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

Public Law 96-114, The Congressional Award Act

2015 Gold Medal Award Ceremony

The Congress of the United States
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C.
National Board of Directors

It is my honor and privilege to applaud the achievements of the recipients of the 2015 Congressional Award Gold Medal. These outstanding 269 young Americans have challenged themselves and made lasting contributions to local communities across this great nation.

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 points and challenges. 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,

Paxton K. Baker
Chairman
National Board of Directors
Voluntary Public Service- serving others and the community. (Examples: volunteer work at nursing homes, libraries, or parks)

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

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

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

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

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

Complete details on age of entry and required hours are available from the National Office at: www.congressionalaward.org.
Gold Medal Program
2015 Congressional Award
Recognition Dinner

June 16, 2015
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, DC

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies
Mr. Tommy McFly

Presentation of the Colors and National Anthem
The United States Air Force Honor Guard
Color Team & SMSgt Ryan Carson

Welcoming Remarks
Paxton K. Baker
Chairman of the Board

Award Presentations
Members of the United States Congress

Closing Remarks
**Master of Ceremonies – Mr. Tommy McFly**

If the Washington Post is right – and Tommy McFly is the “local Ryan Seacrest” – then he’s the multi-platform voice, anchor, and host for the world’s most powerful city and its media ambassador to the rest of the nation. An only child Gemini, rescue dog-loving millennial, originally from Scranton, PA, Tommy is always on the move around Maryland, Virginia, and Washington – and he’s on 24/7.

Weekday mornings, 5am to 9am, Tommy hosts The Tommy Show on 94.7 Fresh FM – sort of like a “fun table at a wedding.” On television, at WUSA 9, and streaming on-line, Tommy is either working the red-carpet for star-studded events like the Kennedy Center Honors or continuously discovering the latest trends, finding inspiring stories, and uncovering the real Washington.

From bringing together over 5,500 fans at Freedom Plaza to cheer the United States soccer team in the World Cup, to organizing events and encouraging greater support for Best Buddies Capital Region, where he volunteers on the state board, to forge a more inclusive society for everyone; from mastering the ceremonies of grand occasions and milestone announcements with guest lists that include heads of state, federal, state, and local officials, and A-list celebrities, to emceeing events for vital organizations like American Red Cross, DC Central Kitchen, The Washington Humane Society and many more - Tommy uses the mic not just to entertain but to inspire, give back, and pay it forward.

It’s that unique blend of social responsibility and community engagement -- and peerless ability to connect with people -- that’s even received the notice of the White House. During the 2013 Inaugural festivities, Tommy was tapped as the emcee of the President’s National Day of Service on the National Mall. For the past four years, he has also served as the official emcee for the National Christmas Tree Lighting Pre-Show. And for four years running he’s emceed the White House Easter Egg Roll, which annually brings together Hollywood stars, chart-toping music talent, and 30,000 citizens from across the country.

He is, as Cathy Alter of The Washington Post Magazine called him, “a prince of DC media.” But the better title might just be DC’s most sought after, trusted friend.
Steve Pemberton is Vice-President, Diversity and Inclusion for Walgreens Boots Alliance. Prior to that he served as Chief Diversity Officer for Walgreens, becoming the first person to hold that position in the historic company’s 114 year history.

Steve is responsible for overseeing the company’s global efforts to create and maintain a diverse and inclusive environment that reflects the culture, people and perspectives of the nations in which it does business while mirroring its current and future customers and communities. An extended part of his responsibilities has been to serve as a public ambassador for the company on matters of employing people with disabilities. In that capacity, he has frequently represented Walgreens’ employment model at the White House and on Capitol Hill. In 2015, he was appointed by United States Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez to serve on an Advisory Committee for the Competitive Integrated Employment of People with Disabilities.

One of America’s most inspiring executives, he brings a deep personal understanding of human differences and the human experience to his position. Steve was a ward of the state for much of his childhood, an experience he chronicled in his 2012 best-selling memoir, *A Chance in the World* (Thomas Nelson). Steve’s extraordinary life journey, featured in People Magazine, has been translated into multiple languages and continues to inspire audiences across the world. His dedication to public service and personal and professional achievement have also earned him Honorary Doctorates from Winston-Salem State University (2014) and Boston College (2015).

A graduate of Boston College, he is a Bostonian by birth and a Chicagoan by choice. Steve resides on several non-profit boards including UCAN, The Home for Little Wanderers, Bernie’s Book Bank and The United States Business Leadership Network. He and his wife Tonya are the proud parents of three children.
Wallop Howard Leadership Award – Hon. John Dingell

John Dingell represented Michigan in the U.S. House of Representatives from December 13, 1955 to January 2, 2015, serving for more than 59 years, the longest uninterrupted Congressional tenure in U.S. history. His first fights were for civil rights, clean water, Medicare, and American workers’ rights and he continued to fight throughout his career for protecting American jobs, improving the safety of our food and drug supply, strengthening consumer product safety, implementing pipeline safety measures, and scores more.

An avid conservationist and outdoorsman, Dingell wrote the Endangered Species Act, the 1990 Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and legislation to build North America’s first international wildlife refuge. As a lifetime advocate for protecting public health, he authored the Affordable Care Act, the Patient’s Bill of Rights, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, the Mammography Quality Standards Act, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, the Prescription Drug User Fee Act, and others. Dingell was a champion of working across the Congressional aisle.
**Inspiration Award – Mrs. Mary Rodgers**

Mary Rodgers, of Rockledge, Pennsylvania, has been serving her community as a volunteer and mentor since the age of eight. Mary began her volunteer career by giving tours at historic Washington’s Crossing National Park. Soon she began to hold yearly backyard fairs to raise money for CARE to purchase food and school supplies for an orphanage in Korea. As an adult, Mary dedicated her time to working with young people who responded well to volunteering in the community.

In 1999, she was named the Service Learning Facilitator for Abington School District. Since then, Abington students have contributed more than 1.25 million hours of service to the community. Among her accomplishments as Abington’s Service Learning Facilitator, Mary has advised over 400 Congressional Award participants. In 2007 Mary was appointed by then Speaker Pelosi to the Congressional Award Foundation Board of Directors. The following year she was elected as Secretary of the Board, a position which she held for five years.

In addition to her tenure on the Congressional Award Board, Mary served on the board of the Philadelphia Global Water Initiative and held the position of Committee Chair for the 2006 National Service Learning Conference. Furthermore, under Mary’s direction, Abington Senior High School was awarded the prestigious Harris Wofford Award by Youth Service America in 2003, naming it the Top Service Learning Institution in the United States. She also received the title of National Service Learning Practitioner of the Year in 2008 by the National Youth Leadership Council.

Mary continues to volunteer on a regular basis and has conducted six trips for Voluntary Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH) which includes traveling with students to Kenya, Guatemala, and Mexico to provide eye care. In her spare time Mary enjoys hiking, kayaking, and reading, as well as spending time with her two children and their families.
2015 Gold Medal Award Ceremony I

June 17, 2015
Cannon Caucus Room, 10:00 a.m.

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies
Mr. Chip Reid
CBS News

Presentation of the Colors and National Anthem
U.S. Capitol Police & Officer David Nelson

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

Keynote Speech
Mr. Steve Culbertson
Youth Service America

Closing Remarks
Master of Ceremonies – Mr. Chip Reid

Chip Reid is National correspondent for CBS News based in Washington, D.C. He covers everything from hard news to features for the “CBS Evening News,” “CBS This Morning” and “CBS Sunday Morning.”

From 2009 to 2011, Chip was CBS News Chief White House Correspondent, traveling with President Obama on dozens of foreign and domestic trips and conducting several one-on-one interviews with the President. Prior to his time at the White House, he covered Capitol Hill for CBS News.

Before joining CBS News, he spent a decade with NBC News, based mainly in Washington where he covered politics, law, defense and foreign policy. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Chip reported extensively from the Middle East including Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, Qatar, Uzbekistan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. During the first phase of the Iraq war in 2003 he was embedded with a forward battalion of the U.S. Marines.

Prior to his career in journalism Chip spent 6 years practicing law, with the Senate Judiciary Committee and a major Washington law firm.

Chip received a law degree from Columbia Law School and a Master of Public Affairs from Princeton University. While at Princeton he spent three months in Johannesburg, South Africa, working for a civil rights group fighting apartheid. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Vassar College, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa. In 2011 he had the honor of being the first male graduate to deliver the commencement address at Vassar College.
Keynote Speaker – Mr. Steve Culbertson

Steven Alexander Culbertson is President and CEO of YSA (Youth Service America), an international nonprofit organization that activates children and youth, ages 5-25, to find their voice, take action, and have an impact on the world’s biggest problems.

For two years in a row, the Nonprofit Times named Steve to its list of “The 50 most powerful and influential leaders” in the sector, saying, “Culbertson has helped to position volunteering and young people as an issue and a national priority.” Steve led YSA’s international expansion by creating Global Youth Service Day, and YSA now coordinates activities in more than 100 countries on six continents. In 2008, he developed Semester of Service, an academic framework that links Martin Luther King Day of Service (in January) to Global Youth Service Day (in April) with service-learning projects of “Duration and Intensity.”

Steve has been an active volunteer since childhood with service organizations ranging from Rotary International and the Boy Scouts of America, to the Episcopal Church and the Lawrence Hall School. He serves on the national Board of Directors of Camp Fire and Youth Service America, and he is a Trustee for America’s Promise Alliance. Steve was born in Bitburg, Germany and grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts. He has a degree in both English and French from Hamilton College, and he lives in Washington, DC. Follow Steve on Twitter: @Culbs.
2015 Gold Medal Award Ceremony II

June 17, 2015
Cannon Caucus Room, 2:30 p.m.

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies
Ms. Andrea Roane
WUSA9

Presentation of the Colors and National Anthem
U.S. Capitol Police & Officer David Nelson

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

Keynote Speech
Mr. Steve Culbertson
Youth Service America

Closing Remarks
Andrea Roane has been with Gannett-owned WUSA 9 since 1981, and has anchored every news program from morning to afternoon, and late night. She currently co-anchors WUSA 9 News from 4:25 AM to 7:00 AM, Noon and is the station’s Health reporter.

A multi-EMMY and GRACIE Award winner, Andrea has covered a wealth of hard news stories, from politics, the arts, education, religion, and sports to women’s health and empowerment issues. In 3-decades of reporting, she has interviewed newsmakers, entertainers, and politicians. Her reporting has taken her across the U.S., overseas to Jerusalem, the Virgin Islands, and Havana, Cuba.

Andrea’s commitment to women’s health and community service has been recognized with countless national and local awards. For her outstanding work as a journalist and for her community service, Andrea was a 2014 inductee into the DC Hall of Fame. In 2006, she was named one of Washingtonian Magazine’s “Washingtonians of The Year” for her continued work on breast cancer awareness through her Buddy Check 9 initiative, now in its 22nd year.

Among her many community affiliations, Andrea is a member of the Capital Breast Care Center Community Advisory Council, co-chair of the Kennedy Center’s Community & Friends Board; member of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Women in the Arts; a Trustee Emeritus of the Catholic University of America; and a Sustaining Director of the Prevent Cancer Foundation.

Andrea holds an undergraduate degree in Secondary Education and a graduate degree in Drama & Communications from LSU, New Orleans, which is now the University of New Orleans.

Andrea and her husband, Michael Skehan, live in Washington, DC. They have an adult daughter and son.
Congratulations to all of the
2015 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

