to Tapatitlan de Morelos, Mexico. I wanted to learn about my family history. I visited small communities in Mexico as well as big cities and learned a great deal about my heritage. The Congressional Award has allowed me to find purpose in my life and participate in worthy causes in my community.

Michael Bejarano

Wylie, Texas

Advisor: Andrew Semler

My Voluntary Public Service included tutoring kids from low-income communities, assisting physicians in medical outreach to Guatemalan families, providing direct care to children with life-limiting conditions at a hospice facility, and providing service to patients at an emergency room. My Personal Development was enhanced by performing research in the Bio-Inspired Robotics and Healthcare Lab at Arizona State University. Working with a team to engineer a system to control microrobots for medical applications allowed me to develop, refine, and apply my research skills. My Physical Fitness goals focused on developing a regimen to increase my strength in bench press, deadlift, and squat. Setting quantitative goals, maintaining self-discipline, and sustaining a consistent daily routine were instrumental in achieving my goals. Finally, in my Exploration of New York City, I pursued an immersive experience that took me to places of educational, cultural, and historical significance. The experience was a fantastic opportunity for me to interact with and learn from people with diverse backgrounds and new perspectives. In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I was challenged to try new experiences, embrace obstacles with diligence and perseverance, and provide charitable work in active service to local and global communities.

Victor Rangel

Brownsville, Texas

Advisor: Osman Akbas

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local hospital. I worked in various departments in order to make patients and their family members more comfortable. For Personal Development, I learned traditional martial arts. I am now only a belt away from the black belt level. For Physical Fitness, I performed aerobic exercise in order to build body mass. I raised my BMI by 1-2 points. Finally, for my Expedition/Exploration, I took a trip from Brownsville, Texas to San Antonio in order to study the history and culture of Texas. My journey through the Congressional Award has helped me realize that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.

Brady Moon

Provo, Utah

Advisor: Mona Farnsworth

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, HOBY

I assisted low-income families in building their own homes. Over my years of service I helped build over 50 homes. In addition to building homes, I directed an outreach program helping over 2,000 K-12 students gain STEM experiences by building and competing with underwater robots. I focus on improving my computer programming skills and became more involved in a cappella. I became more proficient in the Java, Swift, and Matlab programming languages. I joined an a cappella group where we recorded albums, performed, and lifted others through music. I improved my distance running from six miles to being able to complete a marathon and also branched out from running by racing my first triathlon. I then focused on cycling training to prepare for my Expedition of cycling around Utah. My goal was to explore the variety of experiences and location across Utah. I cycled as much as I could for the trip in order to really appreciate my surroundings. We experienced hot springs, lava tubes, rope swings, Zion National Park, slot canyons, and much more. The Congressional Award has helped me stay focused on improving the integral aspects of my life.

Spencer Baird

Lehi, Utah

Advisor: Dave Welch

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, National Honor Society

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at a space center, where we give kids a star trek like experience, and I helped it go along smoothly. For Personal Development, I learned more about electrical engineering. I also developed my skills as a pianist. For Physical Fitness, I joined my schools Mountain biking team and learned how to mountain bike and how to take care of a bike. Lastly, for my Expedition, I went on a photography trip up to Alice Lake in the Sawtooth Mountain range in Idaho. We backpacked up to the lake so that we could get pictures of the solar eclipse. In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned a lot about how to be more independent and follow through on my goals.

Eldar Muhic
Sandy, Utah
Advisor: Halis Kablan

In earning the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. One of these volunteer programs was at a soccer training facility for kids. I worked on site teaching children soccer and educating them about the importance of exercise. For my Personal Development goal, I studied specific ACT sections to improve my overall composite score. In the end, I achieved my goal and my composite score went up 4 points. For my Physical Fitness goal, I decided that I would train extremely hard to improve my endurance for soccer. At the end of more than two years of training, I was running faster and lasting much longer in the games. For my Expedition, I planned a six-day hiking trip to Kanarra Creek. While hiking I experienced a beautiful environment and had the chance to take some breathtaking pictures of the wildlife. My experience with the Congressional Award is one that I will never forget, it taught me that I can achieve anything I plan, create, and do.

Jessica Herbert
Lehi, Utah
Advisor: Whitney Swensen
Affiliation: National Honor Society

I provided over 100 hours of service under the direction of my advisor for residents of Utah County. This included making and donating fleece blankets, food, blood, coats, and book drives. There are so many needs directly in the communities that we live- by helping a little bit we can each make a difference. I want to become an elementary school teacher so I worked hard by setting a Personal Development goal to increase my teaching skills and working with young children. I put on “Kids Camps” where I taught and entertained up to 20 children per day at camp teaching and providing themed crafts, games, and songs. I do not like the water! However, I set a Physical Fitness goal to work on my swimming skills. After setting goals and accomplishing them, I learned how to wake board, water ski, surf and snorkel. I am grateful that I was able to set goals to become better at something I was afraid of. This world is amazing! I was able to explore different parts of the U.S. I am from Utah and I was able to visit the East in Pennsylvania, and the South in Texas. I was also able to explore three countries - Mexico, Belize and Honduras. I am thankful for amazing people I met. This was such a wonderful opportunity to set goals and accomplish them. I learned about myself, the community, and the great need there is for service. I am so thankful for the resources around us. I am thankful for the chance to push myself, set goals, re-evaluate, and accomplish so many things. I am thankful for my supportive parents and advisor that helped me accomplish this award! I am grateful for the people I met and the good that was done.

Kate Herbert

Lehi, Utah

Advisor: Whitney Swensen

Affiliation: National Honor Society

I organized a community wide book drive with seven elementary schools, and the Junior High and High School to supplement books into the new high school library, provide books to children and agencies in need, and give as Christmas presents to children. I worked hard to increase my leadership skills by running for office, filing out applications, and interviewing. I held leadership positions at my school, on sports teams and at church. I attended Leadership camps and training, where I learned and applied many things about how to be a leader. For Physical Fitness, I worked hard to increase my tennis and basketball skills. I was able to support my team and push myself as an athlete. I am grateful for the skills I learned and the importance of being part of a team and doing your best! I am also thankful for wonderful coaches and friends that come from sports. For my Exploration, I explored three new countries and took my first trip to Houston, Texas. I stayed with strangers who became friends a few months before the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. I hiked Mayan ruins in Belize, snorkeled in the 2nd largest coral reef in the world, and compared and contrasted the local cultures. I am so grateful I set goals, pushed myself to meet new people, developed myself, and shared my time with others. I am thankful for the skills I have learned by completing this program and I would like to thank my parents and advisor for helping me accomplish and achieve this award. I will apply the traits I learned for years to come. Thank you!!!

Czarina Land

Herriman, Utah

Advisor: Megan Theorine

Affiliation: National Honor Society

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at an animal shelter. I also helped with the planning and executing many NHS and student council events. For Personal Development, I went to my college mentor and leadership program every week for two hours. There I worked on getting my ACT score higher. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided to become healthier by running weekly and working out other parts of my body. Finally for Expedition, I planned a 6-night, 7-day houseboat trip to Lake Powell. While there, I explored canyons, learned about different cultures, and figured out how to run a houseboat. Overall, I had an amazing time earning my Gold Medal, and I ultimately learned that I can succeed and anything I put my mind to.

Matthew Germaine
Montpelier, Vermont
Advisor: Robyn Baylor
Affiliation: AmeriCorps NCCC

To achieve the Voluntary Public Service requirement, I completed two very different years of AmeriCorps service. The first term, with AmeriCorps NCCC, involved rigorous team-based projects, while the second, with AmeriCorps VISTA, involved leading an array of capacity-building ventures in Vermont. Seeking to align my Personal Development goals with my passions and future aspirations, I took classes to receive my Certificate in Nonprofit Management and utilized a local program to be trained and certified as a host on my own live weekly radio hour at a small community radio station. Being an avid runner during my time as a student and beyond, I trained through an entire New England winter to complete my first-ever ultramarathon and achieve my Physical Fitness goal. In preparing for this race, I set a new personal record for the half-marathon, and curated an interest in rowing. To achieve my Expedition/Exploration goals, I set aside an extended weekend to intentionally explore the community in which I served as an AmeriCorps VISTA Leader. In doing so, I climbed Vermont's highest peak; learned about the historic Ricker Mountain settlement; and visited the Waterbury Dam. Through service, learning, running, rowing, hiking, and an array of additional activities, the Congressional Award has instilled in me the illuminating insight that setting goals allows me to get things done in my personal and professional life, and I look forward to utilizing this insight in the many more adventures that lie ahead.

Katherine Cinnamon
Manassas, Virginia
Advisor: Dan Longo

Affiliations: Military Family Advisory Network, National Honor Society, United States Air Force

For my Voluntary Public Service, I mentored middle school robotics teams. I taught the students mechanics and how to use engineering design process to design and build their robots. I expanded my outreach to volunteering at STEM summer camps and volunteering at robotics competitions as a judge or referee. For my Personal Development, I competed on multiple robotics teams, reaching the highest levels of international competition in VEX Robotics, SeaPerch, FIRST Robotics and ZERO Robotics. I have learned engineering, problem solving, how to work under immense pressure, communication skills, technical writing and programming. For my Physical Fitness goals, I learned how to play a new sport, disc golf. By practicing I was able to improve my technique, throws and overall score. I am also a competitive swimmer and worked hard during practices to improve my times and reach my goals. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to London, England and spent five days immersing myself into the culture. I learned about the British government and monarchy, culture and history. I also used public transportation exclusively for the duration of the trip and planned all the logistics. Through earning the Congressional Award I have seen the transformative power of service and the impact we can all make in our communities by sharing our passion and time with others to make a difference in their lives.

Matthew Cinnamon

Manassas, Virginia

Advisor: Dan Longo

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Military Family Advisory Network, National Honor Society, United States Air Force

I volunteered as a mentor to elementary and middle school robotics teams, I taught the students mechanical engineering and how to program robots. I also led a large effort to label storm drains in my community to educate homeowners of the dangers of pollutants entering our watershed. For Personal Development, I honed my technical skills by competing on four robotics teams; FIRST Robotics, VEX Robotics, SeaPerch and MIT's ZERO Robotics and advanced to the highest levels of competition in each one. Every platform requires a range of engineering disciplines and programming skills to compete in each one. My Physical Fitness activity goal was to improve my ability as a swimmer. By regularly attending practice and incorporating strength and cardio workouts, I became a stronger and faster. I was a member of my high school varsity swim team for three years and significantly improved times. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Rome, Italy to include neighboring cities of Florence, Pisa, Naples and the ruins of Pompeii. My goal was to explore and learn about the rich history of Rome and the Roman Empire, culture, art, food, and architecture. Through this service, I have learned to not be afraid to share my passion; you never know the lasting impact you can have on others.