2015 Congressional Award Gold Medalists
are listed by last name
★★★★

Autobiographies submitted by 2015 Congressional Award Gold Medalists are listed by Congressional District and then last name
2015 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Gabriela Abadia, Florida
Lincoln Abbott, Texas
Biraspati Adhikari, Pennsylvania
Radhika Adhikari, Pennsylvania
Seth Alicea, New Jersey
Naomi Allen, Florida
Michael Alvaro, Pennsylvania
Maria Alverio, Iowa
Julie Ambo, California
Griffin Armstorff, California
Kobi Axelrod, New York
Atalie Bale, Ohio
Zoe Barbeau, Florida
J. Aaren Barge, Pennsylvania
Mackenzie Batten, California
Hunter Benkoski, Pennsylvania
Rajat Bhageria, Ohio
Jamuna Bista, Pennsylvania
Michael Boyson, Texas
Olivia Brophy, California
Camden Brown, Texas
Rachel Bugg, Virginia
Ryan Buraus, New York
William Buster, California
Mary Ann Cahoon, Missouri
Victoria Cannon, Tennessee
Matthew Cha, California
Wing Kay Joyce Chan, Idaho
Corbin Chance, New Jersey
Jacob Chasan, California
Michael Cheng, Indiana
Emily Chiles, Missouri
Alexander Cho, California
Daniel Cho, New Jersey
Justin Cho, California
Bogeun Choi, Wisconsin
Noah Choi, California
Siri Choragudi, Georgia
Joshua Chung, California
Daniel Cieply, Indiana
Melody Colliatie, California
Brandon Colling, Arizona
Matthew Connell, Kansas
Patrick Connell, Kansas
James Cook, Michigan
Virginia Cook, California
Phillip Costello, Arkansas
Hannah Crane, Indiana
Kamila Czachorowski, Illinois
John Dadouris, New Jersey
Juhi Dalal, California
Maria Dattolo, Florida
Nolan Dexter-Brown, California
Nielsen Dias, Florida
Randell Doane, Florida
Rupa Dural, Pennsylvania
Maxwell Durtchi, New York
Caroline Dutzi, California
Casey Eble, Florida
Edison Elder, Wyoming
Michael Epperly, Virginia
Michaela Fallon, Florida
James Fantin, Wyoming
Nicole Fares, New York
Carianna Farrell, Georgia
Frank Faverzani, New Jersey
Lesli Fernandez, California
Catherine Fisher, Massachusetts
Bri Flaherty, Missouri
Christina Flear, Virginia
Alie Fordyce, Colorado
Samuel Fordyce, Colorado
Abbie Foster, Massachusetts
Michael Frye, Indiana
J. Parker Garrison, North Carolina
Jeremy Geiger, Texas
Tristana Giunta, Virginia
Kyle Goggio, Illinois
Alec Gonzales, California
Adan Gonzalez, Texas
Katherine Grabowsky, Kansas
Matthew Grillo, New Jersey
Alana Gross, New Jersey
James Grubbs, North Carolina
Felix Guo, Oklahoma
Devika Gurung, Pennsylvania
Emma Hall, California
Matthew Halloran, New Jersey
Jacob (Jungwoo) Han, California
Robert Hapke, Minnesota
Katrina Hayes-Macaluso, Florida
Charlotte Heffelmire, Virginia
Danielle Heins, Washington
Josh Heisey, Idaho
2015 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Jordan Helfand, Massachusetts
Jocelyn Hernandez, Texas
Noah Hicks, Michigan
Matthew Higgs, Virginia
Joseph Hinton, Idaho
Joanna Hong, California
Avinash Iyer, California
Catherine Jessen, Washington
KeeGan Johnson, Wyoming
Jonathan Jow, California
Brister Jones, North Carolina
Jonathan Jow, California
Raghadh Kalra, Texas
George Kanellitsas, Illinois
Aaron Kang, California
Arjun Kapoor, New York
Serhat Kariparduc, Utah
Karna Karki, Pennsylvania
Karishma Kashyap, Texas
Robynn-Emmanuelle Katzef, Florida
Justin Kawaguchi, California
Sabrine Keane, Massachusetts
Juliana Kemenosh, New Jersey
Reber Kennedy, Alabama
Taylor Kennington, South Carolina
Arbab Khalid, Nevada
Christopher Kim, California
Lucia Kim, California
Yoorhim Kim, California
Sara Knighton, Georgia
Juliana Kochis, Pennsylvania
Sarah Kopsa, Nebraska
Nikki Kothari, Virginia
Isaac Kuo, California
Sam Kuster, New Jersey
Michelle Laker, Virginia
Basanta Lamichhane, Pennsylvania
Taylor Lane, Virginia
Jennifer Lang, California
Holly Laws, Missouri
Jeff Lee, California
Ji Hye Lee, California
Sophia Lee, Pennsylvania
Shanley Lenart, Kansas
Chester Leung, California
Brittany Levy, Pennsylvania
Erin Lewis, Virginia
Jessica Li, Florida
Emilie Liu, California
Abigail Lockhart, South Carolina
Savannah Logan, Florida
Shivani Lokre, Kansas
Harrison Teague Loughman, California
Amanda Lu, Texas
Morgan Ludwig, Indiana
Ferdinand Luhur, Pennsylvania
Tess Luman, Georgia
Mason Magee, Idaho
Jonathan Magee, Idaho
Jordan Marino, New York
Zachary Maxwell, North Carolina
Kailey McCormick, Florida
Gabriel McDonald, California
Hugh McGinley, Florida
Grace McGowan, Kansas
Laura Mediorreal, Texas
Samuel Meyerson, Florida
Alexander Mietchen, Utah
Amrata Majumdar, New Jersey
Emma Moon, Indiana
Andrew Morgan, Florida
Olivia Morton, Pennsylvania
Taylor Murphy, New Jersey
Nicole Nam, California
Michael Negararu, Nevada
Kevin Ng, New Jersey
Jennifer Nicholas, Florida
Kirsten Norton, Idaho
Jessica Ocampo, Florida
John Wesley Orton, Utah
Fernando Osorno, Texas
Zachary Panton, Florida
Ni Em Par, Pennsylvania
Eli Parker, North Carolina
Mili Patel, California
Brandon Paul, North Carolina
Avani Pavuluri, New Jersey
Henry Pawelczyk, Illinois
John Peruzzi, Connecticut
John Peters, Illinois
Marianna Pizzato, Wyoming
Rishi Prasad, Pennsylvania
Samantha Price, New Jersey
2015 Congressional Award Gold Medalists

Jessica Pritchard, Florida
Anne-Marie Prochaska, Mississippi
Rebecca Pulley, Texas
Stephanie Quinton, New Jersey
Morgan Redford, California
Casey Riggs, California
Micheal Riggs, California
Jose Andres Rocha, California
Anna Rogers, Kentucky
Ashley Royce, Florida
Ashley Ryan, Massachusetts
Sabrina Saintil, Florida
Marisa Salvador, Florida
Suhani Sanghavi, Virginia
Tara Santora, Pennsylvania
Aakanksha Saxena, Arizona
Michael Schaja, Florida
Jericho Schroeder, Idaho
Lauren Seckar, California
David Seo, California
Dae han Seong, Washington
Supreet Shah, California
Jeremy Shockley, Wyoming
Ki Wan Sim, California
Samantha Singer, Florida
Austin Smith, Virginia
Chelsea Smith, New Jersey
Dorothy Smith, South Carolina
Hunter Smith, North Carolina
Shelbi Smolak, Florida
Mollie Somers, New Jersey
Arjun Sridhar, Massachusetts
Shimona Srivastava, California
Cassandra Steele, Massachusetts
Annalise Stevenson, California
Rachel Stogner, North Carolina
Kyle Sukley, Pennsylvania
Thomas Sych, New Jersey
Kavya Tangella, New York
Emma Taylor-Brill, North Carolina
Seth Taylor-Brill, North Carolina
Gopinath Thangada, Texas
Kabita Thapa, Pennsylvania
Jacob Thiemann, Florida
Brooke Tobias, California
Vincent Tran, California
Mary Turney, Missouri

Nihar Varanasi, California
Robert Vaughn, Florida
Ellie Vigurie, Florida
Samuel Vilchez, Florida
Patrick Vin, California
Stephen Waldrep, Tennessee
Samuel Walker, South Carolina
Merran Waller, Missouri
Christopher Warburton, Florida
Lorne Wasserman, Louisiana
Tiffany Webb, West Virginia
Jaynie Welsh, Wyoming
Jessica Williams, California
Jessica Wilson, Mississippi
Rachel Wilson, Mississippi
Lyssa Winslow, New Hampshire
Jacqueline Wong, Missouri
Jared Wong, California
Daniel Yang, California
Karen Yang, Texas
Nicolas Yang, California
Jonathan Ye, California
Joshua Yoo, California
Seung-Hee Yoo, California
GiHyeon Yoon, California
Daniel Yoon, California
Michael Youn, California
Nick Zamora, Texas
Andrew Zehner, Wisconsin
Cameron Zetterlund, California
Sophie Zhang, California
Bradley Zhu, California
Reber Kennedy  
*Montgomery, Alabama*  
*Advisor: Donnie Robinson*  
*Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, YMCA*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service through my Boy Scout Eagle Project and Sea Cadets. Through Eagle Projects, cleaning resident camps, and volunteering at a Navy Recruiting Station, I learned that service is a vital part of healthy communities. For my Personal Development, I participated in United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps. I attended monthly drills and completed correspondence courses as well as summer trainings. I joined a swim team and competed in meets throughout the southeast through USA Swimming and the YMCA for my Physical Fitness goal. Finally, my Exploration was an eight day trip to England, touring London, Oxford, Stratford, Bath, Stonehenge, and Windsor Castle. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal helped me to broaden my experiences, set goals, and work hard to achieve them.

Brandon Colling  
*Gold Canyon, Arizona*  
*Advisor: Chad Storm*

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered as a youth coach for my local parks and recreation department and also raised funds for a no-kill dog rescue. I also worked at my local food bank. For Personal Development, I learned more about photography, attended a leadership camp, took a driving course, and studied the Korean language and culture. For my Physical Fitness, I worked to improve my skills in basketball and soccer. I played varsity soccer and participated in a YMCA basketball league. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Northern Arizona to study Native American artifacts and culture and to explore natural features such as the Grand Canyon. By challenging myself to earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal I learned the value of hard work, perseverance, setting goals, and giving back to my community.
Aakanksha Saxena
Scottsdale, Arizona
Advisor: Paul McClernon

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered almost 250 hours of my time to the promotion of education among younger students. I also volunteered at the research division of a local hospital in order to improve the current understanding of neurological systems. For Personal Development, I enriched my understanding for science by participating in state and national level science fairs and by joining my school Science Olympiad team. My science research centered on the quantification of the carbon footprint of academic institutions. For Physical Fitness, I joined my school’s varsity swim team and junior varsity tennis team. I reduced my 50-yard freestyle time by over twenty-five percent and significantly improved my skill set as a budding tennis player. For my Exploration, I planned a five-night trip to India. This trip allowed me to better understand my heritage and allowed me to compare American and Indian culture. The Congressional Award program helped me discover my passions and showed me that anything is possible.

Phillip Costello
Wesley, Arkansas
Advisor: Barry Landon
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

My Voluntary Public Service hours were divided evenly between the Boy Scouts and the Washington County Historical Society. I provided guidance for four Eagle Scout projects, including my own which was to blaze and map a trail for a city park, and helped bring history to life so others could learn from the past. I sought to teach origami classes and a university science lab as well as learn bluegrass music for my Personal Development. I improved my Physical Fitness through earning the Personal Fitness and Swimming merit badges. My Expedition was a trek from Washington State to the Rocky Mountains to the Bay of Fundy. So much can be accomplished one step at a time. Through my participation in the Congressional Award program I gained not only a perspective of serving my community, but also of setting personal goals and keeping track of my activities.
Gabriel McDonald  
Grass Valley, California  
Advisor: Brenda Hollmer  
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

To serve my community, I volunteered at a Boy Scout camp, helped build trails and showed scouts how to mountain bike. I also served at a local homeless shelter and installed benches in a local county park. For Personal Development, I studied the Bible and completed multiple Boy Scout merit badges. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I rode mountain bikes competitively. I found a great community and a love for the outdoors. For my Expedition, I planned small backpacking trips along with a weeklong trip to Whistler, British Columbia to ride mountain bikes with a friend.

Olivia Brophy  
Granite Bay, California  
Advisor: Linda Derosier

My focus was on making stories come alive and words pop off a page to instill a love of reading for youth. I developed my appreciation and skills in the fine arts by creating costumes and sets for school plays as well as taking photographs and submitting them in local fairs. With the help of my coaches, I greatly improved my gymnastic skills. While in Merida, Mexico I was able to live with a wonderfully generous family. I gained a greater love for the Spanish language and an appreciation for Mexican culture. Completing the Congressional Award has allowed me to grow personally and socially.
Alec Gonzales

Elk Grove, California
Advisor: Armando Diaz

To earn the Gold Medal, I volunteered at the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services. I worked on-site to help clients receive much needed clothing. My Personal Development goal was to become a certified scuba diver. I am currently an advanced open water diver with 30 dives completed. My Physical Fitness goals included playing on my high school football and golf teams. Both teams required long hours of practice. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Devils Tower Monument. It was an amazing road trip with great scenery and amazing wildlife. Working hard to achieve the Gold Medal was a challenging experience which improved my organization and time management skills and inspired me to accomplish many goals.

Emma Hall

Clayton, California
Advisor: Christine Mitchell
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by tutoring children, helping the homeless, volunteering at a pet rescue, and creating and running the Clayton Family Fair and Picnic. I organized over 100 volunteers to provide games, education, and music to our community at no charge. I spent over 400 hours on Personal Development by taking dance lessons in many different styles and choreographing routines. I also led children at church summer camps and on Sunday mornings. I spent over 200 hours improving my soccer skills for my Physical Fitness. I completed the Expedition portion by travelling to Peru for three weeks. I travelled to a remote Andean village to help build a cold weather greenhouse and I helped teach the local children who almost exclusively spoke Quechuan. We also travelled with students from a school in Lima and worked on creating a sustainable garden in a Peruvian shantytown.
Casey Riggs  
*Walnut Creek, California*  
*Advisor: Jeanne Baker*

I volunteered with a county search and rescue team. I completed searches, as well as provided medical services at public events such as parades and street fairs. I completed Emergency Medical Responder training, and assisted with other trainings after I was certified. I also learned the skills needed for urban search and rescue. I hiked on the mountain near my home. I steadily increased the hours I hiked at one time and the weight of my backpack. For my Expedition, I backpacked and summited Mt. Whitney. It was a great experience to set goals and see them completed. It was also very rewarding to serve the public, and it is something I definitely plan on continuing.

Micheal Riggs  
*Walnut Creek, California*  
*Advisor: Jeanne Baker*

As part of my Voluntary Public Service, I assisted in searches with a local search and rescue team, as well as provided medical service at city and county events. I completed Emergency Medical Responder training and helped proctor other medical classes after my training. I also learned the skills necessary for urban search and rescue. I completed my Physical Fitness goal by hiking on the mountain near my house. As my skill improved, I increased the hours I hiked as well as the weight of my backpack. I went on my first backpacking trip to Yosemite National Park and climbed Half Dome. It was a rewarding experience helping the public. It was also rewarding to set goals and see them get accomplished.
Jared Wong  
*Danville, California*  
*Advisor: John Sutter*

I earned my Congressional Award Gold Medal by organizing the Contra Costa Music Students’ Service League, an organization that performs for patients at senior homes and hospitals. For my Personal Development goals, I challenged myself to be more organized. This enabled me to maintain a high GPA while performing all of my extra curricular activities. My Physical Fitness goal was to make the varsity tennis team at my high school. I exercised at the gym, practiced a lot, and made the varsity team as a sophomore! For my Exploration, I learned how to fish, ride in a canoe, and cook for myself. The Congressional Award taught me how to plan and organize my time to achieve my goals. It gave me confidence that I can obtain my dreams one step at a time!

William Buster  
*San Francisco, California*  
*Advisor: Richard Robertson*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service managing a program providing support to students from disadvantaged Bay Area communities. Participants were the first in their families to attend higher education. For my Personal Development, I took courses to learn computer programming and design while working full time. Additionally, I studied for the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program to enhance my future career opportunities. For my Physical Fitness, I engaged in an online weight training program, revamped my diet and began practicing yoga. Through focusing on my health I was able to lose over 50 pounds, shed high cholesterol and reduce my blood pressure. I planned an Expedition to Seoul, South Korea during summer break of 2010 having never previously left the United States. I immersed myself in the culture and vibrant history during my stay. I feel the real award came in the form of the experiences and lives I was able to touch during my pursuit of the Congressional Award.
Annalise Stevenson  
*Pleasanton, California*  
*Advisor: Megan Leich*

I wanted to care for homeless cats and dogs, improve their health if necessary and help find them suitable families. To do so, I spent a great deal of time volunteering with the Pleasanton Valley Humane Society and the Homewardbound Golden Retriever Rescue Organization. Music is a passion of mine and I wanted to explore singing and the guitar. I wanted to continue my learning of the martial art of Tae Kwon Do and my goal was to attain a black belt. I became a member of the U.S. Tae Kwon Do team and won the bronze medal at the 2012 World Tae Kwon Do Championships. I wanted explore what it is like to own and manage a big cattle ranch in Colorado. I spent two weeks immersing myself in the culture and learned that cattle ranching is very hard work, but it can also be incredibly rewarding! The Congressional Award has stimulated me to expand my comfort zone in many ways. It taught me that dreams are attainable if I developed a plan, followed that plan, and made adjustments where necessary.

Nihar Varanasi  
*Dublin, California*  
*Advisor: Tracie Kelly*  
*Affiliation: People To People International*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered as a camp counselor at a disability camp for special needs children. I helped organize various camp activities and spent time getting to know the wonderful, brave kids. For Personal Development, I took piano lessons weekly, practiced daily, and studied theory on my own. I am now a confident piano player and have performed at school recitals, Christmas programs, and assisted living facilities. For Physical Fitness, I spent many hours each week practicing my tennis skills to make the varsity tennis team. I also trained to become a Certified Master Scuba Diver. For my Expedition, I planned a five night camping trip at Lake Delvalle. While camping, I went on daily morning hikes, went canoeing and swimming in the lake, and learned to cook. I had a life-changing experience earning my Gold Medal because I was inspired to become an active participant in my community, learned to set goals, and gained valuable experience.
Juhi Dalal  
Fremont, California  
Advisor: Manmeet Bains  
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

The most important Voluntary Public Service that I completed was participating and leading my high school’s Relay for Life - a 24 hour walkathon to raise money for cancer research. I also volunteered at various summer camps and events for kids under the age of 12. For Personal Development, I participated in a business camp that helped me understand the world around me and has helped me in many aspects of my life. I also worked in the summer as a Teacher’s Aide. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I practiced Tae Kwon Do and achieved my first degree black belt. I went through rigorous physical training for five years to achieve this rank. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to an Amish town in Lancaster, Pennsylvania where I was able to experience a new lifestyle. I also met many interesting people whose lives are very different from mine. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was definitely a tough but inspiring process. I not only learned a great deal about myself, but also about the world around me.

Patrick Vin  
Cupertino, California  
Advisor: Tom Hinojosa

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked with my community naturalist museum at my local nature preserve in Santa Clara. I worked on keeping the preserve clean and teaching field trips about nature. I worked on my archery skill and practiced twice a week at my local range in order to improve. I am now ranked 12th in my division in California. For my Physical Fitness, I decided to work on improving in the martial art Judo. I trained every week in order to improve my skills and I was promoted to black belt in 2014. For my Exploration, I decided to go camping with friends for a week. We hiked and explored the nature around us, including lakes and forests. Overall, my experience earning the Congressional Award has changed me for the better and I accomplished what I once thought was impossible.
Virginia Cook
San Jose, California
Advisor Diana Fairchild

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I founded an annual clothing drive for teens in Bay Area shelters. I also worked at my local hospital in preparation for a career in nursing. For Personal Development, I took harp lessons and sang in two choirs. For my Physical Fitness, I rowed crew, which required practicing six times a week and weekend regattas. I started as a novice and worked my way to rowing on the varsity crew team for three years. For my Expedition I planned a trip through the Pacific Northwest with my mom and my grandmother. We have taken many trips together, but this one was completely my responsibility to coordinate and execute. It was the trip of a lifetime for all three of us. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to pursue this goal and finally see it come to fruition!

Chester Leung
Saratoga, California
Advisor: Emily Lo

I volunteered at Book-Go-Round, a used book store operated by Friends of the Saratoga Library, and as a counselor at Wisdom Culture & Education youth camps. I took piano and percussion lessons weekly and performed with the California Youth Symphony, Stanford Philharmonia Orchestra, and Silicon Valley Symphony. I learned music theory, piano performance skills, and how to play in an orchestra. By playing volleyball, I strengthened my legs and increased my vertical jump. Eventually, I was able to increase my vertical jump by seven inches. I travelled from Saratoga California to Hong Kong. While there, I explored the different cultural traditions and participated in activities that locals did. I also learned a lot about the local language, transportation networks, political system and cuisine. I learned that anyone can make a difference in their community.
Harrison Teague Loughman
San Jose, California
Advisor: Maureen Kane

For my Voluntary Public Service, I coached soccer in Greensboro, North Carolina. I volunteered for the Santa Clara Library as an Assistant Grant Coordinator and now continue to serve there, assisting with all aspects of their Teen Program. For Personal Development, I started blogging about tech products, innovations, gadgets, and apps. For Physical Fitness, I conditioned my body with an intense fitness training program. I trained and played with FC DALLAS U15 Pre-Development Soccer Academy for over a year. I completed the Outward Bound Hurricane Island Maine two-week sailing course. It was a real learning experience for me on many levels. The Congressional Award provided me with structure and pushed me to serve, try new things and venture further. I learned about not only myself, but also about the real world.

Jose Andres Rocha
San Jose, California
Advisor: Sandra Nance

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work with the Experimental Aircraft Association Young Eagles and Civil Air Patrol. I volunteered with the Young Eagles to help young people learn about flight. For Personal Development, I learned to fly. I attended aviation camps and a flight academy. I took ground and flight training and obtained my private pilot license. For my Physical Fitness, I learned two new sports: golf and football. I joined The First Tee of Silicon Valley to learn golf and joined the Evergreen Valley High School, varsity golf team. Finally, for my Expedition, I traveled to Spain, Morocco, and Portugal. While traveling, I got to learn about a new culture’s food, dress, religion, and history. I developed into a well-rounded individual with positive goals and ambitions while earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal.
Jonathan Ye  
San Diego, California  
Advisor: Janice Peterson  
Affiliation: AmeriCorps NCCC

I completed over 2,000 hours of Public Service with AmeriCorps NCCC and Teton Science Schools, doing service as varied as fighting wildfires, analyzing FEMA policies, teaching first graders and seniors, and surveying fish. I worked on several Personal Development skills, but I found improving my languages - specifically Chinese, Java, and HTML - most useful. My Physical Fitness goals revolved around building consistency. I improved my mile time by more than a minute over my personal best and tripled my range. Americorps NCCC introduced me to America’s beauty and diversity and provided me the experience to explore and adventure. Those skills would then help me plan and run group trips into Wyoming’s Teton and Gros Ventre Mountains.

Melody Colliatie  
Simi Valley, California  
Advisor: Margie Savoye

My Voluntary Public Service included establishing an international microloan program for tribal women in Kenya, supporting landmine victims in Thailand, building homes for impoverished families and working with orphans in Mexico, and planting trees in Costa Rica’s Children’s Eternal Rain Forest. I also volunteered at a local homeless rehabilitation center in California and at an animal shelter in Missouri. For Personal Development, I worked multiple jobs throughout high school and college. I graduated with a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Business Management and Marketing without debt. For my Physical Fitness goals, I played varsity sports during my entire high school career lettering in golf, basketball and cross country. For my Expedition, I planned an exploration in Southern Germany. I hiked the Bavarian Alps and interacted only in German in Munich to test my language skills as part of this cultural experience. Working to earn the Gold Medal taught me the importance of open-mindedness, persistence and self-reliance. It has inspired and helped propel me to make a difference locally, nationally and globally.
Lauren Seckar  
*Simi Valley, California*  
*Advisor: Michele Albert*  
*Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA*

I volunteered with different community organizations, my church, and my Girl Scout Troop. I helped build houses in Mexico with my church and volunteered at the local hospital. Living in Southern California and being in the medical profession, I believed it would be beneficial for me to be bilingual. In high school, I began taking Spanish classes and continued into college. I have always been an active individual and have always been involved in fitness. I participated on the track and field team and the soccer team in high school. In college I continued to participate in Physical Fitness by running and becoming involved in CrossFit. I had been on many Explorations with my family and Girl Scout Troop, but I never previously planned one. Being able to plan an Expedition for my Girl Scout Troop to King Canyon was an amazing leadership experience. The Congressional Award has given me many opportunities to gain leadership skills, gain friendships and, more importantly, get out of my comfort zone and challenge myself in ways I hadn't before.

Avinash Iyer  
*Thousand Oaks, California*  
*Advisor: Melissa Kukta*

To earn my Gold Medal, I completed my Voluntary Public Service at my local teen center, my school, and the Westminster Free Medical Clinic. For my Personal Development, I learned more about Sanskrit literature. After completing the Purusa Suktham, I began learning the Rudram and Chamakam. Reading about these scripture has made me more knowledge about my culture and its rich history. For Physical Fitness, I continued to pursue yoga. It was a great experience helping younger kids learn yoga and show them how to calm their bodies and their minds. For my Expedition, I planned a trip from my house to the Bay Area. Being able to plan the route and decide on which sights to see really opened my eyes to the level of preparation needed for a trip of this scale. The entire Congressional Award experience was eye-opening and showed how I can enrich my life.
Justin Kawaguchi
Newbury Park, California
Advisor: Todd Creason
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

To achieve my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked in collaboration with the Boy Scouts of America, YMCA, and Key Club International. For Personal Development, I enrolled in Japanese language classes and attended weekly lessons. I look forward to utilizing my newfound knowledge in international travels. For my Physical Fitness, I progressed from my local YMCA swim team to a member of the Newbury Park High School swim team. I have seen a steady improvement in swim times. My Exploration was a cultural trip to San Francisco. My family and I toured Chinatown, the Mission District, Japantown, and Little Italy to sample the cuisine and discover new cultures. The Congressional Award was a truly inspirational opportunity and aided in the development of personal skills such as planning, goal-setting and perseverance. I will always remember the amazing times that I had and will cherish them forever.

Supreet Shah
Thousand Oaks, California
Advisor: Dan Nalbandian
Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, People to People International

For Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered more than 400 hours with the Teen Leadership Club and the Los Robles Hospital. As part of my Personal Development, I studied management and finance career opportunities. I participated freshman basketball and golf for my Physical Fitness. My goal was to be able to score pars and birdies on every golf course. My game has significantly improved through practice. A 19-day Expedition to Spain, France and Italy as People to People International Student Ambassador allowed me to be more social, confident, and independent while promoting peace and friendship. My stay with an Italian family was especially memorable. I’ve immensely enjoyed the Congressional Award program. It has shown me my strengths and made my family proud.
Justin Cho  
_Arcadia, California_  
_Advisor: Jina Kim_

For my Voluntary Public Service, I traveled to Tijuana, Mexico with Global Youth Mission. While there, I helped diagnose patients and assisted the locals who lacked proper health care. For my Personal Development, I played the violin and tried to refine my skills in music. I practiced for many hours for my private lessons. For my Physical Fitness, I played for my varsity baseball team. Throughout the offseason, the team and I would condition and do light practices each week. During the season, we would have practice every day and have games on the weekends. For my Expedition, I traveled to Catalina Island with my father. We spent the whole time hiking, camping, and taking in nature’s beauty. It was a great experience to get out of the city. My overall experience with the Congressional Award was amazing as I was able to round myself out as a better person.