Brianna DiSanza

Sumerduck, Virginia

Advisor: Rosemary Monsell

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 750 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at my local hospital and library. I worked both on-site and in the community interacting with patients, families, and individuals through many occupations in order to help benefit the community. For Personal Development, I founded a not-for-profit organization that donates hand-made surgical scrub caps to pediatric patients who undergo surgery at the Fauquier Hospital. The experience taught me how to be a public leader by rallying people around a cause to help those in need. For Physical Fitness, I focused on earning my Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do by improving my stamina and strength through cross-training, weightlifting, and sparring. My skill level has risen greatly since the beginning of my endeavor for the Congressional Award. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned an entire month long trip to Japan to broaden my horizons. I traveled all across the country experiencing Japanese culture first hand and immersing myself within their way of life. It was truly a memorable journey I will always cherish. Earning my Congressional Gold Award Medal was an incredible experience that taught me if you are working towards something you truly care about, you don't have to be pushed; the vision pulls you.

Matthew Roca

Fredericksburg, Virginia

Advisor: John Epperly

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service through the Boy Scouts of America. I was able to bring my passion for the scouting program together with the congressional program and continue to volunteer even after leaving for college. For Personal Development I started my first job at a local fast food restaurant. I was able to gain so much more from holding a job then I would ever have gained from just going to school. For my Physical Fitness requirements I joined the marching band in my high school and was able to reach my highest level of health and fitness ever. I was even able to lead as the band captain for my senior year. During my Expedition I was able to travel to Ireland. There I saw a landscape and a culture that I never knew I would have the chance to experience. Even with the time I spent there, I still wish I could go back and see the rest of the country. Through this program I have been able to reach a new level of health well being as well as national and global citizenship.

Ben Silverberg

Norfolk, Virginia

Advisor: Catryna Jackson

For my Voluntary Public Service, I participated in volunteer work at Nauticus, my local nautical museum. As part of the Visitor Experience crew, I introduced guests to the animals and shared facts, figures, and safety information. For Personal Development, I took part in an internship at a local financial advisory firm. I learnt technology and networking skills while managing client databases and working with partner companies. For Physical Fitness, I continued physical therapy at home for my weak joints and took up cycling when I was able. I now cycle consistently for sport and for pleasure. I organized an educational trip in New York and Philadelphia for my Exploration. I toured museums and historical sites to learn about early American and Jewish-American history. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has shown me the many benefits consistency and dedication can bring to my life.

Nolan Fitzsimmons
Falls Church, Virginia
Advisor: David Mehler

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service in two ways. I volunteered at an assisted living home, assisting residents and staff in any way I could. I also volunteered for the U.S. Chess Center, with whom my involvement included helping to run two weekly elementary school chess clubs. For my Personal Development, I developed my writing skills by writing numerous essays and by reading many books. I would regularly send essays to my advisor, and he would review them and send them back with corrections and feedback. After this, I would rewrite them and send them to him again. For my Physical Fitness goals, I improved my overall endurance with a combination of running and swimming. I regularly went for long runs of roughly five kilometers each. In addition to this, I periodically went swimming for long distances at my local recreation center. For my Expedition, I choose to learn more about the US Mexico border, immigration, and the role of US Border Patrol by spending 2 weeks along the US – Mexico border, traveling from Laredo, Texas to Chula Vista, California, exploring cities and communities on both sides of the border. My trip included going into Mexico 8 different times to 7 different cities and touring/meeting with U.S. border agents in 3 different states. The Congressional Award, especially the exploration, was life-changing to me by giving me great experiences that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Helen Ganley
Falls Church, Virginia
Advisor: Kelly Carper

As an avid volleyball player, I realized there weren't enough coaches to give all of the interested middle school girls a team. I volunteered to coach so that all girls could enjoy the sport that had given me so much. For Personal Development, I focused on music. I play percussion and wanted to test myself by applying for rigorous pre-professional programs. I worked hard, auditioned for, and was accepted to the Interlochen Wind Symphony program. I also wanted to march on my high school's marching band's drumline, which required stamina and strength. For Physical Fitness, I worked hard and am now drumline section leader for the State Champion McLean High School Marching Highlanders. As music and theater are important parts of my life, for my Exploration, I organized a trip from my home to New York City to see some Broadway shows. I had to learn new skills including troubleshooting. The lessons learned from the experience has given me confidence for my future. I want to thank the Congressional Gold Award for helping me establish goals and encouraging me to meet them.

Nicole Gray

Alexandria, Virginia
Advisor: Elizabeth Weith

I served in excess of 750 hours feeding and clothing the homeless, volunteering at my local hospital, and working with children with disabilities. I earned my EMT license, and I continue to volunteer with Georgetown Emergency Response Medical Service (GERMS). My interests and passions ultimately drove my Personal Development activities beyond general technology, performing arts, and their intersections to include emergency response. I have also become an EMT and CPR instructor, now sharing my expertise and passion. Over five years my Physical Fitness improved as I healed from a devastating injury to reestablish my physical range of motion. I returned to running and swimming, now competing mainly against myself. My interest in global health informed my Expedition to India. Those twelve days dramatically expanded my understanding of worldwide medical and environmental needs and the logistic and economic impacts of delivering care and resources. In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal my path continuously evolved as I learned more about myself and explored the opportunities of the disciplines with which I've engaged to better serve others.

Carmen Mazyck

Mason Neck, Virginia
Advisor: Allison Bowden

Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, HOBY, National Honor Society

I dedicated over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by spreading my love and passion for the arts in the Alexandria and Washington, DC communities. As part of my Girl Scout Gold Award, I developed and hosted several workshops for at-risk youth. In the area of Personal Development, I became a strong believer in peace, and worked tirelessly to embrace and celebrate the unique differences and blended cultures of students at my school as a founding member, past Communications Chair, and President of the Hayfield Black Student Union. Focusing on Physical Fitness while in high school, I lettered in volleyball, played on a national club volleyball team, and served as an athletic training student aide, using art and music as meditation tools to help student athletes cope with their pain. For my Expedition, I travelled to London, Paris, and Madrid for ten days to explore the history of art and become more culturally aware and globally educated.

Margaret Kirtley
Annandale, Virginia
Advisor: Kacey McAleer

Much of my Voluntary Public Service work was oriented around people suffering from dementia. I founded an organization called “Memory Keys” which is aimed at introducing students to the wide range of benefits music therapy can have. I also taught one-on-one piano lessons at various nursing homes. My Personal Development goal was to improve my piano skills, with the plan of practicing every day until I could play at Carnegie Hall in New York City. I learned the truth behind the saying “How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice and practice!” I ended up being asked to perform at Carnegie Hall three times. I’ve always wanted to compete in a Spartan race. For my Physical Fitness, I devoted one to two hours every day before and after school to a regiment composed predominantly of lifting with some cardio. I competed in two races, one at the Nationals Park and one in North Carolina. For my Expedition I planned a family trip to Southeast Asia, including Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Siem Reap. My first priority was to spend time with elephants, and so I made plans to visit an elephant sanctuary in Chiang Mai, which was one of the best experiences of my life. We also attended a Thai cooking class. I’m very honored to be receiving The Congressional Award--these set of experiences really helped shape me as a person and I can’t wait to see what the future will bring.

Katherine Craig
Sterling, Virginia
Advisor: Richard Bader

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at my local animal shelter, logging over 550 Voluntary Public Service hours. I spent time in and out of the shelter providing care to needy dogs and cats. To complete the Personal Development portion, I spent much of my time further developing my scuba diving skills. I achieved both the Rescue Diver and Underwater Photographer certifications. For Physical Fitness, I conditioned my athletic ability and field hockey skills. Throughout this goal, I became Co-Captain of my high school team, an All-Conference and All-Region player, as well as helped push my team to earn 3rd place in Virginia High School Field Hockey. My Expedition/Exploration goal was reached through the planning and completion of a hiking/camping trip to Sedona, AZ and the Grand Canyon. I became more comfortable with outdoor living as well as navigation. My overall experience in earning the Congressional Award was exciting and full of accomplishments that I am glad I was able to attain.

Akshay Deverakonda

Herndon, Virginia

Advisor: Bruce Falk

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I served my community through my Boy Scout troop, along with volunteering through the Library of Congress and at Great Falls National Park. For Personal Development, I gained experience with scientific research by working in a university laboratory. I additionally learned how to support college students with editing while working with my university's Writing Resource Center. For Physical Fitness, having had no serious experience with running, I trained myself up gradually by running increasingly greater distances until I successfully completed a half-marathon. For my Expedition, I trekked through Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico with a crew from my Boy Scout trip for 10 days. My experience with the award helped me grow and showed me the value of commitment and seeing things through to the end.

Neil Kothari

Oak Hill, Virginia

Advisor: Iris Smith

For my Voluntary Public Service, I coached middle school children in an international K-12 problem solving/STEAM competition called Odyssey of the Mind. I spent every Saturday and Sunday for 8 months with the team of 6th graders in preparation for the tournament. I also tutored for several hours each week in 5 STEM subjects. I achieved my Personal Development goal by expanding on my knowledge of Indian classical music and to sing in different languages, learning notation, techniques, and various instruments. For Physical Fitness, I set out to improve my average round of golf by 15-20 strokes. I competed in matches on my high school's Varsity Golf team which I will be captain of during the 2018 season. The team was named District Champions, Regional Champions, and State 5A Runner-Ups. My Expedition took me on a week trip to the Grand Canyon where I learned about Native American tribes that had inhabited the Grand Canyon and their habitats, agriculture, and beliefs. Someone once quoted "A long journey begins with a single step". While the quest for the gold medal seemed a long journey, it was my first step to learning and displaying perseverance, commitment, and grit.

Margaret Thompson
Fairfax Station, Virginia
Advisor: Belinda Bender

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I logged hours at a health and rehabilitation facility for terminally ill patients and worked at the Ronald McDonald House preparing meals and making blankets and quilts. For Personal Development, I attended various courses on personal development offered by The Old Dominion Cotillion. For my Physical Fitness portion, I took self-defense classes and also participated as a cheer leader and cheer coach at my high school. For my Expedition/Exploration, I planned a two-week trip up the coast of my birth state, California. My family and I traveled over 800 miles, from San Diego in the south to Napa Valley in the north, and I learned about the history and culture of our 31st state. I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, and learned the value of using my time and energy to improve myself and to help others.

Artemis Veizi
Centreville, Virginia
Advisor: Mejroda Ura

I had the privilege of volunteering at the Fort Belvoir Army Base Recreation Center, helping veterans and active-duty personnel enjoy time with nature. Getting to know people I would never have met otherwise has pulled me out of my bubble to a more meaningful appreciation of my potential for impact. I first watched my grandmother knit when I was three years old, and could hardly imagine possessing the patience to sit and knit for hours at a time. I learned how to knit as my Personal Development for the Award, starting with a pair of mismatched, too small socks and progressing to full sweaters! For my Physical Fitness, I rowed with my school's team. Rowing took on new meaning through my pursuit of the Award when I saw it as an opportunity to make every minute of every grueling practice count. I hope my dedication has served as an example for younger rowers, an impact I am still working towards now as a captain. I executed challenging but incredibly beautiful and overwhelmingly fun hikes in the Austrian Alps and Yosemite National Park for my Expedition. In the Alps, I took my hiking to the next level with klettersteig (iron rope climbing), an experience, unlike any climbing I've ever done but by far the most exciting. The immense effort and time that went into the Award often made me question the time cost versus personal value--a question that yielded the same conclusion: In a world of unknowns, one thing I'm certain of is my ability to meet every challenge and new adventure with a sense of wonder and gratitude in my lifelong pursuit of fulfillment and discovery.