Lesli Fernandez  
_Glendale, California_  
_Advisor: James Martin_

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered for Title One in Clermont, Florida. For Personal Development, I spent many hours at the tutoring center studying for classes. For Physical Fitness, I had a membership to a gym and exercised to complete my hours. For my Expedition, I went camping in Malibu and also explored the Getty museum. I learned how important it is to be involved in the community.
Griffin Armstorff  
*Burbank, California*  
*Advisor: Jim Roope*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I worked to remove invasive species from the San Gabriel River area. I also worked with nonprofit groups on service projects involving the military, dog shelters, and the homeless. For my Personal Development, I attended ground school to learn how to fly a plane. I also taught children how to swim. The Physical Fitness component of the Congressional Award was enjoyable because I was able to swim almost every day. I was also able to improve on all of my swim strokes and beat my own personal records during swim meets. For my Expedition, I went backpacking through Philmont, New Mexico. While backpacking we went burrow racing, rock climbing, built trails, and explored mines. Overall, I was able to develop my own skills, help people, and improve my community.

Matthew Cha  
*Harbor City, California*  
*Advisor: Daniel Moyer*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

I collected donations such as books, clothes, and electronics from neighbors and put them up for sale at multiple garage sales in order to raise money for a scholarship for students. As a Boy Scout, I was involved in many activities such as earning merit badges, going on campouts, and volunteering my time for activities such as feeding the homeless. I performed various exercises including jogging, stretching, and playing tennis on a weekly basis. I also signed up at the local YMCA and went to their weight room in order to achieve my Physical Fitness goals. As a Boy Scout, I asked members of my local troop to see if anyone wanted to go on a trip with me. After making the necessary arrangements and plans, I was able to successfully go on a trip with my friends and fellow Boy Scouts.
Ji Hye Lee  
Los Angeles, California  
Advisor: Jina Kim

I went to Mexico to teach children at an orphanage and to cook for disabled patients. I established a nonprofit organization to maintain connection and to support them continually. To overcome my shyness and stage fright, I played cello in concerts and in nursing homes. Almost every single day I practiced jump-rope and swimming. Through this experience, I gained self-confidence and maximized perseverance. For my Exploration, I traveled to Japan and Korea to study their cultures. Through the Award I gained self-confidence, learned perseverance and persistence, and found my true passion. The Congressional Award guided me to find out who I actually am.

Lucia Hyesong Kim  
Los Angeles, California  
Advisor: Jina Kim

To complete my 400 Voluntary Public Service hours, I went to Mexico and served at orphanages. Service has become part of my routine on the weekends, helping me maintain a healthy perspective on life. I set a goal to improve my piano skills both as a soloist and a member of my school’s orchestra. I practiced at least seven hours per week on my own and in addition had two-hour private lessons. For my Physical Fitness, I went to Korean dance practice every week, trying my very best to get picked to be in the first row for performances. I have become more comfortable with the beats of Korean dance and find it easier to drum and dance at the same time. For my Expedition, I planned a camping trip to Santa Barbara packed with outdoor activities including horseback riding and fishing. I was responsible for the entire trip and was happy when it turned out exactly as planned. Through my participation in the Congressional Award, I have learned the importance of being well-rounded. I believe that I have grown into a more responsible and hardworking person because of the various goals I set and achieved.
Jonathan Mak  
*Cerritos, California*
*Advisor: Jina Kim*
*Affiliations: American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America*

In my Eagle project, I took over complete planning and execution of a local book drive and refurbishing a day care library in order to boost literacy levels and encourage reading for local youth. I worked as a community education leader with the Red Cross to spread the value of preparedness. Since I manage my own personal sleep health blog, I worked to improve the design and flow of the website by learning more about computer science. Starting from junior varsity swim team, I managed to cut times off my personal records in order to be promoted to varsity. Through developing better technique and physical finesse, I was able to continually best my times every race. I visited Hong Kong in order to connect with my cultural roots and immerse myself in a foreign experience. I visited multiple festivals and ate at street marts in order to truly understand the life and culture of the area. I would like to thank everyone that has helped my journey in obtaining this prestigious award. I am so thankful for all of you, and through this process, I have learned more about myself.

Noah Choi  
*Fullerton, California*
*Advisor: Daniel Moyer*

For my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at numerous places including the local children’s museums and senior living center. I worked hands on at each location, doing my best to benefit my community. For Personal Development, I invested time into learning the piano. I practiced daily and took lessons to hone my musical abilities. For Physical Fitness, I spent time running and working out at the gym. I worked on lowering my resting BPM while raising my stamina and mile time. For my Exploration, I went on a solo journey to France. I experienced the culture of the country, including its music, people, and food.
Nolan Dexter-Brown
Yorba Linda, California
Advisor: Ray Downs
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I got to educate the public about plants and animals while working as a ZooTeen at the Living Desert. Some of my 460 hours of Voluntary Public Service were spent working special events and overnight family campouts. For my Personal Development, I was active in leadership within my Boy Scout troop. My focus was leadership and I learned how to work with others to achieve goals and received my Eagle Scout rank. For Physical Fitness, I earned my second degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. I also learned shot put and participated in the Scottish Highland Games. I planned a five day vacation to Scotland to learn about my heritage and the culture. I got to participate in the Bridge of Allan Highland Games and see Julius Caesar at Shakespeare’s Globe in London. It was a great trip that I will remember forever.

Jacob Han
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Daniel Moyer
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

Every Saturday, I volunteered at the local Orange County Food Bank. I also created a National Alliance on Mental Illness chapter at my school that provided service to a home that cares for seniors with Alzheimer’s. I pursued creative writing and photography. I ended up using my newfound interest in photography to work with the World Health Organization on a global report entitled “Health for the World’s Adolescents”. As a varsity water polo and swim athlete, I trained and practiced in the pool. I worked on lowering my swim times and getting a more accurate shot. I traveled to South Korea to learn about the culture and increase my fluency in Korean. I explored the country and documented my experience with a camera. The Congressional Award forced me to step outside of my comfort zone and pursue new interests and activities, which allowed me to mature and grow.
Joanna Hong  
*Fullerton, California*  
*Advisor: Daniel Moyer*

In order to earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by tutoring elementary and middle school students from low-income families. I also volunteered at the local children’s museum. For Personal Development, I have practiced and received piano lessons every week for the entire duration of the Congressional Award program. I completed my goals by passing the Certificate of Merit tests for piano and performing at recitals. For my Physical Fitness, I played recreational tennis every weekend with my friends and family. I also joined the tennis team at my school and have improved my skills by competing in district games and practice matches. For my Expedition, I planned a five day camping trip to Lake Arrowhead in Big Bear, California. I observed the devastation of a forest fire that occurred years ago and learned the difficulties of cooking in an unconventional setting. Although earning the Gold Medal was hard, I have gained irreplaceable memories during my progress.

Aaron Kang  
*Yorba Linda, California*  
*Advisor: Daniel Moyer*

I provided service to the public by creating a club dedicated to decorating Manzanita Trees for charity purposes. After decorating these trees, we showcased them in galas and had a fundraiser to help impoverished children who live in motels and children who live in North Korea. In order to develop my internal sense of self, I pursued art as a way of expressing myself. I drew and painted numerous images of human figures in poses as a way of expressing emotions. For Physical Fitness, I pursued my hobby of archery by attending numerous competitions and practicing in my free time. Whether it was traveling to different states or practicing at a local range, I often found relaxation through my shots. The Expedition was a really great opportunity for me to explore the environment as I got to visit Malawi. I spent time assisting villages and primary schools, and had the chance to explore an entirely different culture. By taking part in the Congressional Award, I was able to challenge and further myself as an individual and become a better citizen for my community and the world.
Yoorhim Kim  
Chino Hills, California  
Advisor: Daniel Moyer

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked with young children at the Boys & Girls Club of Fullerton. I also fundraised for a food bank in Malawi. For Personal Development, I achieved my goal of ranking into the top three percent of piano players in the state. In addition, I also successfully participated in the MTAC Convention. For Physical Fitness, I gained more muscle and improved my body mass index for a healthier lifestyle. I gained five pounds of muscle and increased my stamina. For my Exploration, I better understood the culture and history of Korea by visiting multiple landmarks there and staying in a hanok, a traditional Korean home. I gained a much deeper appreciation for my own culture during my stay. I am extremely grateful I took up the opportunity to achieve Gold Medal and I cannot wait to learn more about myself in the future.

Jeff Lee  
Walnut, California  
Advisor: Jina Kim

To receive my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours with a variety of organizations to help the less fortunate. For my Personal Development, I learned how to garden by researching online and planting a vegetable garden in my backyard. In order to enhance my Physical Fitness, I regularly went to the gym and lifted weights. For my Expedition, I spent five nights learning more about nature at Sequoia National Park. During my trip I saw the most amazing things. It was a great journey earning my Award and I learned that anything is possible with persistence and determination.
Nicole Nam  
_Brea, California_  
_Advisor: Daniel Moyer_

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I helped clean up local beaches and parks. I also visited recycling businesses and learned how to make the community more eco-friendly. For Personal Development, I worked on raising my SAT score by practicing every day and making sure I didn’t make the same mistakes as before. For Physical Fitness, I worked on my dance technique by practicing every day. I did a quick stretching exercise and I practiced my turns and flexibility. To complete my Exploration, I made preparations for a camping trip. I planned the materials I needed and which activities I would do. I also made sure that the trip was safe and comfortable. Through the Congressional Award I was able to experience new things and responsibilities.

Shimona Srivastava  
_Fullerton, California_  
_Advisor: Daniel Ramirez_  
_Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA_

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work by collaborating with my high school and national environmental groups to lead an environmental awareness campaign. I organized weekly club meetings, invited academics, arranged nature hikes and fundraisers, and hosted advocacy events. For my Personal Development, I learned ballet and Bollywood dance and blended the two dance forms. I practiced every week for two hours and danced in several events in my community. For Physical Fitness, I trained as a runner and competed in several races. I practiced running sprints and long distances every week. I shortened my mile time by two minutes and competed in the 400 meter and 800 meter race. For my Expedition, I explored the historical landmarks in New York, Hartford and Boston. While visiting different locations, I studied and pieced together the historical foundations of our nation. Through the journey to achieve the Gold Medal, I have recognized my strengths as a leader in the pursuit of my aspirations.
Nicolas Yang
Fullerton, California
Advisor: Eric Shim
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I have been involved with the Boy Scouts of America for my Congressional Award. I completed my Voluntary Public Service through helping other members with their projects to benefit the community, including collecting canned food and fundraising for local charities. I have participated in speech and debate for four years and trained weekly for tournaments. I have played golf for about five years, during which I practiced five days a week and went out to the golf course to learn how far I had progressed. For my Expedition, I went camping by myself to Lake Perris. Before starting my journey, I took a month to plan what supplies I would bring and where I would camp out. Through these experiences, I have grown to be responsible for myself and matured as an individual.

Seung-Hee Yoo
Yorba Linda, California
Advisor: Nancy Coulter

I completed more than 300 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a community service organization for children. I also volunteered at my school as a member of the PTSA Leadership Group for over 100 hours. For Personal Development, I studied oil painting with an art tutor. I can now paint portraits, figures, still life, and landscapes. I practiced archery at the local Archery Club for my Physical Fitness activity. I started at 18 meters shooting with a 20 pound bow and now I can shoot 70 meters with a 32 pound bow. For my Expedition, I planned a camping trip at Joshua Tree National Park. I finished five days hiking, as I had planned, and cooked every meal myself. Through the Congressional Award I learned how to set long term goals. None of these goals were easy. I also learned to be patient to reach my goals and how to discipline myself when I have a lot of tasks to do. Most of all, I gained self-confidence.
Gi Hyeon Yoon  
*Buena Park, California*  
*Advisor: Daniel Moyer*

To achieve the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered to teach math to elementary and middle school students. For Personal Development, I learned to play the drums and practiced every day to improve. I am now an intermediate drummer. To complete my Physical Fitness objectives, I trained with a private trainer where I worked on my mile, half-mile, and quarter-mile times. I began with a slow time and slowly worked my way into becoming a faster runner. For my Expedition, I decided to take a five night camping trip to the Big Bear Mountains. I enjoyed taking trips up different mountain trails, seeing wildlife like a rattlesnake and a coyote, and stargazing! In the beginning I didn’t think I would gain much from doing all this, but in the end I realize I have learned so much more about what I can do and what can be learned by challenging myself.

Caroline Dutzi  
*Murrieta, California*  
*Advisor: Carol Hernandez*

I have worked extremely hard and was able to surpass my goals for Voluntary Public Service. I did so through many Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) community service events, multiple school campus beautification projects, and donating my time at local middle and elementary schools. For Personal Development, I really challenged myself to not only be a better student and a better all-around person. To achieve my Gold Medal, I put extra hours into my academic pursuits. I believe in leading a healthy life and setting an example to the younger kids in my community. I achieved my Physical Fitness goal by being a part of the varsity swim team and leading classes in JROTC. I planned and organized an Expedition to immerse myself in an unfamiliar environment. I had made a five day trip to Boston where I led my group on a tour of the Freedom Trail and taught them of our nation’s history. After three years of hard work in this program I have a new found attitude. With hard work, I believe anything is possible.
Mili Patel  
*Murrieta, California*  
*Advisor: Carol Hernandez*

To complete my Voluntary Public Service goals, I worked through several organizations and the Community Services Department of the City of Murrieta. I am a member of Murrieta’s Youth Advisory Committee. For my Personal Development goals, I participated in extracurricular activities including Indian dancing. I am a member of my high school’s varsity tennis team. As a tennis player, I set various goals for skill improvement. I prepared a seven day Exploration to Washington DC where I learned about our nation’s history. My visit included scheduled trips to the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Capitol. The Congressional Award has taught me how to be more mature as a young adult and more prepared for the demands of the world.

Joshua Chung  
*Irvine, California*  
*Advisor: David Park*

Through my Voluntary Public Service, I developed a sense of appreciation and responsibility for my community. Whether it was chopping up vegetables for a hospital patient’s next meal or numerically sorting out stacks of medical records, I learned to work with diligence and composure. My Personal Development was an endeavor to inspire others through my solo saxophone performances and my aspiration to constantly improve in debate. This instilled perseverance, dedication, and commitment in my actions. My Physical Fitness goals allowed me to enhance my health through exercising self-discipline. My mixed martial arts sessions were all about being consistent in my practice across all areas of Tae Kwon Do, Aikido, and Boxing. My Exploration of the Seonamsa Temple taught me more than I ever thought possible about Buddhism and Korean culture. It was a challenge and experience that I will never forget. The skills and qualities that I have gained by participating in the Congressional Award will resonate throughout my life and I hope that many young Americans will be inspired to take on this challenge too!
Jonathan Jow  
**Irvine, California**  
*Advisor: Howard Chang*

To complete my Voluntary Public Service hours, I volunteered as a Junior Auxiliary at a hospital in Newport Beach. I also spent many hours teaching mathematics to middle and elementary school students and performing fundraisers in support of ALS research. For Personal Development, I practiced violin both independently and under the direction of several different orchestras. By doing so, I widened my classical repertoire and improved my technique. For Physical Fitness, I worked hard to hone my skills in tennis. Through many hours of practice, I was able to improve the consistency, power, and accuracy of my shots. My Expedition was a ten day family trip to London and Paris. Through my Expedition, I not only learned a great deal about the history and culture of the two cities, but also important lessons about research, planning, and scheduling a trip. Overall, I’m grateful to the Congressional Award for motivating me to better myself in a variety of areas.

Christopher Kim  
**Irvine, California**  
*Advisor: Jina Kim*  
**Affiliations: HOBY, US Air Force**

For my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service within my community and abroad. I have gone on trips to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Costa Rica and Mexico to serve people in need. For my Personal Development, I took guitar lessons to become stage ready in a couple months. After three months, I became the lead guitarist and singer in my church band. For my Physical Fitness, I dedicated over a thousand hours to the sport of pistol marksmanship. After a year, I became one of the top junior shooters in the nation. For my Expedition, I planned my first camping trip to Ocean Mesa Campground in Santa Barbara. It was a challenging experience because I had never been camping before. I learned how to start a campfire and catch a fish.
Emilie Liu  
Foothill Ranch, California  
Advisor: Denise Keddy

I earned my Congressional Award Gold Medal by completing over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at the local food bank, library and an organization aimed at helping families end the cycle of domestic violence. I also founded an organization to collect college prep books for donation to local schools. For Personal Development, I experimented with recipes from around the world. I learned to prepare an entire Thanksgiving meal and many dishes from Malaysia, Spain, France and China. For my Physical Fitness, I trained to improve my vertical jump by almost five inches. I overcame health limitations to jump higher and become a stronger and more agile athlete. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Hong Kong, my father’s birth place, to learn about my heritage. I visited places where my father grew up and pondered the influences on his young life. This Congressional Award journey has taught me to set big goals and to be patient and persistent in achieving those goals.

Daniel Yang  
Irvine, California  
Advisor: Heather Bethmann

In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I dedicated over 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service at two different regional hospitals to connect with patients and make their hospital stay more comfortable. At one hospital, I played violin in an effort to create a positive, comfortable environment for healing. For Personal Development, I decided to apply myself even more to violin practice. I have learned the values of diligent, dedicated practice as it applies to artistic expression. For Physical Fitness, I became an avid swimmer, training specifically with attention to my breaststroke. With effort in my workouts and pointers from my coach, I began to see time drops and achieved many of my time goals. For my Expedition, I planned a week’s trip to Japan to experience elements of both modern and traditional Japanese culture. Learning some of the basics of the Japanese language was difficult, but I learned so much from the different historical and cultural sites I visited. The Congressional Award took me on a journey to discover who I am and what I can accomplish through goal-setting and hard work.
Joshua Yoo  
*Irvine, California*  
*Advisor: Jina Kim*

In order to receive my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours under the direction of Global Youth Missions by directly aiding underprivileged communities. I visited communities in Southern California and distributed care packages containing food and vitamins. For Personal Development, I studied music theory in order to pass the Advanced level of the Certificate of Merit Program. In addition, I took on the challenge of learning not just solo repertoire, but also duet repertoire in order to grow as a musician and learn better communication skills. For Physical Fitness, I challenged myself to improve my mile swim time to 45 minutes. I trained for this task by doing multiple dry-land workouts in order to build up my physical strength, stretching to increase flexibility, and sprints in the pool to build up my stamina in the water. For my Exploration, I decided to travel from Irvine, California to Chicago, Illinois to compare the different demographics and modes of transportation between the two cities and to experience city life. This Exploration was truly an eye-opening experience. By participating in the Congressional Award, I was able to experience instances of love, compassion, self-confidence, and failure during my activities, which all aided in my personal growth and development.

Jennifer Lang  
*Long Beach, California*  
*Advisor: Teri Young*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I helped the homeless, served at various local community events, and raised three puppies through Guide Dogs of America. My fine arts Personal Development goal enabled me to improve in my singing, acting, and playing of musical instruments. As these skills improved, I received larger parts for my plays and even sang and played for my church’s worship team. To reach my Physical Fitness goals, I trained as a swimmer through my daily swim team workouts and as a runner on my own. After Super Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines in November 2013, I completely planned and raised the funds for much needed fishing boats and for my mom and I to go on a mission trip to help out the Filipino people. During the ten days we were there, we helped with feeding and supporting the survivors. Doing all of the activities for the Congressional Award has stretched me and made me grow as a person. I now know I can set goals, plan, and exceed my expectations.
Brooke Tobias  
_Cypress, California_  
_Advisor: Lisa Munley_

I completed Voluntary Public Service by being co-president of the Fragile X Awareness club at my school. I brought awareness by organizing school meetings, planning bonding events for affected families, and volunteering for events put on by the FX Board. For my Personal Development, I coordinated blanket-making events and distributed blankets to children in need at local shelters and hospitals. For my Physical Fitness, I committed to my dance training four days a week. I also taught dance classes at my school and nearby studios. For my Expedition, I planned a hiking trip to Mt. Whitney. At over 14,000 feet, it was challenging and exhilarating and one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has opened my eyes to all of the incredible opportunities around me, and has given me confidence.

Vincent Tran  
_Fountain Valley, California_  
_Advisor: David Theriault_

I committed my time to a mentorship program for at-risk Vietnamese students. As a mentor, I met weekly at study hall with my mentee to develop their academic, cultural, and social skills. I learned how to play the guitar and improve my music reading abilities. I was able to complete my goals by taking biweekly guitar lessons and maintaining a practice schedule. I participated in the sport of boxing. I was able to significantly improve my physical and boxing abilities in the gym, weight room, and by studying boxing techniques at home. I planned and conducted a five day Expedition to familiarize myself with Yosemite National Park's terrain, vegetation, and wildlife. Participating in the Congressional Award program has taught me to persevere through hardships, overcome adversities, and face challenges to achieve my determined goals.
Julie Ambo  
Carlsbad, California  
Advisor: Joe Chi

I volunteered at community festivals and at activities that benefited the disadvantaged in Carlsbad. I also tutored elementary students at the local library, and led games and crafts at a retirement home. To improve my Japanese reading and writing skills, I attended night classes at my community center. At home, I self-studied Level 2 kanji characters; these characters are derived from the Chinese alphabet and are used frequently in daily life in Japan. To solidify both my tennis forehand and serve, I took lessons weekly and practiced with my younger sister. I also worked out by walking extensively. To delve into Japanese culture, I explored Tokyo for five days and practiced my speaking skills with everyone I met. Before flying to Japan, I researched its public transportation, traditional food, hot spring baths, and historical sights.

Mackenzie Batten  
Poway, California  
Advisor: Pam Ludwig

I worked with a special education school club focusing on socialization. I have also spent many hours working on Special Olympics events in my community. I read everyday to further my understanding of Christian Science and my relationship with God. I practiced volleyball, softball, and track after school in order to improve my skills. I established my own self-directed workout routine in order to stay in shape during my off season. I traveled to Grenada where I had the opportunity to explore the beautiful culture and rich history of the Grenadian people. I got to live among them, seeing how different their lives were from my own and learning about myself and my own culture in the process. I love all of the memories that I have gained by earning the Congressional Award. I feel as though I know more about who I am as a person and I have come to the realization that above anything else, helping others is what I want to do with my life.
Jacob Chasan  
*La Jolla, California*  
*Advisor: Jamie Hart*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

For my Voluntary Public Service project, I donated my time as an expert app developer to build apps for the Boy Scouts of America and the Center for Sutton Movement Writing. For my Personal Development goal, I organized my personal activities, school work, and the work hours. My Physical Fitness goal was to maintain continuous physical fitness through two activities, Krav Maga self-defense and Yoga. Through the use of Hatha and Restorative Yoga, I was able to keep fit, flexible and relaxed. For my Expedition, I studied Native American culture and explored Yosemite National Park. I researched the local Native American tribes in my community as well as those that inhabited the Yosemite Valley. Achieving the Congressional Gold Award was an excellent addition to achieving my Eagle Scout rank as it allowed me to take the skill set I learned through the Boy Scouts of America and focus it on more personal goals.

Morgan Redford  
*Coronado, California*  
*Advisor: Suzan Hardy*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. In dedicating my time to community service, I made Rotary’s motto “service above self” my own. For Personal Development, I joined the Coronado High School Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC) Unit. I learned how to be a leader, how to connect with different people and how important community service is. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to improve my horsemanship. I rode four days a week with an equestrian instructor to improve my skills and earned the United States Equestrian Federation Equestrian Athlete designation. For my Expedition, I helped plan a five day NJROTC trip to Washington, DC. I visited many of our nation’s memorials and learned about all who were lost. Earning my Gold Medal was a truly rewarding experience that taught me how to be an effective leader.
Jessica Williams  
San Diego, California  
Advisor: Adrienne Crabtree  
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 Voluntary Public Service hours at an animal shelter and completed my Girl Scout Gold Award. For Personal Development, I learned German and volunteered at various German cultural events like Oktoberfest to practice my speech. For the Physical Fitness portion, I took karate classes multiple times a week, participated in local tournaments, and earned my green belt. For my Exploration, I planned a trip for my family to New Orleans. We visited a lot of historical and cultural sites and also tried some great food. I learned a lot about how to impact my community and better myself by completing the Congressional Award.

Cameron Zetterlund  
San Diego, California  
Advisor: Jon Stewart

To achieve 400 Voluntary Public Service hours, I focused my activities on helping children. I volunteered at organizations such as the San Diego Food Bank, San Diego Humane Society summer camps, and even organized a book drive to raise money for families who have children with Down Syndrome. For Personal Development, my goal was to improve my sports knowledge and skills through spotting and managing a variety of sports. My ultimate goal was to become my school’s sports announcer, which I achieved. My Physical Fitness goal was to increase my athletic endurance and abilities while striving to exercise on a regular basis. I challenged myself to participate on team sports which not only made exercising more enjoyable, but taught me team-building skills and perseverance. Because of my passion for history, I chose to focus my Exploration on historical sites in California. I planned all aspects of the road trip from San Diego to Concord where we saw missions, La Brea Tar Pits, and the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance. The Congressional Award taught me how to set long term goals, keep detailed records, face personal weaknesses, and persevere through obstacles in order to achieve my ultimate goals.
Alie Fordyce  
*Denver, Colorado*  
*Advisor: Skyler Bentley*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service that targeted community health and environmental improvement. I volunteered in the US, Europe, Africa and Asia. For Personal Development, I expanded my writing skills through initiating a school newspaper and a blog. I also set a goal to further develop my second-language skills and achieved it by assisting in the official translation of a book from German to English. For Physical Fitness, I joined a track club and achieved my goals to improve in speed and endurance. I realized that I love running and will now run track at university. For my Exploration, my goal was to learn more about the mountains and utilize a combination of skiing and hiking to get to destinations. I learned about orienteering and survival skills. I have always been interested in my environment, developing skills, physical fitness and exploring other parts of the world, but the Congressional Award was the catalyst that ignited my interests and has made me more independent and goal-oriented.

Samuel Fordyce  
*Denver, Colorado*  
*Advisor: Skyler Bentley*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed my Voluntary Public Service for the community as a medical volunteer, tutor and sports coach assistant. For Personal Development, I took courses about what it is like to be an EMT and medical doctor; and about how to conduct entrepreneurial research. For Physical Fitness, I added to my overall fitness by competing for my school badminton and swimming team. For my Expedition, my goal was to learn more about mountainous areas and learn specialized skills to navigate this type of terrain. I learned about avalanche safety and orienteering. The Congressional Award experience gave me the life-long and life-changing ability to independently set and achieve goals. I learned about the connections between health and well-being through community. This journey has confirmed my interest in healthcare and I am now in a university accelerated medical program.
John Peruzzi  
*Greenwich, Connecticut*  
*Advisor: Michael Hienzsch*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service as both a member and President of Teen-Works. I helped children meet their needs, provided emergency relief and supported recycling and sustainability. For Personal Development, I took piano lessons and prepared for performances at concert halls, my grandmother’s nursing home, schools and shelters. I also made a CD of my music. For Physical Fitness, I set out to improve my basketball skills and spent extra hours training. This effort made me a much stronger contributor to my school’s JV and varsity teams. For my Expedition, I went to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. I lived on a ship for four nights, hiked, and swam with seals and sharks. I learned about history, science, global citizenship, and preserving natural resources. Overall, the experiences I had earning my Gold Medal reinforced my aspirations to make a difference and contribute to my community.