Andy Zhao
Great Falls, Virginia
Advisor: Wei Hong

To complete Voluntary Public Service, I mentored local youths both one on one and through after school robotics programs. For my Personal Development, I wanted to develop my skills in photography. To achieve this I joined his school's yearbook and newspaper, dedicating countless hours to taking and developing photos. As captain of my school's rowing team, I improved my Physical Fitness greatly and led the First Eight to a third place finish at Nationals. For my Exploration, I traveled to New Orleans where I explored local history, jazz, and Cajun cuisine to bring back to my volunteer soup kitchen in New York. Through participating in the Congressional Award I have received countless opportunities to pursue my interests. I am grateful for what the program has done for me and strive to give that back through my actions.

Gailynn Benjamin
Pullman, Washington
Advisor: Tom Weaver
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered over 400 hours at two different hospitals. I completed the volunteer programs at Gritman Medical Center in high school and Swedish Medical Center in college. For Personal Development, I worked multiple jobs while I was in school. I was a videographer for the online live-stream of volleyball and basketball games for the Seattle Pacific University Falcons. I also taught and graded biology lab classes. For Physical Fitness, I played varsity basketball and volleyball in high school. By my senior year, I lettered in both sports. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned and led a five day bike trip with my Venture Crew. We started at the Hiawatha Trail on the border of Montana and Idaho, and we ended in Pullman, Washington. We biked over 150 miles on the trip. Through the experience, I gave back to my community and became more confident in myself.

Lauren Champlin

Spokane, Washington

Advisor: Mary Himley

For my Voluntary Public Service, I did a lot of work in childcare, specifically with younger children. However, my favorite volunteer work I did was at a summer STEM Academy where I worked in the Gaming and Coding module, helping children to program their own computer games. One of my Personal Development goals was closely related to my volunteer work in a summer STEM academy. I practiced and learned programming computer games. Another goal I achieved was learning and improving my French. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I did a variety of different exercises. I did rock climbing at Wild Walls climbing gym, practiced yoga at my home, and did a lot of hiking, both locally and while on vacation. For my Expedition, I traveled to England and learned about British culture. I explored new forms of transportation, entertainment, and food. I even stayed with a British family for a couple of days and experienced their daily life. Earning the Congressional Award gave me the opportunity for many new experiences.

Bridget Rowe

Renton, Washington

Advisor: Christie Shimizu

Service has always been important in my life so I chose to split my hours between a few different service opportunities. I volunteered at a Japanese garden, gave feedback to students at high school speech tournaments, tutored children from low income backgrounds, and volunteered as an ESL teacher. For Personal Development, I spent time at a children's camp helping to lead students from low income backgrounds through various constructive activities. I learned how to manage behavior, plan fun activities, and connect with the kids. In order to achieve my Physical Fitness goal of running several 5k races, I slowly built up the amount of time that I could run. I set up a schedule for running and stuck to it. As I continued to run 5k races, my speed improved immensely. I spent five days helping out at an organic farm in Oregon for my Exploration goal. I got to try many unfamiliar farming practices and also learned a lot about the Native American culture of the couple who owned the farm. The work was difficult and the trip was an amazing and growing experience! I originally started working on the Congressional Award when I was in high school, but took a break and then completed it post college; this entire experience taught me that it is okay to slow down but to never give up on completing my goals.

Hannah Wadham

Provo, Utah

Advisor: Dean Speidel

For Voluntary Public Service, I organized food at my local foodbank into meals and wrote recipes in both English and Spanish, so that families who picked up the food would better know how to use it. For Personal Development, I learned how to knit and practiced a variety of stitches in various types of yarn until I had enough sample squares to make a large blanket, which I then donated to a local program that provides blankets to people in need. For Physical Fitness, I trained for and ran two 5K races, focusing on cutting my time from a previous 5k that I had run. Although I did not win either race, I was able to shave off over a minute and a half from my previous time, which was far more than I initially thought I could accomplish. For my Expedition, I worked for a week on a farm, helping with everything from a morning milking starting at 5 AM to the night milking which ends at 8 PM, and many more chores in between such as, feeding the calves or shoveling manure. Completing the Congressional Award helped me realize that I can handle the stresses of work and school and still make time for the things that are truly important to me, by pushing me to plan ahead and better manage my time.

Brooke Chang

Bellevue, Washington

Advisor: Scott Chin

In earning my Congressional Gold Medal, I dedicated my Voluntary Public Service hours towards organizations that promoted the welfare of underprivileged and homeless youths. Through this, I gained a deeper understanding of the economic struggles facing families and youth in my community. For my Personal Development goal, I improved my leadership skills by participating in my school's student government. Working closely and communicating with other officers, I helped plan various activities and fundraisers to benefit the students at my school. For Physical Fitness, I played tennis with my teammates, my coaches, and the ball machine until I decreased my unforced errors percentage from 50 to 30. My final goal was to learn about wildlife and Native American culture through a camping Expedition in Havasupai Falls, Arizona. We hiked 5-10 miles a day and learned about the complex history of the Havasupai people. Overall, pursuing the Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an empowering growth opportunity, teaching me about my leadership, my potential, and the people around me.

Sten Hoffman

Bellevue, Washington

Advisor: Andrew Benson

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at the Seattle Aquarium as a Youth Ocean Advocate. For Personal Development, I played the trumpet in my high school's band and jazz ensembles. I ran cross country with my high school's long distance running team to achieve my Physical Fitness goal. Lastly, for my Expedition, I went to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimmaron, New Mexico.

Hyun Seo Christina Joo

Bellevue, Washington

Advisor: Joy Kaplan

Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

In working towards my Voluntary Public Service goals for the Congressional Award, I served youth and families in my city through organizations like the Boys and Girls Club. I also served disadvantaged communities at food banks and migrant farms. For the Personal Development portion of this award, I improved my skill level in Taekwondo by training for my 3rd degree black belt, becoming a certified judge, and teaching at my Taekwondo school. Not only has my skill level rose, I have also gained a deeper understanding of the sport. Prior to my Congressional Award journey, I had gotten a leg injury, but the Award pushed me to stay active. As my Physical Fitness goal, I improved my upper body strength by increasing the number of sit ups I can do in a minute and the time of my plank. For my Exploration, I immersed myself in the rich culture and life of South Korea. As a South Korean who has lived in America since a young age, learning about and experiencing the politics, culture, and history of my homeland was eye-opening and gave me a new sense of identity. In times of injuries, work, and a hectic high school schedule, the Congressional Award has pushed me to serve my community and serve myself, helping me achieve and learn more than I could have ever imagined.

Angela Lin

Seattle, Washington

Advisor: Ms. Sandra Foy

Affiliations: National Honor Society, YMCA

I have provided over 700 hours serving my local and international community. I have dedicated the last three years teaching English to disabled teens, while partnering with an international humanitarian organization to organize fundraising concerts and disseminate innovative assistive technology to disabled children in China. A classical piano enthusiast, I learned to play my favorite piano pieces by Chopin and Liszt and learned about the music theory and history during the Romantic era. I also worked with a physical trainer to improve my strength and endurance — I am currently training to run a half marathon this summer! For my Exploration, I planned and funded a trip to a small village in Chongqing, where I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the local culture, and learn about the people and their values. Participating in the Congressional Award program has been an extremely transformational and rewarding experience in making me the well-rounded leader I am today.

Emily Mather

Bellevue, Washington

Advisor: Jennifer Sorenson

Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I focused on serving my community's disadvantaged children. I have assisted them as a teacher's assistant at the Bellevue School District's four-week summer school for students who did not meet the district's academic standards, many of whom are ELL (English Language Learner) students. I expanded my knowledge in Japanese history, literature, math, science, and social studies by attending Seattle Japanese School on Saturdays. In addition, to strengthen my leadership skills, I became an active member of Bellevue Youth Link, providing programs to support local youth. I trained in Naginata, a form of traditional Japanese martial arts. I have attained 1 kyu (pronounced ie-queue) and am working towards 1 dan (sho-dan). For my Exploration, I traveled to Hiroshima and learned the historical significance of World Heritage Sites such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial and the Itsukushima shrine. In particular, the remains of the Atomic Bomb Dome and its museum deeply impacted me and made me aware of the horrors of war. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on the fact that even as a youth, I could empower the disadvantaged children in my community and help them overcome obstacles in their lives.

Ena Wang

Mercer Island, Washington

Advisor: Erica Hill

In order to earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with WTA, RASKC and Cope Health Scholars. All three of these organizations allowed me to explore new areas, work with teams, and benefit my local community by taking care of others and the environment. I also worked on my own abilities for an instrument which has been present for the majority of my life, the guzheng, in order to fulfill the Personal Development requirement. Over the course of the Congressional Award I have participated in many competitions and developed my own skills. For Physical Fitness, I decided to continue training in taekwondo and earn my second degree black belt. I began to take more classes and train more frequently while teaching other students as an instructor, and even tried out a more competitive style. To fulfill the Expedition requirement, I planned a five day long cabin trip at a local ski mountain. Over the course of this trip my friends and I took care of ourselves and spent most of our time skiing in the area. My journey to earn my Congressional Award was a long one, but it was worth it every step of the way.

Elizabeth Sexton

Williamstown, West Virginia

Advisor: Tonia Bohnen

Affiliations: HOBY

In earning the Congressional Award, I volunteered at my local food pantry and held a fundraiser for this special nonprofit organization. I gained a passion for this issue as my understanding of hunger in America increased. For my Personal Development goal, I continued expanding my skills as a violinist. I focused my efforts on chamber music and orchestral development. For Physical Fitness, I learned to play tennis by participating in the Congressional Award program. Through this experience, I discovered how to successfully learn a new skill. The Congressional Award taught me how to plan an extensive trip through taking several long Expeditions around the country. Eventually, I planned a twelve day trip to explore the Midwest region of the United States. Because I participated in this award, I became a more confident individual, knowing I can achieve challenging goals through hard work and determination.

Sahil Dave

Charleston, West Virginia

Advisor: Ashley Kang

I completed nearly 600 hours of Voluntary Public Service, most of which entailed work targeted towards my local food kitchen and the betterment of Charleston as a whole. In this regard, my contributions range from aiding in the preparation of daily meals to supervising capital fundraisers and produce drives. For Personal Development, I attended various training programs and joined my school's Model United Nations and Public Forum Debate teams, with the intention of improving my skills in the arts of public speaking and argumentative debate. For my Physical Fitness portion, I decided I to bring tremendous technical improvement to my performance in tennis, as well as in regards to my overall athleticism and endurance; specifically, I improved my first serve accuracy by ten percent and also lost twenty pounds in two years time. Lastly, for my Expedition I planned a twelve-night trip throughout Southeast Asia, where I explored a vast array of archaic monasteries and temples. In this time, I came to understand the origins and philosophical basis of Theravada Buddhism, as well as the tremendous place it has within the region.

Alexandria Potter

Charleston, West Virginia

Advisor: Janice Zahurak and Nancy Woytek

After visiting the Flight 93 memorial, I was so touched, that I became a volunteer there. I have spent a great deal of time at the memorial and have participated in many events including anniversary observances. My participation has given me a renewed sense of patriotism. The ukulele has always fascinated me, so for my Personal Development I decided to learn to play the instrument without any formal lessons. I am proud to say that I am now adept at the instrument and have written original songs for performance. Not being a fan of cold weather, I decided to make the most of winters in western Pennsylvania by improving my skiing ability, which I did! Spending the day on snow-covered mountains, surrounded by natural outdoor beauty, made me appreciate winter and forget about the stresses of daily life. Visiting Seabrook Island, South Carolina was the Exploration that gave me a new perspective on the beauty of the ocean and the need to preserve ocean animals and wildlife. At the aquarium, I visited the ocean animal hospital, watched the sunset, dug for clams and helped rescue sea turtles and more. Clearly, the Congressional Award program allowed me to find a passion for new activities, to set goals, and to schedule time to accomplish those goals.

Christopher Potter

Charleston, West Virginia

Advisor: Janice Zahurak and Nancy Woytek

Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

Opportunities for Voluntary Public Service were plentiful in Latrobe, Pa. and I have engaged in many. But, my favorite contribution was to my high school. I turned a weed infested outdoor area into a lovely garden where students now have lunch on warm days. As a young Boy Scout, attending scout badge days were so enriching that I went beyond the expectations to become an Eagle Scout--earning many more badges than required. These badges have given me additional opportunities to investigate and become knowledgeable many different areas of scouting. I began my Physical Fitness activities by challenging myself on the track. I wanted to become a better athlete so by working out in the gym in addition to running, I accomplished my mission. While progressing, I grew not only physically, but also in stamina and attitude. My AP U.S. History teacher inspired me to learn more about our country, so my Exploration focused on Williamsburg. It was thrilling to visit a place that played a major role in establishing our country and to see the way life was during those days. The Congressional Award program afforded me the opportunity to learn a great deal about myself and how to accomplish lofty goals.

Victoria Potter

Charleston, West Virginia

Advisor: Janice Zahurak and Nancy Woytek

My Voluntary Public Service was focused on protecting and preserving the Loggerhead sea turtles along the coast of Seabrook Island, SC where I volunteered for several summers. I received funding for a grant by The Disney Corporation for a program I developed to teach kids about the sea turtles plight. I enjoy dining in fine restaurants with family and friends so, I determined that I wanted to learn to cook for Personal Development. My cooking accomplishments surprised me and my family as we enjoyed the foods I created for my personal development requirement. As a member of the track team, I dedicated a great deal of time and effort to working with a former coach so I could accomplish my goal. Since I plan on becoming a veterinarian, I chose to visit and work on a farm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania for my Exploration. On the farm, I had many valuable experiences from hand milking and machine milking the milking cows to witnessing the birth of a bull. The Congressional Award program taught me how to establish practical, demanding goals and to challenge myself to reach those goals.

Nikhita Santebennur
Brookfield, Wisconsin
Advisor: Sangeeta Rajput

For my Voluntary Public Service, several of my hours came from knitting blankets for patients at my local hospital, discharging patients, and assisting in the Emergency Department of the hospital. Additionally, I spent time with residents in Alzheimer's & dementia care, and cared for orphaned birds. In order to complete my Personal Development goals, I developed my karate abilities, eventually working my way to first degree black belt. This took a great amount of self-discipline, out of class practice, and development of skills such as self-confidence and perseverance. My Physical Fitness goals revolved around competitive swimming. In order to achieve my goal times I spent several hours perfecting my freestyle stroke, my flip turns, and my streamlines, while working with my coach and discussing areas that I could improve. To complete my Bronze Medal Exploration, I traveled to northern Wisconsin & Minnesota in order to explore the Voyageur history within the midwest and the history behind the Fur Trade in the 1800s. For my Gold Medal Expedition, I spent a week backpacking in the Colorado Rockies through Outward Bound. My overall journey earning my Congressional Award has been like no other, as I have not only learned of perseverance, determination, and dedication, but have also gained valuable skills I will be able to use for a lifetime.

Alex Aguirre
Powell, Wyoming
Advisor: Trista Ostrom

I volunteered through Dano Youth Camp to make a difference for youth in Park County. I coordinated and organized the Dano'lope' Dash which raises funds for the organization and most recently, I became the assistant director for the camp. I also recruited youth, organized field camp and regular camps, worked with the board of directors, and executed an eight-day trip for boys. For Personal Development, my goal was to learn more about construction by working part time at my dad's construction company. I learned how to build roads, patch roofs, work with electrical and plumbing crews on a new house, and learned more about outside design. My Physical Fitness goal was to go to Half Acre Gym at the University of Wyoming at least three times per week to improve my squat lifting goal. My overall goal is to keep in shape for horn hunting in the spring and hunting in the fall. Lastly, I went on an eight-day backpacking trip for my expedition. I learned how to work with others and coordinate trips that accommodate everyone.

Abijah Ahern

Laramie, Wyoming

Advisor: Chris Olson

Affiliations: Boys & Girls Club

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at Meals on Wheels and Big Brothers Big Sisters. I also dedicated time to Laramie Foster Closet and through Plainsmen Singers, where I organized clothing, served meals at Applebee's for their awareness event, delivered meals once a week, and helped in the kitchen as needed. I also traveled to Croatia where I volunteered in local schools and presented at an international education conference. Music is a large part of my life, so for my Personal Development goal I joined the University of Wyoming Jazz Band 3. I was the co-lead/solo chair for the All State Jazz band and I made all-state band. I practiced three times a week for the University of Wyoming's Jazz band and took private lessons. For Physical Fitness, I played tennis at Laramie High School and learned about cross country skiing with my family. I cross country skied during the winter and strength conditioned during the summer to be physically prepared for the winter months. I also played tennis in the fall as part of a doubles team. My Exploration was to Lokve and Rijeka, Croatia where I learned about archeological sites and explored nearby locations. I learned a lot about coordinating travel and flying alone to another country. I have gained so much from this program. I have developed accountability and work ethic as well as a greater respect and understanding for my peers, my community, my state, and my world.

Shelby Albright

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered for theatrical productions in my community and school by helping as the stage manager. I also volunteered for the youth symphony activities and musical festival for kids. For Personal Development, I took violin lessons every week and practiced on my own. My ultimate goal was to prepare for college auditions. I worked on increasing the number of steps I took each day for my Physical Fitness goal. I was aware of my steps and continuously worked on improving the number I took each day. I went on my exploration to South Dakota over the summer, where I had a list of things I wanted to see including Jewel Cave, Wind Cave, Devils Tower, Mt. Rushmore and the Reptile Gardens. I learned how to successfully plan and execute a trip.

Alexander Allison
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Trista Ostrom

I volunteered at Cheyenne's 150th celebration, the Botanic Gardens, Wyoming Children's Society, and the Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat. I also helped with Wyoming Congressional Award Christmas float and at McCormick Junior High, where I assisted with workouts for the athletes and helped swimmers with stroke technique. My Personal Development goal was to improve my skill level on the violin. I practiced regularly and participated in scheduled concerts and a group festival. My Physical Fitness goal was to acquire my third-degree black belt in Tae-Kwon-Do. My third-degree black belt is the culmination of nine years studying martial arts. I learned three new forms, improved my knowledge of self-defense, the use of weapons, and my teaching ability improved. My Expedition was a trip through northern Wyoming and Montana where I visited Yellowstone National Park, the Battle of Little Bighorn Historic Site, and the Oregon Trail. I learned a lot about the Indian Wars from Fort Phil Kearny and the Custer Battlefield.

Emily Applegate
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered through Make-A-Wish, gave tennis lessons at Casper Country Club, was a part of Kelly Walsh Student Council, and helped at a homeless shelter. My Personal Development goal was to babysit every month to learn responsibility and time management. My volunteer hours dedicated to teaching lessons eventually turned into a job, which was my second Personal Development goal. I achieved my Physical Fitness goal to be the number one singles player for the Kelly Walsh High School tennis team. I took lessons, attended practices, and competed all four years of high school. My Expedition was a trip to my cabin in Dubois, Wyoming, where I explored the mountains on four-wheelers, fished and hiked. I learned how to plan ahead and how to use my time efficiently. My leadership skills grew through the award and I continued to stay involved and motivated. It taught me to finish what I started

Tayten Barhaug
Powell, Wyoming
Advisor: Allen Griffin
Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered through 4-H as a youth representative on the Park County 4-H Council, organized the 4-H Junior Leaders club, chaired the Sure Shots 4-H club and worked with members on their projects. I also volunteered to teach a Robotics team where they had weekly practices to prepare for competition. My Personal Development goal was to improve my archery accuracy through practicing at least once a week. I wanted to shoot a score of at least 220 points in total by the state archery shoot. My Physical Fitness goal was to be comfortable hiking at altitudes over the course of eight hours for both Dano Youth Camp and hunting season. Lastly, my Exploration was to Carlsbad, California where I attended the LEGOLAND North American Championship and visited surrounding sites. Through the Congressional Award, I have gained better goal setting and leadership skills overall.

Gunner Bartlett
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through Cheyenne East High School to be a member of the G team and as a wrestling official to help youth in my community. I was also a football captain which required me to plan and coordinate activities for the team. I also helped at my school during my free hour, where I would help grade tests or run passes as needed. My Personal Development goal was to read outside of the academic curriculum. I read books that I enjoyed and was able to take a break mentally from school. My Physical Fitness goal was to reach 825lbs combining bench, squat and clean. I was able to reach my goal by the conclusion of the Congressional Award. My Exploration was to Seattle, Washington, where I visited the Huskies' facilities, the gum wall, Space Needle, and the Museum of Seattle. By participating in the Congressional Award, I have developed problem solving skills as well as formed new relationships with the younger athletes I have helped mentor.

Dayna Berg

Casper, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliations: Key Club and National Honor Society

I volunteered through Kelly Walsh High School where I helped with the blood drive, face painting at a pancake breakfast, and helped at the Speech and Debate tournament and with concessions. Through Key Club, I went to Primrose Retirement Community and organized the library and game room. Through National Honor Society, I volunteered through Coats for Kids, Santa's Workshop and at state track. My Personal Development goal was to improve my dance leadership skills by teaching a petite Jazz class and by subbing for other classes at 307 Dance Academy. I also attended weekly competition classes and rehearsals where I improved my own skill level. My goal was to complete a triple pirouette proficiently and successfully. My Exploration was a trip to Canada with my family during which, I learned skills in planning and preparation.