Naomi Allen  
*Gulf Breeze, Florida*  
*Advisor: Vickie Mullins*  
*Affiliation: 4-H*

I developed my own service project for Voluntary Public Service by working with Soles4Souls to collect and give shoes to those in need. I also volunteered for Teen Court to connect and interact with my peers and helped at the recycling sector of Waste Management. For Personal Development, I focused on my communication and public speaking skills by participating in my school Debate and Model UN teams. My Physical Fitness goal was to practice yoga and strength training to relax my body and make it stronger. For cardio exercise, I ran every week to eventually complete a 5K race. My Expedition took me to historic sites like the Gulf Islands National Sea Shore in Florida and Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
Jessica Ocampo  
Atlantic Beach, Florida  
Advisor: Kathy Christensen  
Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

To earn my final Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service through the Beaches Habitat for Humanity education center after school program and at a local community college’s Spanish Lab. I used my employment as my Personal Development goal, working in a retail department and as a clinical administrator. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to run a 5K race. I accomplished my goal by gradually increasing my distance, speed, and days of training per week. For my Exploration, I went on a five day, four night trip to Savannah and Americus, Georgia. I organized a tour of the cities, picked cotton, and photographed all the beautiful sightings. I learned about so many things, and the history behind these amazing places. Overall, I am so proud of my accomplishments and I had an amazing experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal.

Sabrina Saintil  
Atlantic Beach, Florida  
Advisor: Kathy Christensen  
Affiliation: Habitat for Humanity

Through my Voluntary Public Service in the after school program of Habitat for Humanity’s education center I was able to tutor elementary school students. I expanded my culinary skills and educated myself on healthy meals for my Personal Development activity. My Physical Fitness goal was to implement a weight lifting routine. The result of my new workout plan was a weight loss of 50 pounds. My Exploration was an excursion to Georgia to explore the birthplace of Habitat for Humanity. The Congressional Award was life changing.
Samuel Vilchez Santiago
Orlando, Florida
Advisor: Tabatha Campos
Affiliations: American Red Cross, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Key Club

My Voluntary Public Service was completed through several local community-oriented events organized by my school’s Key Club, National Beta Club, and National Honor Society. I also got involved with Mi Familia Vota, through which I was able to register people to vote, especially Hispanics. My goal for Personal Development was to understand my Hispanic culture in a better way so that I would be able to embrace it and share with others. I took Spanish literature and language classes and also founded the Hispanic Honor Society at my school. To accomplish my Physical Fitness goal, I jogged five times a week throughout my neighborhood. I also went to the gym as much as I could. I was able to lose thirty pounds by the end of the program. To complete my Expedition, I explored nature through a camping trip. I was able to overcome my fear for natural places. It was an amazing experience for me. I was able to become a more rounded individual.

Ashley Royce
Lake Placid, Florida
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered in the emergency room of my local hospital as well as the local nursing home. I helped many sick patients and assisted the staff in their effort to make them well again. For Personal Development, I learned to play the guitar using online resources and informational books. I am now able to play several basic songs on my guitar. For my Physical Fitness, I decided to increase my running abilities by training for and running in three 5K races. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a five-night trip throughout North Florida. I visited museums and historic landmarks to learn about the early history of the state of Florida. As I earned my Congressional Award, I improved myself in several areas while also learning so much about my home. I am so thankful for the opportunities and experiences that I have learned through this program!
Gabriela Abadia  
*Palm Beach Gardens, Florida*
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*

During my journey to earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I dedicated myself to Voluntary Public Service by making no-sew blankets for migrant children and children suffering from cancer. I also spent hundreds of hours serving as a camp counselor, helping in a musical at my local theatre, and volunteering in technical theatre capacities. In the Personal Development category, I became extremely involved in my school theatre department and focused on improving my acting, singing, and dancing techniques. I set a goal to reach an intermediate skill level in ballet for Physical Fitness. In the process, I learned how to dance en pointe and I also got certified in Cecchetti Level 2 and 3. My Exploration gave me the opportunity to tour New York City. Exploring a few of the incredible museums that New York has to offer was one of my favorite parts of my trip. Overall, this has been an incredible experience that has shaped me into the well-rounded individual I am today.

Zoe Barbeau  
*Port Saint Lucie, Florida*
*Advisor: Georgina Love*
*Affiliation: 4-H*

I completed my Voluntary Public Service at the Savannas Preserve State Park, Hoke Library, and 4-H in order to promote education and science. I helped with educational programs on frogs to photosynthesis for K-8 students and participated in a Science Fair Boot Camp to educate students about STEM. I sought to become a better writer for Personal Development and participated in National Novel Writing Month and successfully achieved my word goals (20,000 words). I also learned how to sew and constructed an entire outfit. To improve my Physical Fitness as a competitive fencer, I ran, bicycled, and lifted weights. I went from being an unrated fencer to receiving a D rating, the highest in Division 3. My sister and I visited our uncle and aunt in Milwaukee for my Exploration. We embarked on a cultural experience by going to many museums, nature sites, and restaurants. I most enjoyed going to the Milwaukee Art Museum’s classic painting exhibit which had several of Ruben’s paintings on display. By participating in the Congressional Award, I have improved my time management and recording skills while pursuing many of my interests that I would not have been able to otherwise.
Maria Danielle Dattolo  
*West Palm Beach, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*

To achieve my Congressional Award, I contributed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service towards supporting hospitalized children. Cards of Kindness provides over 1,200 handmade cheerfully colored cards a year to children in Joe DiMaggio’s Hospital. I also made no-sew fleece blankets for the children in St Mary’s Children’s Hospital. As a member of an Italian family, learning how to cook time-honored family recipes was a fitting Personal Development goal. I played on two lacrosse teams for my Physical Fitness goal. I improved my technical skills, speed, and strength on the field and earned recruiting offers from Division I schools. I am excited to be playing at the collegiate level next year. My Exploration of San Francisco’s history, culture, and architecture and visiting the natural parks of the Bay Area was the highlight of my summer. Achieving the Congressional Award has provided me with lifelong lessons, organization, and pride in completing ambitious goals.

Randell Doane  
*North Palm Beach, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*

*Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, People to People International*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I tutored students in math and science. Even when I was hospitalized for a rare blood disorder, I continued tutoring other children on the pediatric oncology unit and at the Ronald McDonald House for the six months of my hospitalization. My Personal Development goal involved becoming proficient on the bass guitar. I found my ability levels improved so much that I have been able to join a rock band at Cornell. My hospitalization and year of chemotherapy set back my Physical Fitness goals of discus throwing a bit. However, I got a physical therapist after I was released from the hospital and I have been able to reach and even exceed my discus distance goals. I went on a People to People International trip to China in 2009 when the swine flu epidemic became a pandemic. I was one of the kids on the trip that had to be quarantined after sitting close to someone with an elevated temperature on the airplane. Needless to say, the cultural immersion that I received my eight days in quarantine was more in depth and unique than if I had just gone on the trip as planned! Having these goals to work on kept me focused and helped me through my hospitalization, because it made me realize that even with roadblocks thrown in front of you, you can still continue your life and pursue your goals.
Casey Eble  
_Téquesta, Florida_  
_Advisor: Lynn Lyons_

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service through serving as a teacher’s assistant, making blankets for the ill children of St Mary’s Hospital, and donating my original artwork to the Veterans Society. My Personal Development goal was to improve my Tae Kwon Do training to obtain my Poom Red/Black Belt, Deputy Black Belt, and my 1st Degree Black Belt. For my Physical Fitness, I wanted to increase my physical strength by going to my local gym. By increasing the intensity of my workouts, I not only increased my strength but also my endurance. My Expedition was a five day trip to the Peace River and Juniper Springs where I made a crossing by boat to the Bahamas, learned to spear fish while free diving, explored the cultural and historical sites of Miami, and set up camp, cooked by campfire, and navigated the water ways. After participating in the Congressional Award, I have become a more responsible, organized and diligent worker. It has taught me the importance of setting and achieving goals. It has created a desire to continue to give back to my community.

Michaela Fallon  
_Jupiter, Florida_  
_Advisor: Lynn Lyons_

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I was the assistant coach of a middle school softball team and I also visited a local nursing home and pre-school each month to play games and make crafts. For Personal Development, I worked to improve my skills as an employee for Sweet Frog Premium Frozen Yogurt and was promoted in the process. For Physical Fitness, I played travel softball, attending practices, games, camps, and tournaments. I increased the speed of my pitches from 51 to 55 miles per hour. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a six-night trip to Washington, DC where I visited monuments and museums and learned about the history of our nation. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was an unforgettable experience that taught me time management, responsibility, leadership, and perseverance.
Jessica Hsieh Li  
*Stuart, Florida*  
*Advisor: Kelly George*  
*Affiliation: YMCA*

In pursuit of the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by shadowing the nurses and doctors at my local hospital. I also coached children's soccer teams at the YMCA, teaching them the values of teamwork and how to improve their skills. For my Personal Development, I studied music performance, increasing my knowledge of various orchestral literatures and advanced techniques that could help me improve my flute performance skills. I created and directed soccer activities for children with special needs for Physical Fitness. I also worked on improving my stamina levels in marching band. I spent a month in a foreign country for my Expedition, learning about a new culture and implementing the use of my foreign language knowledge. I traveled all over Taiwan, which allowed me to open my eyes to a whole new world.

Savannah Logan  
*Jupiter, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service in my community. I made blankets for critically ill children at St. Mary's hospital, and I made holiday cards for troops in Afghanistan. I learned to cook for Personal Development. I followed recipes for over 30 different dishes and, as the culmination of my goal, I prepared and cooked a four course meal for five friends. For Physical Fitness, I set a goal to improve my volleyball skills, finishing my senior year with Small School Player of the Year honors and a Division 1 scholarship to play in college. Finally, for my Exploration I planned a five-day trip to Nashville, Tennessee. As someone with a true passion for country music, I immersed myself in that culture while also exploring a city rich with history. I feel very accomplished for earning my Gold Medal. I realize that I can achieve anything with hard work and I had an absolute blast doing it!
Kailey McCormick  
**Tequesta, Florida**  
**Advisor: Lynn Lyons**

To earn my Congressional Award, I served as an assistant coach for the middle school boys’ and girls’ volleyball teams for Voluntary Public Service. This volunteer experience was very rewarding because I was able to spend many years fostering young players in my favorite sport. For the Personal Development program area, I began an internship with The Alliance for Eating Disorders and was able to truly understand how to help young women improve their body image. The Physical Fitness portion of the program was by far my best accomplishment. The sport of volleyball afforded me many great opportunities and the goal-setting for the Congressional Award helped me to achieve my personal best in this sport. For my Exploration, I planned, paid for, and traveled alone to the state of Delaware. This has been a rewarding experience.

Hugh McGinley  
**Jupiter, Florida**  
**Advisor: Lynn Lyons**

In order to earn the Congressional Award, I dedicated many hours to improving my community and myself. For Voluntary Public Service, I spent my summers helping children at a local art camp. I also joined a program to tutor children of migrant farm workers after school and made blankets for children at St. Mary's Hospital. For Personal Development, I worked hard to reduce my 5K time by almost five minutes. My Physical Fitness was completed primarily through high school and travel lacrosse teams. I also tried a new sport, golf, and played for three years on the school team. For my Exploration, I planned a five-night stay in the Florida Keys. I took my family to museums, out on the boat, snorkeling, and biking in an overall amazing week. The Congressional Award was a lot of work, but I had so much fun and learned about myself through the experience.
Sam Meyerson  
*Palm City, Florida*  
*Advisor: Joe Pistorio*  
*Affiliation: American Red Cross*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to the American Red Cross and youth basketball teams. I helped teach children lessons in leadership and first aid. For my Personal Development goal, I went to an SAT and ACT study group to prepare for testing and have scored high enough to get into the colleges I’m interested in. I also worked writing social media campaigns for HighSchoolDriver.com and other websites while learning about marketing careers. I worked on running a faster mile to improve my endurance and speed on the lacrosse field and basketball court for Physical Fitness. My Expedition was a five-day, four-night trip to Key West, Florida while living on a houseboat. I learned a lot about the history and culture of the city. The Congressional Award was very helpful in learning how to set long term goals and work towards them to become a better leader while having a positive impact on my community.