Riley Box

Casper, Wyoming

Advisor: Chase Olsen

I volunteered to provide musical entertainment for my community in Casper. I played at athletic events and public concerts as well as provided free entertainment to the public. I also volunteered with the community theatre as a drummer in the pit crew. My Personal Development goal was to obtain my learner's permit and work towards my driver's license. I practiced every week and took my test when I turned 16. I also set a goal to learn responsibility and business-related skills by running my own lawn care services in the summer. My Physical Fitness goal was to increase my walking distance to prepare for marching band. I attended practice but also walked more on my own to ensure that I was ready for the summer parades. My Exploration was to the Black Hills where we visited so many of the historic landmarks and saw new things. I have gained a sense of community and worth as I am providing for others through the Wyoming Congressional Award.

Evelyn Brady
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered by mentoring youth at the local elementary school, where I helped kids ages 3-14 with their homework through an afterschool program that is designed to provide outside activity, homework assistance and care for children until their parents are able to pick them up. My Personal Development goal was to learn responsibility and time management by working at St. Mary's School, where I was a summer care supervisor and helped take care of kids during the day. I also helped organize and watch kids on field trips and with different projects and activities. As I transitioned into college, I wanted to maintain my Physical Fitness hours. My goal was to go to the gym three days a week and be able to increase the amount of time I could run without stopping. My Exploration was through Oregon, Washington and Wyoming, where I saw lots of new places and even stayed in a cabin at Togwotee Mountain Lodge. I have gained the ability to come up with a plan, goals, and a way to achieve them. I have gained accountability and responsibility as well as valuable life skills.

Jaliegah Davis
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen

I volunteered as a Pineview Elementary School mentor and summer school teacher's aide. I also volunteered at Wyoming State Track as a field worker and through Operation Christmas Shoebox as a packer. I learned skills in organization and working with children. For Personal Development, I joined DECA and learned about leadership and how to not only apply it to my everyday life but how to influence others in the job market. My Physical Fitness goals all revolved around volleyball, basketball and track. I worked on improving my volleyball passing skills to improve from 50-80% and focused on getting the setter my passes. My Expedition was a camping trip to Lake De Smet with my family last summer. I learned a lot of new problem solving and leadership skills that I am eager to apply to my future. My most significant experiences from completing the Congressional Award is being more connected to my community and also enjoying the new successes in my life that I earned by working hard for the Gold medal.

Danielle DiJohn
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered to raise awareness for the March of Dimes Foundation in my community by creating program structure and raising awareness. I also volunteered through the Eat, Read, Grow program, National Guard Kids and tutored students in need. For Personal Development, I wanted to increase my knowledge about specific countries and their culture in terms of food. I learned more about multiple cultures and then made food items that came from those countries. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my current 100-yard freestyle swim time by going to practice and the weight room. I competed and also taught life guard skills to help others become better swimmers. Lastly, I went to California for my Exploration where I visited beaches, Balboa Island, and the J. Paul Getty Center.

Gabriella Dodgson
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through Cheyenne East High School and Student Council. I was also elected as the regional representative for the Wyoming Association of Student Council's and served as the Vice President of my local Student Council. I also volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award's annual golf invitational to help raise funds for the program. For Personal Development, I have been striving to make changes to my overall health. I planned and prepared meals and I learned how to budget and mass produce meals. I also worked on developing my leadership skills through attending leadership related conferences. Because I no longer play competitive softball, I needed an activity that would keep me active. I have been working on different training programs and lifting programs to best fit my lifestyle especially as I move to college. For my Exploration, I went to England where I learned about where my family is from. I went site-seeing and visited places that my dad grew up near. I have learned the importance of improving your community and networking with others through the Congressional Award.

Adrienne Duda

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Deb Dolph

Affiliations: 4-H; Boys & Girls Club

I volunteered in the Cheyenne community through 4-H and Boys and Girls Club. I also served as an usher and served food at Cheyenne Frontier Days and other community events. I also volunteered at the 2017 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat in Laramie and at the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce to help organize, file, print, clean and prepare for luncheons. I practiced piano every week and took a weekly lesson for my Personal Development goal. I learned that a lot of practice is necessary to become better at something. I already participate in numerous Physical Fitness activities so I set a goal to increase my endurance from thirty minutes to an hour that could include all of the different activities that I already do. I on an Exploration to Chicago, where I experienced what life is like in a big city and planned activities for my family to do while we were there. Through the Congressional Award, I have become more actively involved in my community and have learned the value of volunteer work.

Connor Gililand

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered through Boy Scouts to earn my Eagle Scout by renovating work stations around Lyon's Park. I also volunteered at the 2016 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat in Cheyenne. I took driver's education and learned how to drive for my Personal Development goal. I studied for the permit and took the test prior to taking two weeks of driver's education. For Physical Fitness, I was really involved in Karate and wanted to improve the number of push-ups I could do to increase my overall strength. I can now do 50 push-ups in a row without stopping due to practices and strength training. For my Expedition, I went on a trip through Boy Scouts, where I worked with other scouting members and camped for several days. I learned how to help others who were new to camping. I have gained experience in helping others learn how to get to where they want to be by participating in the Congressional Award.

Santana Gould
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen
Affiliations: Boys & Girls Club

I volunteered at the Boys and Girls Club in Casper, where I spent between 2-4 hours per night helping with anything that they asked. I mainly cleaned the building by taking out trash, sweeping the floors or cleaning the windows. I also helped in the literacy center where I helped kids with their homework. My Personal Development goal was to work at Frias Concrete and Stone Construction to learn how to be responsible with my time and money. I worked 3-6 days a week, where my work consisted of pouring concrete, setting up to pour concrete, putting up dry wall and a multitude of other duties. For Physical Fitness, I attended football and boxing practice to push myself to new limits. My Exploration was a trip to Mexico, to the area where my family is from. I visited the local community and witnessed the baptism of some of my family members. I learned that participating in programs while in high school always helps. I improved my time management and my social skills.

Mary Harris
Green River, Wyoming
Advisor: Gary Killpack
Affiliations: National Honor Society

For Voluntary Public Service, I established the nonprofit organization LIFT. As President and founder, I provide emergent care (LOVE, FEED) to victims suffering disaster locally, statewide, nationally and internationally, and then to provide education and guidance (INSPIRE, TRAIN) for self-reliance. I developed new musical skills through lessons and practice with the guitar and piano. I was also able to enhance my reading comprehension through reading new and challenging literature. I was able to achieve All State honors after countless hours of practice and physical fitness training. My regimen was calculated and measured to achieve optimum success. I planned a week long backpack trip in the wilderness area of the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming. On one of these expeditions there was a twenty people attending. The week included fishing, hiking, swimming, cliff-jumping, and cooking. The Congressional Award motivated to reach excellence.

SayDree Hendricks
Laramie, Wyoming
Advisor: Meredith McLaughlin

I volunteered through Force of Altruism to help with the after-school program, day camps, taco sales and school store. I also traveled to Croatia to help with the international youth summit and to lead ice breakers at the conference. I wanted to learn responsibility and time management and more about childcare by babysitting for my Personal Development goal. I learned how each child is different and that they all have different needs. My Physical Fitness goal was to complete a jump serve in volleyball. I started playing volleyball every Tuesday night during the off season to train and perfect my jump serve. For my Exploration, I visited Croatia for a long period of time after a conference, where I went to Lokve, Zadar and Pula, which were all beautiful parts of the country. I visited museums and different beaches and saw the site of the natural organ. By participating in the Congressional Award, I have been inspired to help more people, keep the environment clean, and do more community service. I have learned that if I put my mind to something, I can achieve it.

Sydney Horton
Otto, Wyoming
Advisor: Nate Fulton
Affiliations: National Honor Society

I volunteered as a swim coach for Special Olympics and middle school swimming. I also volunteered through Student Council and National Honor Society to help with the Make-A-Wish events, breast cancer awareness activities and the backpack program. Lastly, I volunteered at the Homesteader Museum where I completed numerous tasks, including organizing the facilities. For Personal Development, I became a lifeguard so that I could work at the local pool and earn additional money. My Physical Fitness goal was to reach a time of 6:45.5 in the 500 freestyle. I went to practice and was on the USA swim team to work on improving my time. For my Exploration, I went to the Bahamas, where I explored the island and tried new things. I have gained leadership, independence and hard work through the Congressional Award.

Adrian Johnson

Laramie, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliations: National Honor Society; Key Club

I volunteered as a Spanish tutor and had an office in Spanish Honor Society, where I spent one of my periods during the day tutoring students who needed help. I was also involved in Key Club, National Honor Society, and Jazz Band where I organized various food drives, worked at the animal shelter and went to the Senior Center to interact with senior citizens. Lastly, I volunteered at a variety of cycling events within my community and coached youth soccer. As my coaching skills developed, I made coaching and teaching abilities one of my Personal Development goals. I coached games and held many practices designed to work on a specific set of skills and help them develop their soccer abilities. For Physical Fitness, I continued to improve my track and cross-country times and eventually set a goal to run my first season in college. For my Exploration, I visited several different places in China with my grandmother where I met new people, explored a new culture and gained an understanding of a new place. I learned about travel, budgeting and planning. Being in the Congressional Award has taught me life lessons of responsibility, leadership, commitment, loyalty, and trust as I engaged in work within my community.

Ciara Johnson

Laramie, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliations: Key Club

I volunteered through Force of Altruism, Key Club, and Laramie High School. I helped with the after-school programs, at the school store, Shepard's Symposium, and at the soup kitchen. I also traveled to Croatia to help with an international youth summit and present as part of the adult panel. For Personal Development, I taught a class at my dance studio ranging from 2-3 hours per week to learn more about being an assistant teacher and helping children of many different ages. My Physical Fitness goal was to master the splits by attending dance class and improve my skill level. I took many dance classes throughout the school year and summer and practiced on my own in order to reach my goal. I am finally able to do the splits and I have gotten much more strong and flexible. I traveled to Adelaide, Australia for my Exploration with my mom. My goal was to gain new knowledge and experience in traveling, organization, and communication. Congressional Award has given me the opportunity to be rewarded for my community service and it has also motivated me to do even more to help others through service. I am very thankful for this opportunity and to have had the chance to become a better person along the way.

Kaylee Jones

Elk Mountain, Wyoming

Advisor: Meredith McLaughlin

Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered through the Force of Altruism to help local agencies including the Laramie Foster Closet and the Lab School. I also ran an after-school program for younger children and worked on the Head Start Awareness Project. She also fundraised for a trip to Croatia to work with students from all over the world. My Personal Development goal was to raise and exhibit pigs at county fair through 4-H. I bought a pig each year and did daily chores in addition to training my pig and learning all about the swine project. I really enjoy playing soccer so I decided to work on my mile time for my Physical Fitness goal. I ran as much as I could and trained with coaches and teammates. By participating in the Congressional Award, I have gained the knowledge of how important leadership, giving and receiving, and overall helping your community is in your overall life.

Logan Jones

Rock Springs, Wyoming

Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato

I volunteered at the 2017 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat where I helped at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens and at Laramie Foster Closet. I also volunteered at the Wyoming Congressional Award annual Golf Invitational where we raised funds for the program. Lastly, I volunteered in Rock Springs at numerous events and fundraisers. My Personal Development goal was to learn more about woodworking. My dad and I decided to make a custom bed for my bedroom where I had to plan what supplies we needed and how to do it. I love soccer and my goal this year was to improve the number of goals I score per game. I lifted weights, practiced indoor and outdoor and during the off season to improve my skill level. My Expedition was a trip that my dad and I took to Dubois, where we snowshoed and snowmobiled. I used a GoPro to record our trip and all of the different things we did. My favorite memory from my Congressional Award was spending time with my dad on this trip. I have gained a lot by participating in the Congressional Award, including respect, commitment, dedication, and a stronger work ethic.

Elizabeth Kassel
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Dianne Kirkbride

I volunteered at the Historic Governor's Mansion, where I helped clean and maintain the appearance of the building, catalog artifacts and donations, and host events such as the Christmas opening and the Children's Easter Egg Hunt. Over the years I have learned more about the history of the previous Cheyenne governor's including the first female governor in the United States. I also spent time volunteering at the Cheyenne Ice and Events Center where I helped kids learn how to skate.

I made my Personal Development goals based on my interest in the field of healthcare. I became a CNA and learned more about drug testing, breath and alcohol testing and other formats of care in addition to basic needs. I have always enjoyed playing hockey. I set my Physical Fitness goals around my participation in hockey and figure skating. My earlier goals revolved around figure skating and my hope to pass into more advanced levels of figure skating. I went to Germany on my Exploration, where I broadened my view on people's lives around me and historical events that have affected people's lives. My exploration was my favorite part of the award!

Syd Martin
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through my youth group on a monthly basis and traveled to different parts of the country to partake in larger service projects. For monthly activities, I helped organizations such as COMEA and other agencies in my hometown. I learned how different communities have different needs and it was important for our group to volunteer to help with larger projects in other parts of the country.

I have always been interested in art but it has been hard to find time to commit to practicing. Participating in the drawing-a-day challenge forced me to practice every day to improve my skills. I did some form of drawing everyday with the subject and media changing as I learned where my areas of struggle were. I spent a minimum of one hour each day and really explored different mediums and types of art. I made an effort to walk everyday while also exploring skateboarding and an open acting movement class at my school. My goal was to reach 10,000 steps each day. I went on my Exploration to Colorado where we helped a community in need but I also planned different activities for us to take part in. I learned about another part of the United States while helping. I have gained an immense sense of local and global community while practicing setting goals and being involved in my community.

Ginger McCormick
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through Cheyenne East High School where I helped the Speech and Debate novice team with their pieces and with practice. I also volunteered through Student Council, Dancing with the Stars, and an elementary reading night. I volunteered at the local and the elementary school library where I helped organize events, shelve books, serve on the teen advisory board and help wherever needed. Lastly, I volunteered as an assistant in the International Baccalaureate program office. For Personal Development, I was part of the East High School Speech and Debate team. Through my three years in being a part of the team, I've competed in Humor, Public Forum Debate, Congressional Debate, Program Oral Interpretation, and Policy Debate. I cut pieces for each of my events and competed at several tournaments. My Physical Fitness goal was to join CrossFit and decrease my mile time. I participated in CrossFit five times a week as well as ran twice a week to reach my goal. I traveled to France for my Exploration where I stayed with a host family and even attended school. I learned about France and their culture while exploring so many different parts of it. My most significant experience with the Congressional Award was getting the chance to be part of the library and explore a potential career. I learned so many new things and how to help people.

Seth Meyer
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen
Affiliations: Boys and Girls Club

Through Fellowship of Christian Athletes, I volunteered at the senior center, the soup kitchen, Boys and Girls Club, and tutored when needed. I also spent a summer taking care of kids with special needs at a summer camp; we took kids fishing, swimming, and taught yard games. At Meals on Wheels, I delivered meals and helped out in the dish room preparing meals. Lastly, I volunteered during the summer at Casper Youth Baseball where I helped keep the baseball games going and fill in when needed as an umpire. My Personal Development goal was to work for Galles Greenhouse to learn responsibility and time management. I watered plants, helped customers, sold plants, and loaded plants for customers. I also worked the machinery to load heavy trees into customer's cars. During the winter months, I learned about the books and how to keep the greenhouse in operation. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my speed by playing football. I went to all of the practices and worked on my leg strength and speed. I did weightlifting and agility training as well as attended camps. My Expedition was to Grand Teton National Park where I hiked and camped for four nights. I also swam in the lake near our campsite to fully experience everything the park had to offer. I have gained the understanding of volunteering and doing good for others rather than doing things for myself. I learned the value of hard work and how helping the community can be enjoyable.

Elliott Miller

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Linda Dixon

I volunteered to help children get active and explore the outdoors through the Cheyenne Children's Village. I also helped with various fitness camps at Laramie County Community College. Lastly, I helped younger children learn how to play soccer. My Personal Development goal was to better myself through concert choir by practicing and taking private lessons. I also researched to find the right college for me! My Physical Fitness goal was to break two minutes in the 800m in track. I ran an average of four times a week for almost two years as well as biked, skied, and swam. My Expedition was a camping trip to Glacier and Waterton National Parks in northern Montana and southern Alberta Canada. This trip challenged me by providing me an opportunity to lead a trip for just my mom and I where I did all the planning and the cooking and finding places to sleep. It was a great experience! Through the Congressional Award, I have learned a new found love of the environment along with a joy of helping others. I have also gained a greater awareness of what personal growth is and how it is achieved through goal setting.

Evan Naughton

Laramie, Wyoming

Advisor: Christine Olson

Affiliations: National Honor Society; Key Club

I volunteered through Black Dog Animal Rescue, the Christmas concerts, Laramie Community Days, and Sleeping Beauty in Laramie. I also volunteered through National Honor Society and Key Club where I was able to help those who were less fortunate than me and those in need. Lastly, I helped coach a hockey team. My Personal Development goal was to play piano at least one hour per week and continue to improve my skill level. My Physical Fitness goal was to score at least one goal per game in hockey and master my skills in dance to be eligible to perform in a public performance. My Exploration was to Washington, D.C. where I explored all of the historic places and visited friends while we were there. I have gained leadership, cultural awareness, preparation for life outside of school, importance of altruism, awareness of privilege, and many more positive lessons through the Congressional Award.

Aurora Noe
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone
Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered at two local elementary schools where I helped fifth graders build circuits and robots. I was a member of the planning team for the Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat, where we made dog toys for the shelter, organized items at Laramie Foster Closet, and volunteered at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. I also volunteered on the Christmas Parade planning committee, at the downtown ice rink, and for the Wyoming Women's Civic League. I made a goal to cook once a month to learn new skills that would in return prepare me for adulthood. I tried new recipes including zucchini chips and Spanish rice as well as artichoke pasta. I learned how to cook with ingredients I had never cooked with before that in return broadened my abilities. My Physical Fitness goals were to improve my mile time and maintain the number of steps I walked each day. It was challenging to remember to keep track of my steps but it was interesting to see how many I would walk within a certain amount of time. I planned a trip to Seattle, Washington and learned to navigate on my own, drive in a big city, and try exotic foods. I have enjoyed meeting new people and gaining leadership skills through the Congressional Award. I have also enjoyed the feeling of commitment to something meaningful.

Aedian O'Connor
Laramie, Wyoming
Advisor: Meredith McLaughlin

I volunteered through Force of Altruism at the UW Lab School where I helped with a Head Start awareness project, after-school day camp, and the school store. I prepared for a trip to Croatia where we worked with students from all over the world on service, volunteerism, and social justice. I also volunteered at the 2017 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat and the Golf Invitational that raises funds for the Wyoming Congressional Award. For my Personal Development goal, I worked on earning my driver's license by practicing and taking the test. I spend a majority of my time at the gym as a gymnast. I practice 5 days a week and 3 hours a day during the summer. My goal was to increase my level from a 6 to an 8. I went on my Exploration to Peru, South America where I learned a lot about the history and culture of South America. I learned how to use context to understand another language and I also realized that I want to learn more Spanish. I have gained extensive leadership experience. The Congressional Award has made me more independent in finding volunteer opportunities and more passionate about being involved in my community. I have gained new relationships and friends as well from this program that has made me expand my social circle which has in turn made me have more fun!

Micaiah Pantle

Encampment, Wyoming

Advisor: Janice Peterson

I volunteered to help my community with ongoing projects such as painting the post office, helping our town's Halloween carnival, teaching swing dance lessons, washing ambulances, picking up trash, helping with the annual blood drive, and organizing the Veteran's Day Assembly. Through student council, I also mentored children in my community. I also helped coach and ref Utah Jazz games. Lastly, I volunteered as the volleyball manager. My Personal Development goal was to find different ways to continue my growth and knowledge in my religion. I went to my Bible group once a week and also ordered devotionals about my religion. I read my Bible every day and do a devotional of the day. My Physical Fitness goals included improving my free throw percentage every year that I played basketball and to find ways to stay active outside of the sports season. I began walking my dog and running to keep up with my goal. My Expedition was a camping trip with a friend. We researched our location, meals, and activities. I also know what it is like to canoe and I hope to do it more often in the future. This was a great trip! By participating in the Congressional Award for the last four years, I have really expanded my knowledge on many levels. I have learned the importance of setting goals and what it takes to achieve these goals.

Brayden Parker

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through soccer and track camp where we sectioned off into four groups and worked with kids on their ball handling, shooting, communication, and listening skills. For track, we helped them with the events they liked the most. I also volunteered through the East High School IB Steering committee where I organized and attended meetings as well as planned events and social activities for students. My Personal Development goal was to get a job through the City of Cheyenne and Bed Bath and Beyond to learn responsibility and time management. My goal for Physical Fitness was to improve my overall squat max. I went to the gym and to the weight room at school where I worked on the flexibility of my legs to increase explosion. My Expedition was to Lander, Wyoming where we went on a hunting trip. My biggest accomplishment was being the leader and navigating a group to meeting points. Our group filled their tags so on the last day, we ended up with a fifth elk that I had to quarter, gut, and skin all by myself.