Andrew Morgan  
*Palm Beach Gardens, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with Boy Scouts of America, Youth Athletic Association, and a local school camp. I learned so much through teaching younger children about sports. I am most proud of the community garden that I designed and built, which will benefit a local food bank for years to come. For Personal Development, I focused on improving my ACT scores. By working with a tutor and studying on my own, I was able to improve my ACT test score by more than twenty percent. For my Physical Fitness portion, I worked on both improving my times in cross country and improving in baseball. I secured starting varsity positions in both sports. My Expedition involved planning and participating for the high adventure Philmont Scout Ranch in the rugged mountains of New Mexico. For ten days, with my crew, I hiked, camped, cooked and even had to perform emergency first aid during this life changing leadership experience. Working towards the Congressional Award has helped me learn how to set goals, both short term and long term.
Jennifer Nicholas  
Jupiter, Florida  
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To achieve the Congressional Award, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service in my community through coaching youth sports programs, volunteering as a camp counselor, making cards and blankets for cancer patients at a local children’s hospital, and participating in local events to raise money and awareness for cancer research and treatment. For Personal Development, I became employed at my first job working three days a week. I gained management, financial, organizational and supervisory skills. I increased my running speed and endurance and improved my strength training for Physical Fitness. I planned a five-day trip to New York City for my Exploration. I had never been to a big city and it took a lot of planning and organizing to make sure that I saw as much as possible. We went to a Broadway show, the Statue of Liberty, the 9/11 Memorial, Radio City, Rockefeller Center, Empire State Building, Central Park, Times Square, and even saw the St Patrick’s Day parade! Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was an unbelievable experience. I tried things and challenged myself in ways I may have never done if I didn’t participate in this program.

Zachary Panton  
Palm City, Florida  
Advisor: Maribel Soriano

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 600 hours of Voluntary Public Service. Most recently I volunteered as a FEMA/Martin Reserve Corp Volunteer during the immunizations of the T-dap vaccinations for seventh graders at the Martin County Health Clinic. For Personal Development, I took piano lessons and earned my second 30-point Gold Cup from the National Federation of Piano Festivals. As a member of Piano Guild, I have performed at “Pianothon” to raise money for the Children Health Council in Martin County. For my Physical Fitness, I have played high school varsity soccer for four years. As a center midfielder, I have scored the most goals for my team this year. For my Expedition, I explored the caves and tunnels characteristic of Niagara Falls in Toronto, Canada. I submerged myself into Canadian culture by traveling in the area, speaking with citizens and sampling the local cuisine. Participating in the Congressional Award was a life-changing experience and it taught me a variety of skills and values.
Jessica Pritchard  
*Palm Beach Gardens, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*

To earn my Congressional Award, I contributed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service towards multiple organizations, such as The Love Doctors Charity Toy Drive. The toy drive gave me the opportunity to help less fortunate families pick out presents for their children to open during the holidays. For Personal Development, I set a goal to increase my SAT score by 100 points. My hard work and hours of studying paid off and I am proud to say that I was accepted at my dream school, Florida State University. For Physical Fitness, I set a goal in swim to reduce my time in the 50 yard and 100 yard backstroke as well as improve in yoga and pilates. I chose to excel in swim and yoga/pilates because they are sports that I will be able to do throughout my life. For my Expedition, I planned a six camping trip to Withlacoochee State Forest. I went kayaking in the springs, fishing, hiking and rode four wheelers through the trails behind my campground. The Congressional Award program has left an indescribable impact on my life that will live with me forever.

Marisa Salvador  
*Palm Beach Gardens, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*

To obtain my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Arthritis Foundation. I volunteered at the National Juvenile Conventions, local arthritis events, and the National Arthritis Advocacy Summit. I raised over $40,000 dollars for the cause. I gained knowledge and tangible skills in archery for my Personal Development goal. I practiced at the local Gander Mountain and increased my skills. For my Physical Fittness, I participated in varsity cheerleading at Palm Beach Gardens High School. By going to practices and games, I improved my skills to a mid-intermediate level. I planned a five-night trip to Colorado for my Expedition. I went hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park and ventured to the Denver Zoo, Denver Botanical Gardens, Denver Art Museum, and the Denver Science Museum. I had a wonderful experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal and I learned the more responsibilities that I take on the more I can accomplish.
Samantha Singer  
*Palm City, Florida*  
*Advisor: Cathy Balzer*  
*Affiliation: American Red Cross*

I have logged over 1,400 collective hours in earning my Congressional Award. For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at the American Red Cross and the Martin County Pioneer Lacrosse League. I learned so much about my community with the Red Cross and my leadership skills flourished after coaching girls’ lacrosse. For the Personal Development section, I worked on my running technique in order to improve my speed. This taught me that speed gets better with both technique and proper nutrition. For the Physical Fitness portion, I went to lacrosse practices, camps, and tournaments to build my strengths and reduce my weaknesses in the sport. Finally, for my Expedition, I undertook a five-night trip to the North Carolina mountains that enhanced my leadership and decision making skills. I hiked, camped, and learned to improvise when things did not go according to the plan. The Congressional Award has taught me so much about not only my community, but also about myself, and I am so proud to be part of it.

Shelbi Smolak  
*North Palm Beach, Florida*  
*Advisor: Lynn Lyons*  
*Affiliation: National Honor Society*

Throughout my experience with the Congressional Award program, I have dedicated more than 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service under the direction of my high school and college. In the Personal Development program area my goal was to learn how to cook and prepare meals. I achieved an advanced intermediate level in tennis as my Physical Fitness goal. The fulfillment of this goal culminated in over 650 hours devoted to the sport. Finally, I planned an educational trip to Atlanta, Georgia for my Exploration. I can now say with confidence that I am capable of doing whatever I set my mind to, without hesitation of failure.
Jacob Thiemann  
North Palm Beach, Florida  
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service for several local charities. I also spent time tutoring others, supporting local sports, and helping raise money for the victims of the Haiti earthquakes. For Personal Development, I participated in wrestling lessons six times a week and studied the sport on my own. I am now the captain of my high school wrestling team. I also achieved my private pilot’s license. For my Physical Fitness, I decided I would train and improve my racquetball skills. When I began, I did not know any strategies or rules. I can now teach others how to play the game and love competing with friends. I planned a trip to Boston for my Exploration. I walked the Freedom Trail, attended a Boston Celtics basketball game, and visited several museums. The Congressional Award has allowed me to mature in a way that no other program ever could.

Robert Vaughn  
Tequesta, Florida  
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I visited Costa Rica to build bathrooms and classrooms for schools in remote sections of the country. I also started a non-profit organization called “Teaming Up To Outfit Others” that collects sports uniforms to bring back to the schools in Costa Rica. For Personal Development, I learned how to fly fish. I dedicated time to working out and setting strength goals for my Physical Fitness. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-day trip to the Ozark Mountains. I was able to incorporate everything I have learned over the years as I have completed the Congressional Award. From golfing, hiking and fly fishing, to overcoming obstacles and budget planning, I was able to successfully enjoy and complete my trip.
Christopher Warburton  
Téquesta, Florida  
Advisor: Lynn Lyons

While earning my Gold Medal, my journey has taken me through 421 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I have learned that I'm mainly interested in helping children and animals, groups who cannot speak for themselves and need the most help. My Personal Development goals led me to get my certifications in Freediving and Scuba because of my interest in marine conservation. Physical Fitness allowed me to incorporate healthy exercise habits into my everyday life that will continually carry on with me in the future. The Exploration was one of my favorite program areas. I learned how to research, plan, and implement a trip in order to experience new cultures. I took my family to New England to learn about my Dad’s heritage. The most important thing I learned was time management and organizational skills so that I could stay on track and meet my goals.

Robynn-Emmanuelle Katzeff  
Naples, Florida  
Advisor: Francis Gibson  
Affiliation: US Air Force

To meet the requirements in Voluntary Public Service, I worked at with a physical education program, teen court, and my local hospital. Although I contributed differently in every program, the goal was always the same, to help the community. For Personal Development, I joined the Naples Philharmonic Youth Orchestra and refined my violin skills. For my Physical Fitness portion, I set swimming goals for myself in the 200IM and the 50 yard butterfly. Finally for my Expedition, I traveled from Florida to The Netherlands by myself. I organized a five-day trip for my family that lives there. My experience while earning the Congressional Award was fantastic. I learned how to take initiative and think on my feet.
Ellie Vigurie  
Lake Worth, Florida  
Advisor: Elizabeth Stephan  
Affiliations: People to People International, US Air Force

To earn the Gold Medal, I reached out to my community through Voluntary Public Service. I spent my time at my high school’s sporting events and at the Junior Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps unit performing in parades and ceremonies. For Personal Development, I decided to help the JAFROTC new cadets by teaching them everything I knew so they would be successful in the program. The future is in our youth and I wanted to do my part to make sure the unit I was leaving was in good hands. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to advance my skills in tennis and soccer. Finally, my Exploration was through People to People International’s Student Ambassador Program. I was able to experience four different and amazing cultures in Europe. Though it took a long time to earn the Congressional Award, it was well worth it. I discovered my true potential in making a change for others and myself.

Michael Schaja  
Parkland, Florida  
Advisor: Cynthia Bloom

I completed my Voluntary Public Service at the South Florida Wildlife Center preparing food according to strict dietary protocols, feeding the animals, cleaning, and sorting laundry. I am also the youngest county coordinator of the monofilament and recycling program (MRRP) in the state of Florida. For Personal Development, I learned Objective-C which is a computer language used to build iPhone apps. I also increased my DECA leadership positions and competed in county, state, and national DECA competitions. I used the P-90X program and went hiking, mountain biking, and rock climbing to complete my Physical Fitness. For my Expedition, I planned a 24-day camping trip in Oregon and Washington with the ultimate goal of reaching the summit of Mt. Adams. I planned routes, cooked and prepared meals, and scouted and set up camp every day. The Congressional Award helped me organize myself and kept me on track to meet my goals.
Katrina Hayes-Macaluso  
*Fort Lauderdale, Florida*  
*Advisor: Patricia Damoorgian*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a non-profit gymnastics camp. I coached kids from the ages of 3-12 and helped provide a fun atmosphere that kept the kids physically active while still having a fun time. For my Personal Development, I took sculpture classes five times a week. I learned to master the use of different materials like clay, wood, metal, and linoleum. For my Physical Fitness portion, I trained in gymnastics five days a week, focusing on floor exercise, balance beam, uneven bars, and the vault. For my Expedition, I traveled to Australia and planned out an itinerary of where in Sydney I would visit. Beforehand, I researched all of the tourist attractions and looked at the local favorites. Even though the Congressional Award Gold Medal took a lot of hard work, time commitment, and dedication, it proved to be an amazing experience that developed me into a person with three dimensional talents.

Nielsen Dias  
*Pembroke Pines, Florida*  
*Advisor: Bernard Lobo*  
*Affiliations: American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America*

In order to earn the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. My major experiences included weekly visits to children at Nationwide Hospital and organizing multiple philanthropy events for my fraternity, including a number of BuckeyeThons, a 24 hour dance marathon which strives to raise money for treatment of children. To complete my Personal Development requirement, I took on a part-time job at a local business. This helped to improve both my financial and accounting skills. For Physical Fitness, I decided to improve my cardiovascular health by increasing my running speed in addition to losing weight. After a year, I was able to run seven miles in one hour and lost over 20 pounds. My Expedition was a five-day camping trip at a local state park. This trip included activities such as cycling, canoeing, and horseback riding. When I originally set the goals to complete the Congressional Award, I thought they were too lofty and would require more effort than I could put in. However, after completion I know now that these goal have made me a better person.
For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at my local library and 121 Reach to serve the younger underprivileged children in my local community through food donations, free tutoring, and upkeep of public facilities. Additionally, I volunteered at local hospitals in different departments for two summers and participated in service events with MDJunior to get medical supplies and care to people who couldn’t afford them. For my Personal Development goal, I practiced the violin regularly to reach a higher orchestra level in my school and studied music theory. For Physical Fitness, I joined the cross country team to build my stamina and run a 5K. I also practiced Bharatanatyam dance regularly to improve my technique and performed in many fundraising dance recitals. I traveled to rural Honduras on a week-long medical mission for my Exploration. I helped to provide free medical clinics and public service projects to help underprivileged Hondurans live a safer life. Completing the Congressional Award has taught me how to set realistic goals and achieve them in an efficient manner.

I have logged more than 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service with the Humane Society of Forsyth County, fostering over 20 cats and kittens and helping with their adoption events. I also organized a pet food drive with my school, collecting hundreds of pounds of pet food. I dedicated my Personal Development goal to theatre, performing in 19 plays and musicals with different community theatre groups. My Physical Fitness focused on dance training. My activities included group classes in ballet, jazz, and lyrical and private lessons in tap. For my Expedition, I spent six days and five nights aboard a small sail boat, exploring the Cape Fear River in North Carolina. Earning the Congressional Award has helped me to set goals and take on new experiences and challenges.
Sara Knighton  
*Adel, Georgia*  
*Advisor: Gail Blitch*  
*Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, HOBY, People to People International*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by forming my own non-profit called BOOK Angels. I raised awareness concerning literacy and raised over 1,200 books donated to local agencies. I learned how to properly shoot a rifle and learned more about gun safety for my Personal Development activity. I obtained my Hunter Safety certificate and, after much practice, I was able to enter a regional skeet competition. For my Physical Fitness, I decided I would train for a 5K race. I practiced weekly until I was able to run it in less than 35 minutes, placing 1st in my age division in the Kiwanis 5K run! Finally, for my Expedition goal, I planned a seven-day, six-night trip to Iceland to explore my Nordic heritage! I had an amazing time starting in Reykjavik, visiting Hallgrimskirja Cathedral, then to Pingvellir National Park, and the famous Blue Lagoon Spa. I am so grateful for the Congressional Award. It allows a person to push their limits and expand their horizons.