Samantha Patterson
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered at the University of Wyoming, where I assisted professors and tutored students in need. I worked as a teaching assistant for microbiology and tutored in life sciences to help students learn time management and study skills. For my Personal Development goals, I reached outside my curriculum and worked as a research assistant in molecular biology. I worked with a graduate student to do simple lab work such as a PCR and gel electrophoresis he needed to publish and get his doctorate. I also worked independently on my own small projects to gain a better understanding of the science I was doing through reading and practice. My Physical Fitness goal was to go to increase my heart rate to help improve my back injury. I did cardio workouts from martial arts, yoga, Pilates, riding a stationary bike, and running with a gym buddy. I was able to improve my pain tolerance in my back while building muscle. I went to Australia for my Exploration and visited Melbourne, Sydney and Cairns, Australia. I was without any family on this trip which made it especially new and challenging. I visited multiple cities which made it even more challenging but that much more rewarding. I learned an appreciation for other cultures, insight into myself, insight into how others think and learn, and what it is like actually working in the science community through the Congressional Award.

Noelle Peterson
Encampment, Wyoming
Advisor: Chloe Gilbert
Affiliations: 4-H; National Honor Society

Highlights of my volunteering included serving as a mentor in our school, placing flags on the local veteran's graves each year in honor of their service, and completing community beautification projects. Being able to help with cancer awareness activities and organizing local blood drives was important as I knew I was helping people who were in need of hope. Raising money and providing coloring books, craft kits, and cancer caps for St. Jude was the activity that meant the most to me because I was able to help children who needed extra support while facing serious illnesses. I improved my leadership skills through the Wyoming High School Activities Association, Women in STEM conferences and holding offices in FFA, National Honor Society, and Student Council. I learned that leadership positions must be earned and each position challenged me to positively influence others. My leadership training helped me earn a position on the WHSAA Student Advisory Council and will give me the opportunity to promote high school activities for all students. I also enjoyed learning self-defense and found undercover police work with gang violence really interesting and educational. For Physical Fitness I was able to increase my upper and lower body strength allowing me to be more competitive in volleyball, basketball, and track. Completing my Expedition with my friend was a great experience and the best part was being able to explore the forest independently while learning about our local history.

Dawson Poste
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America

I volunteered through Boy Scouts to earn my Eagle Scout making library boxes for the community. I also attended scout camp as a lifeguard and I went to the national jamboree where we participated in a national service project. My Personal Development goal was to participate in Boy Scouts and earn my merit badges. I attended weekly meetings where we worked on flag ceremonies, knots, first aid, planned camp outs, and worked on merit badges. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to improve my bench and squat by participating in overall strength training. I joined the cheerleading team where I was a back base. I went on my expedition to Yellowstone where we canoed, hiked, camped, and saw the sites. I saw a lot of new things and was able to appreciate what we have right here in Wyoming. The Congressional Award has taught me leadership skills both inside and outside of school. It has also taught me a passion for working out and staying healthy. Finally, it has taught me how to give back to the community.

Rylee Ramsey
Powell, Wyoming
Advisor: Trista Ostrom
Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered to mentor youth in my community by participating in organizations such as 4-H, Student Council, FFA, and Ignition. I am also the president of my 4-H club and currently serve as Student Council junior class president, planning the Winter Formal dance and prom. I also volunteered by traveling to Texas after the devastating hurricanes to help with revival and clean up. Lastly, I traveled to Montana to work on a reservation to offer a spay and neuter clinic. My Personal Development goal was to start a project horse yearling and to exhibit during county fair. Working with my filly has definitely taught me patience and has brought out the gentle side of me. I have learned so much. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my barrel time on my horse. I practiced as much as I could and competed at local rodeos and fair. I went on my Expedition to Livingston and Bozeman, Montana where we stayed in a cabin, hiked, and celebrated the Fourth of July. By setting and achieving my Congressional Award goals, I have become much stronger and social and I have become more involved with my community. I have begun to work with younger children and help them pursue their interests as well. Overall, I have become a stronger individual.

Noah Riffie

Laramie, Wyoming

Advisor: Meredith McLaughlin

I volunteered through Force of Altruism to help with after school programs, day camps, taco sales, the *Lion King* show, Shepard's Symposium, and the *Peter Pan* show. I traveled to Croatia to participate in the international youth summit where we presented workshops and helped in local schools. I presented a workshop on social justice at the conference and helped with ice breakers. My Personal Development goal was to become fluent in multiple code languages. I learned how to code alongside my father while working on operating systems and learning how to unlock storage. We also learned associated language. I made a goal of reaching a certain number of steps each day for my Physical Fitness goal. My Expedition was to the Bighorn Mountains where we camped, fished and spent time with family. It was a lot of learning but also a lot of fun.

Alexandria Rinne

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered with my theatre team to prepare productions that raised awareness for issues like animal cruelty and child soldiers. I also volunteered with a children's pre-kindergarten program in Cheyenne. I helped at East High School during my free hour and modeled at the Emerging Leaders Fashion Show. My goal for Personal Development was to enhance my skills as a pianist by learning contemporary songs and classical pieces. I learned and memorized full pieces from a variety of time periods and genres. My Physical Fitness goal was to strengthen my body so as to allow me to hold my leg at 90° for sixteen counts. I attend ballet and pointe classes as well as perform with a company. My Exploration was to Italy. This trip was very special to me because I loved experiencing this country with my family. By participating in the Congressional Award, I gained a prominent role in my community as a volunteer, connections within my community, an appreciation for the work that goes into events, and a chance to explore my passions.

Lindsey Ruiz
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through my cheerleading squad at East High School where we held youth camps, organized various athletic events, visited schools to read to kids, had lunch with children, and taught lessons about school pride. We also organized food drives and did two blood drives to help people in our community. Outside of cheerleading, I also volunteered at Saddle Ridge Elementary and East High School to tutor kids in various subjects and help out in the art classroom. Lastly, I made a community service reference book for Congressional Award participants at East High School. I continued to work at a variety of locations including Plato's Closet, Cold Stone, and at the dry cleaners when I had spare time to improve my responsibility and time management skills. I learned how to work in many different areas and how to do many different jobs. My Physical Fitness goal was a weightlifting goal so that I could apply it to the three times a week I went to the gym and to my cheerleading routines. I am much stronger now! My Expedition was to Curt Gowdy State Park where we camped, hiked and explored for five days. I have gained experience in working with other people, job experience, better communication skills, and how to manage my time while doing a variety of activities.

Brooklynn Salo
Laramie, Wyoming
Advisor: Trista Ostrom

I volunteered through the Wyoming State Rabbit Judging team where I facilitated meetings and designed study material for members. I also mentored team members in judging and raising rabbits for show. My Personal Development goal was to earn my American Rabbit Breeders Association Judge's License. I studied, networked with other judges, and scheduled my exam. My Physical Fitness goal was to attend a yoga class and to avoid back injuries in the future. I worked on my flexibility and core strength. My Exploration was to Portland, Oregon to attend the American Rabbit Breeders Association convention and explore a new city. With my participation in the Congressional Award, I have gained and improved my leadership and record keeping skills. I also have continued my community involvement. My organization and time management skills also improved.

Delaney Schmidt
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered to put on an art show that benefited animal shelters and rescues. A committee was created to organize thoughts, come to an agreement on facts that include location, and artists that would be showcased. I also volunteered at the local library where I worked on bulletin boards and helped with crafts for kids in addition to doing story time for young children. My Personal Development goal was to improve my art skills through working with chalk pastels, pencils, shading, graphite, blending, and doing realistic drawings. I learned the characteristics of each medium and when to use each. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my tennis serving accuracy. I attended all practices and went to the gym during the off season to improve my strength. My Exploration was to Des Moines, Iowa where I volunteered at Furry Friends Refuge while also visiting local attractions such as the parks, science center, and several restaurants. I have learned about the importance of community involvement and I have also gained self-confidence through the personal development activities that I was inspired to do for this award. Through this award, I have increased my drive and focus of bettering myself to give my future the best outcome I could possibly have.

Sylvia Shanklin
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered at the summer service retreat where we tore down stalls and cut down bushes at the Laramie County Fair. We helped pick up trash and sorted clothes at Meals on Wheels as well as worked on an art mural in downtown Cheyenne. I volunteered at East High School where I tutored students in need and through my youth group to organize community involvement. Lastly, I provided meals to the homeless at least twice a month. For Personal Development, I practiced and competed in French competitions to improve my French speaking skills. My French skills have improved and so has my fluidity in conversation and pronunciation. I enjoy swimming and decided to set one of my Congressional Award goals to improve my 50 meter freestyle swim time so that I could qualify for state. I was able to reach my goal! I executed my Exploration to San Francisco, California where we visited Berkley, the Wharf, and Alcatraz. We rode the bus around historic parts of the city and attended a baseball game. I have improved my skills of working with others as well as my organizing and time management skills through being involved in the Congressional Award.

Kiara Sims

Casper, Wyoming

Advisor: Chase Olsen

Affiliations: Key Club; National Honor Society

My main goal was to volunteer around the community of Casper and to volunteer within my school by assisting other students with their studies. I also volunteered through National Honor Society, Key Club, at the Salvation Army for Coat's for Kids, and at Primrose Retirement Community. I learned that there are so many ways to give back. My Personal Development goal was to improve my public speaking skills to benefit myself in the future in terms of getting a job and succeeding in classes. I joined Speech and Debate as a freshman and am now the president of the Kelly Walsh Speech and Debate team. I learned how to dress and act professionally, how to speak in front of people, how to compose speeches, and how to form logical arguments quickly. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to develop a healthier lifestyle by monitoring my food habits and planning meals. I also wanted to improve my overall fitness by walking and hiking. I logged my meals to determine what my eating habits were, planned meals ahead of time, and walked varying distances. I planned a trip to Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon for my exploration where we visited various sites and were able to experience a new part of the United States. I have gained a sense of community among many other things by participating in the Congressional Award.

Sierra Sinclair

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered on the planning team for the 2017 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat as well as attended the service retreat in Laramie. I also volunteered at the Laramie County ARC where I helped with parties, folding newsletters, hosting a prom, helped with bowling, and with anything else as needed. I wanted to learn responsibility and time management by getting a job at Cold Stone for my Personal Development. I learned how to work with customers and sing for tips. I love volleyball and decided to make my Physical Fitness goal about my hitting average. I attended practices, camps, and private lessons to improve my hitting average. My Exploration was to France where I got to visit the Eiffel Tower and experience a culture I had never been a part of before. I have learned how to work well with others and how to get more involved in my community by being involved with the Congressional Award.

Skye Avalon Skinner
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered through Cheyenne East High School and Student Council and was elected as the class vice president and student body treasurer where I attended meetings, hosted suicide prevention panels, volunteered at Chamber luncheons, worked at Cheyenne's 150th celebration, volunteered at the downtown ice rink, helped with Safe Trick or Treat, and helped at the COMEA shelter. I also volunteered to foster kittens awaiting adoption. My Personal Development goal was working with my mom to learn about 3D photogrammetry and evaluating bones. With the bones, we look at which bones are available, trauma, determine gender, and fill out a packet for each skeleton to document information. In terms of photogrammetry, we have been learning the steps of how to use the program and what to look for. I also learned more about photography for personal development. I took some senior photos this year and will be taking the photos for the Cheyenne Day of Giving event. Through dance, I wanted to improve the number of pull-ups I could do to in turn affect my dance endurance. I can now do 10 pull-ups without stopping thanks to strength conditioning and practice. I went on my Exploration to Croatia and Italy where I explored a different part of the world. I saw new places and new people while learning about a different culture.

Laine Smith
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen

I volunteered at Grant Elementary where I read to students, filed, ran paperwork between classrooms, and helped teachers or students any time that I could. I also helped in the summer months with various moving projects or cleaning. I learned how to take time to help others through volunteering and how much work goes into being a teacher. For Personal Development, I got a lawn care job in Casper to learn responsibility and time management. I mowed lawns, trimmed shrubs and bushes, and learned how cautious you have to be when working in yards that do not belong to you. I am involved in a variety of athletics so I decided to make a weight goal for my Congressional Award that I could work towards that would affect each of my athletic seasons. I went to the weight room five days a week to improve my squat. I worked on this continuously throughout the Congressional Award. I went to Cancun, Mexico for my Exploration with a friend where I learned how to travel without my parents and how to plan out daily activities. I have learned how to expand my individual skill sets beyond my academics and athletics. I have learned responsibility, leadership, planning, and other new skills while setting goals to improve my overall traits.

Stephani Sommer

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliations: HOB; National Honor Society

I volunteered through Student Council at East High School where I attended weekly meetings and helped with events such as student registration, orientation, blood drives, and HOBY Leadership Camp. I also volunteered through Black Dog Animal Rescue where I helped foster dogs in need of forever homes. I participated in Strolling Strings and took private lessons every month to improve my cello skill level for my Personal Development goal. I participated in events such as Cheyenne Frontier Days, and performed at the VA center and other community organizations. My Physical Fitness goal was to keep track of how many steps I took each day and try to reach a certain number of steps each day. I went to Utah, Nevada, Arizona and Colorado for my Exploration where I saw the Grand Canyon, Arches, and Mesa Verde. I also saw Las Vegas. Through the Congressional Award, I have been exposed to different parts of my community that I am able to volunteer with and help. I have learned new skills in leadership, service, and character to better myself and my community. I have become a healthier person both mentally and physically and have grown in so many ways.

Meigan Starr

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

Affiliations: National Honor Society

I volunteered to provide childcare for parents who were involved in community activities. I also volunteered through Children's Youth Symphony in Cheyenne where I worked with young musicians to be able to play different music and use proper technique. Lastly, I volunteered for our school's production of *Into the Woods* where I worked in the pit orchestra for the production. My Personal Development goal was to continue playing the viola and to continue to improve my skill level. I practiced and took private lessons as well as took advantage of any other opportunity that became available. I have truly learned the importance of commitment. My Physical Fitness goal was to increase the number of pull-ups I could do at the gym. I went to the gym at least once every week where I worked on my overall upper body strength. My Exploration was a trip to see the Black Hills in South Dakota and the Bighorn Canyon in Montana. This trip was a goal of mine to experience nature and culture in different ways by trying new activities and getting new experiences. I have learned a lot about how important it is to be a well-rounded individual. I also learned the importance of setting both short-term and long-term goals.

Kesslee Stewart Velasco
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Misty Whetstone
Affiliations: AmeriCorps NCCC

I volunteered through AmeriCorps to complete the majority of my hours. For the gold level, I volunteered to raise funds for organizations in my community. I held educational events and raised funds to buy school supplies and to produce educational materials for incoming parents. For Personal Development, I joined a political organization where we campaigned and advocated for our beliefs. This organization is composed of people who are interested in advocating for human rights and political beliefs. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve the number of push-ups I could do. I also spent time each week meal planning to make sure I didn't consume soy products because I am vegan. My Exploration was to Cambodia where I traveled to work with young children who speak little English and have very little knowledge of other cultures. I have learned a lot about interpersonal communication, collaboration, and how to believe in myself as a leader by participating in the Congressional Award. I have gained a lot of experience in areas I would not have anticipated. Mostly, I have gained an appreciation for my ability to get involved in my community and beyond.

Sarah Sutton
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Trista Ostrom
Affiliations: 4-H; Girls Scouts of the USA; National Honor Society

I volunteered in the Cheyenne community at blood drives, 4-H Pumpkins for Vets, GS Alzheimer's Walk, through Key Club, at the Christmas House for the Women's Civic League, at the Historic Governor's Mansion, and with the LCCC choir, recycled, served as an usher for Cheyenne Little Theater, at Boys and Girls Club, Pancakes for Hero's, United Way Food Truck, Henderson Literacy Night, YMCA Safe Halloween, Halloween at the municipal pool and Hero Day. I also volunteered through a community mission to improve a particular area where a lot of weeds needed pulled and fence needed to be painted. Lastly, I attended the 2016 and 2017 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreats where I volunteered in both Cheyenne and Laramie. My Personal Development goal was to continue to improve my piano skill level. I took weekly lessons and practiced every week. I also prepared for a recital and attended an organ camp. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my marching distance to prepare for summer marching band. I marched in the Cody Stampede as well as at Cheyenne Frontier Days. My Exploration was a trip to Florida where I tried new foods like Cuban cuisine and fresh seafood. I also flew on my own to Florida and got to swim with a seal. This exploration sparked an interest in me to travel and take on new adventures. I have gained a better understanding of how helping and doing things for other people really makes a difference in my life and the lives of others.

Lauren Tyson
Casper, Wyoming
Advisor: Chase Olsen

I volunteered as a preschool and kindergarten youth group leader, helping teach communication skills in a social setting outside of school. I also volunteered through cheerleading where we helped at the annual Jackalope Jump, served pancakes at the Kiwanis breakfast, escorted special education students to prom, worked track days, collected donations for the Casper Humane Society, worked the Festival of Trees Ceremony, and held youth cheerleading camps. For Personal Development, I practiced and completed one acrylic piece for the state art symposium. I spent an hour on Sundays practicing different brush strokes to determine best effects. I learned how to work best with flat brushes on canvas and how to use multiple palettes to improve my color mixing. My Physical Fitness goal was to be involved in cheerleading and master the Liberty Stunt. I attended practices and camps to improve my skill level and cheered at multiple athletic events. I planned a trip to Thailand with my family for my Exploration. My biggest highlights from this trip were riding an elephant, petting a tiger, and trying new foods. I enjoyed experiencing another culture and without planning this trip, I would have never been able to experience such a wonder.

James Whiting
Lander, Wyoming
Advisor: Matthew Parsons
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America; Key Club; National Honor Society

I volunteered through Boy Scouts of America to help put a tire on a plane, clean up the highway, write letters to those serving our country, and help the elderly. I also volunteered through FBLA where we collected canned goods for Thanksgiving, coats for young kids, and raised money for the March of Dimes. I served as the Wyoming Association of Student Council's state president. I attended the 2016 Wyoming Congressional Award Service Retreat and the Golf Invitational to raise funds for the program. For Personal Development, I set and achieved the goal to earn all 142 merit badges in the scouting program. After nearly 1,000 pages of paperwork, incredible growth, and legions of incredibly helpful merit badge counselors, this goal was realized. My second goal was to read through and study the Holy Scriptures which helped me draw closer to God. My goals for Physical Fitness were to run and ski a 5K in under 19 minutes and run 2 miles in 12 minutes. I ended my high school running career with a PR of 17.17 and skied a 17.42 at state this year. My younger brother and I went on a trip to Moab, Utah to explore Arches National Park. On our 5-day adventure we visited tons of secret arches, explored the fiery furnace, and slept under the stars. It was an adventure of a lifetime and taught me how to budget and plan a trip. I experienced the beautiful majesty of the earth and stars, gaining the perspective one only receives from an immersion in nature.

Faith Wright

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Misty Whetstone

I volunteered with community members with who had special needs, helping them to fish, shoot a bow and arrow, paint, and bowl. I also took them to watch movies and shop because those are activities that are a part of this community. By helping everyone become part of the community, I am hopefully teaching others to be kind and helpful. My Personal Development goal was to create my own version of a Michelangelo painting by studying and practicing multiple mediums of art. I have learned that starting a new way of doing things that you're comfortable with is ultimately renewing what you are capable of. My goal for Physical Fitness was to improve my mile time from 15 minutes to 8 minutes in order to prepare for the military. I have improved drastically and continue to improve every day. My Exploration was a trip to California where I visited different sites I hadn't seen before and experienced a holiday in a new place. Without doing this program, I wouldn't have been motivated to do these things as often as I have. I also learned to improve myself as well as being a better person towards others.

Bradley Zimmerman

Cheyenne, Wyoming

Advisor: Trista Ostrom

Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered as a member of the Wyoming State 4-H Leadership Team and as my FFA chapter president. I also organized community youth clinics to learn more about showing goats. I noticed that there were many members in our community who wanted to show livestock but didn't have a place to keep their animal. I started letting members keep animals at my house and then they would come out and we would work with their animals and get them ready for fair. I also volunteered at the Veteran's Association. My Personal Development goal was to breed and exhibit goats at the county fair. I also worked with my breeding animals all year as I developed a breeding program for swine, goats, and black angus. I researched quality genetics and created a schedule for breeding. My Physical Fitness goal was to increase the distance that I could walk my livestock. It is important to halter break my animals prior to fair and it is quite a challenge physically. My father, several friends and I went on a hunting trip to the Continental divide for six days. I learned how to make plans, think fast on my feet, and decide where to hunt for my Expedition. Through this program, I have learned the value of hard work. I have gained inner strength and enhanced my ability to communicate effectively. I feel like I have gained more than I would even be able to give back.

Mikayla Zimmerman

Cheyenne, Wyoming
Advisor: Trista Ostrom
Affiliations: 4-H

I volunteered in Cheyenne by helping with the Rebel Junk Booth, helped with food preparation for the hock team, and helped plan the Wyoming Congressional Award Christmas Parade float. I also volunteered through 4-H where I helped put on livestock clinics and helped as a volunteer leader at Laramie County Fair. My Personal Development goal was to learn more about the career field in which I am studying by getting a job at NASDA with USDA. I have always been interested in agriculture and communications so I got a job helping people in need over the phone and organizing files. My Physical Fitness goal was to attend Zumba multiple times a week to improve my overall fitness. I took a summer yoga class and attended classes at the University of Wyoming to achieve my goal. I took a road trip to Las Vegas with a friend for my Exploration. My ultimate goal was to reach California for my cousin's high school graduation but we stopped along the way. Through this program, I have gained self-confidence and a positive self-image. I have gained some amazing contacts through networking with other medal winners. This program has enhanced my ability to confidently communicate and has pushed me out of my comfort zone. I owe this experience for where I am today and would encourage all youth to participate.

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