Carianna Farrell  
*Jasper, Georgia*  
*Advisor: Deborah Bishop*

To meet the requirements of Voluntary Public Service, I worked consistently at the local food pantry filling food orders and preparing food. I also worked at our local thrift store preparing clothing for sale. I mastered multiple art forms by pushing myself to try new forms of art such as graphic design, oil painting, and even dry erase board sketching for my Personal Development activity. My Physical Fitness goal was to increase my power walking speed. I walked faster and longer and trained myself to walk instead of drive short distances. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to Charleston, South Carolina to become immersed in the town’s rich historical background. The Congressional Award was an incredible experience as it encouraged me to look ahead to what I could potentially accomplish and work towards my goals.
Josh Heisey
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Advisor: Libby O'Linger

For my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered with special needs recreation day camps, providing one-on-one assistance to children. I had several different personal development goals, including personal Bible study, taking guitar lessons and practicing my driving skills for proficiency before I got my driver's license. My Physical Fitness goal was learning jiu jitsu and I progressed to earn my third degree white belt. I also spent many hours training in snowboarding. My Gold Medal Expedition was a trip around the International Selkirk Loop in Washington, British Columbia and Idaho. By far, the biggest impact participating in the award has made on my life has been volunteering with special needs children. This will be the activity that I remember forever.

Mason Magee
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Advisor: Beth Brubaker

Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal encompassed completing over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local hospital. Serving on the teen board of directors and working in almost every area of the hospital, including the O.R. has solidified my decision to go into a career in medicine. For Personal Development, I completed a summer term at the University of Kansas through the Duke Tip program summer academy. I spent over 100 hours in a classroom studying computer programming and a month interacting and living with students from all over the world. The Physical Fitness component entailed setting and meeting goals in cross country, track and field, and basketball. I stretched myself and obtained goals beyond what I thought possible. The most challenging endeavor of the Award was the eight day Washington, DC Exploration I planned for my family. Immersing myself in new surroundings, planning, researching, and carrying out the Exploration made me responsible on a level I had never experienced before. The entire Congressional Award Program was a very meaningful and rich learning experience and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.
Joyce Chan  
*Sun Valley, Idaho*  
*Advisor: Joan Lamb*

I volunteered for the Sun Valley Figure Skating Club by organizing semi-professional ice shows. I also volunteered in community skating events, teaching young skaters, rehearsing, and making videos. For Personal Development, I pursued my interest in Media Arts by taking courses and jobs in editing photos and videos, graphic design and web design. I applied my technical knowledge by helping others make and edit videos. For Physical Fitness, I improved in figure skating, became a USFSA Gold Medalist, passed my Novice Free Skate test, won skating awards, and performed in ice shows. I worked on flexibility every day. For Exploration, I traveled to Bali, Indonesia where I learned about its unique history and the Hindu culture. I focused on the different aspects of Balinese architecture, including ancient temples and palaces. I learned to pursue my interests by setting goals and achieving them, to be motivated and organized, and to be a better person and citizen.

Max Durtschi  
*Ketchum, Idaho*  
*Advisor: Jim Carkonen*

I committed to volunteer projects aimed at fostering community and athletic engagement amongst young people. This proved to be the most rewarding aspect of my Congressional Award experience. I developed my knowledge of nutrition and culinary techniques in order to select and prepare healthy food for my friends and family. I focused on a strict regimen of training in both cycling and Nordic skiing. This goal helped me develop as an athlete and eventually make the national team in both sports. I planned my trip to the United States Cycling Championships in Los Angeles, California. I considered all factors including travel, lodging, and food. The Congressional Award allowed me to develop as an individual, engage in my community, and form lasting relationships with remarkable men and women.
Joseph Hinton
Boise, Idaho
Advisor: Phoebe Smith
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

I designed and completed conservation work on the Payette National Forest’s popular “20-mile loop.” I also photographed and recorded the stories of Boise’s historic buildings for a website to commemorate Boise’s 150th Anniversary. I volunteer three days each week at our public library. I played piano and significantly improved my ability to sight read music. I am on the swim team and improved my form and cut my swim time on the 100-meter free style. I participated in a Boy Scout High Adventure Camp at Florida Sea Base.

Kirsten Norton
Boise, Idaho
Advisor: Zach Parker

I encouraged community health and literacy through volunteering at my local hospital and building a “Little Library” that encourages community driven literacy. Early literacy is important to me because it is a necessary tool for creating opportunity for young students throughout their lives. I acted in a community theater play, earned my motorcycle endorsement, and became a lifeguard. All of these things changed how I was able to interact with my community and gave me the opportunity to gain new skills in multiple areas. I rode my bicycle, skied, and hiked. These outdoor activities allowed me to fully appreciate the landscape around me wherever I went, whether it be a mile from my home or in many of our national parks. I coordinated multiple trips for myself, my family, and my school. These encouraged me to grow as a leader and appreciate the value of teamwork within any given situation. I saw beautiful landscapes and fascinating people in my travels across The United States and truly enjoyed each Expedition. The Congressional Award program has allowed me the opportunity to grow as an individual.
Jericho Schroeder  
Kimberly, Idaho  
Advisor: Debbie Klug  
Affiliations: 4-H, HOBY

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I participated in summer school programs, taught piano, and assisted with various service projects with my high school clubs. I also founded a girls club at my high school. As a group, we volunteered together at animal shelters, nursing homes, and did a self-help presentation to middle school girls. Having played piano for eleven years, I set goals to learn, perfect, and memorize piano compositions. My favorite was *Moonlight Fantasy* by Melody Bober. I participated in 5K runs and would jog regularly around my neighborhood. I flew to Pensacola, Florida to meet a friend for my Exploration. From there, we traveled through Alabama to New Orleans, Louisiana and back to Florida through Mississippi. I loved seeing the southern culture and met a lot of new friends along the way. I enjoyed participating in the Congressional Award, setting goals for myself, and accomplishing them.

Henry Pawelczyk  
Frankfort, Illinois  
Advisor: Jeanne Bern

I volunteered at My Joyful Heart, a charity that provides personalized gift bags containing toiletries, school supplies, clothing, and toys to Chicagoland children. I have cleaned, restocked, sorted through donations, and assembled the gift bags to give hope and encouragement to the children. I have played piano for several years. I attend a weekly lesson and practice on my own. I have become a fairly talented pianist, know a wide variety of songs, learned a great deal about music theory, and appreciate the importance of practice. I am an avid sports fan. For my Physical Fitness, I focused on improving my basketball skills, specifically my shooting percentage. I practiced, completed drills, and played on several teams. I planned a five day/four night trip that took me to Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. I attended college, minor, and major league practices and games and spoke to a variety of personnel to increase my knowledge of sports analytics. Pursuing the Congressional Award has been the most rewarding part of my high school years.
Kamila Czachorowski  
Norridge, Illinois  
Advisor: Jennifer Walsh

For Voluntary Public Service, I tutored kids in my community during the summer and throughout the school year. For Personal Development, I completed over fifty books to improve my reading and writing skills and to become a well-read person. For Physical Fitness, I joined my school’s cross country team and significantly improved my mile time. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to the Smoky Mountains for my family where we zip-lined, visited a Cherokee Reservation, whitewater rafted, and went hiking. Overall, the Congressional Award helped me establish the confidence to achieve everything I set my mind to do.

George Kanellitsas  
Winnetka, Illinois  
Advisor: Steven Ripes  
Affiliation: People to People International

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Service at the YMCA in the mountains of Ketchum, Idaho. I promoted the importance of health, fitness and the environment by working with younger kids. I introduced them to a variety of subjects, from swimming and rock climbing to healthy food. For Personal Development, I studied music. I can now play the piano, drums, and will graduate with honors in cello. For my Physical Fitness, I trained for and learned the game of soccer. I started as a beginner and ended as an advanced level athlete. My Expedition was my first trip away from home. I completed the People to People Student Ambassador program. The program included studying, tests and meetings about each country we visited. While exploring England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, I experienced different cultures, geographic regions, history and customs. My experience in earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal taught me discipline, organization and the importance of giving back to my community. I am inspired to be a better citizen because of my experience.
Kyle Goggio  
*Naperville, Illinois*  
*Advisor: Gerard Oconer*  
*Affiliation: HOBY*

I volunteered as a facilitator, translator, and logistics coordinator at an international green conference in Macedonia. I also served as a special events facilitator and camp counselor at the local history museum and worked at the local children's museum. Finally, I was a volunteer peer juror in the Downer's Grove Peer Jury program. I learned to speak Macedonian by studying with tapes and native-borne speakers. I also learned about the field of paleontology through an extensive, multi-week program at the Field Museum in Chicago. I also trained for and completed 10K runs. I played on my high school hockey team for the past three years, winning the league championship and making it to the Illinois State Semifinals. In order to improve my skills, I attended hockey camps during the summer and trained independently. I planned out a trip to Croatia and Serbia. I really enjoyed meeting so many wonderful people while giving back to the community at the same time.

John Peters  
*Springfield, Illinois*  
*Advisor: Ed Davison*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. The majority of my service was done at the Computer Banc, a local charity that recycles computers for disadvantaged children and families. I also used amateur radio communications to support local events. My Personal Development activities included learning about electronics and amateur radio to pass my Amateur Extra license exam. I also worked as an office administrator at a local accounting firm. The Physical Fitness component was completed mainly at my local YMCA lifting weights, swimming and using fitness equipment. I also went bike riding with my family to improve my fitness. My Expedition activities included my first camping experience and a trip to Peoria, Illinois to learn more about history and automotive technology. The Congressional Award program influenced my life in many areas, especially fitness and community service.
Morgan Ludwig  
*Granger, Indiana*  
*Advisor: Matthew Halfpenny*

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work at my local hospital and through a club at my school. I started a club called Handwritten Hearts where each month we wrote and hand delivered over 100 cards for hospital patients. For Personal Development, I took weekly piano lessons and practiced frequently on my own. I mastered and performed Sonatina in F Major (Anh. 5, No. 2) by Beethoven and Sonata K545 in C Major by Mozart. For Physical Fitness, I practiced tennis regularly and participated in monthly match play. Playing USTA matches, high school games, and local tournaments helped improve my game. For my Expedition, I planned a historical trip through the streets of Boston and a wilderness exploration along the rugged coast of Maine. I prepared for this trip by researching historical figures and getting physically fit for the long hikes and bike rides in Acadia National Park. By participating in the Congressional Award, I gained knowledge about the world around me while developing many life and people skills.

Emma Moon  
*Granger, Indiana*  
*Advisor: David Martin*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of service by developing and participating in the club Handwritten Hearts. In this club, we write over 100 cards per month to patients in our local hospital. We personally deliver these cards to the patients, spending time with each one. For my Personal Development, I taught myself to play the guitar and ukulele and have learned many songs on each instrument. To improve my Physical Fitness, I played varsity tennis for my high school team and competed individually as a USTA player. My goal was to play to the best of my ability in at least six tournaments. For my Expedition, I planned an excursion to the Huntsville, Alabama area. I stepped out of my comfort zone and participated in activities such as cliff jumping, rock climbing, boating, and bat cave adventuring. I am honored to have participated in the Congressional Award program.
Michael Cheng  
*Carmel, Indiana*  
*Advisor: Bettina Cool*

In earning my Award, I dedicated over 300 hours as a youth volunteer at Conner Prairie Interactive History Park. Through this meaningful community service, I helped people - especially young children - understand Indiana’s rich past. For Personal Development, I spent my weekends preparing for the US Chemolympiad. Through private lessons and practice problems, I expanded my knowledge of many science concepts. I practiced Karate every week for my Physical Fitness. I improved my martial arts techniques and earned my junior level black belt in 2013. Through this process, I discovered the importance of commitment and self-discipline. Because of my passion for history, I planned a road-trip Exploration to the East Coast that included many significant historical sites. As a result, I now feel a stronger connection to our country’s heritage. My participation in the Congressional Award Program provided me a new direction in my life and I will continue to expand upon it as a proud citizen of the United States of America.

Hannah Crane  
*Richmond, Indiana*  
*Advisor: Linda Leas*

For my Congressional Award, I completed 440 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local hospital. As an information desk volunteer, I assisted both patients and visitors. I also walked and socialized animal shelter dogs to prepare them for their new owners. For Personal Development, I took horseback riding lessons over a three year period and paid for part of my lessons by working at a local stable. I also researched my family tree and learned of a relative who was in the Tower of London around the time of Anne Boleyn. For my Physical fitness activity, I walked on a treadmill a total of 320 miles - the distance from my city to Nashville, Tennessee. I also practiced weight training and doubled the amount of weight from when I started. I worked on a Virginia farm for my Exploration. I helped a family raise llamas, milk goats, retrieve eggs from a chicken coop and take care of their horses. I also learned to weave and knit. This program was a great opportunity to grow as a person, help people and develop new skills!
Michael Frye  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
Advisor: Mike Hochhalter  
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked on several service projects under the auspice of the Boy Scouts of America. The most outstanding of these was the week-long trail building session in the mountains of Philmont Scout Ranch. For Personal Development, I strengthened my leadership skills by leading Boy Scout camping trips and meetings from 2011-2014. I organized and directed the pouring of a sidewalk on my trail to Eagle Scout and I led my local chapter of Order of the Arrow in 2013. For Physical Fitness, I worked to overcome deformities in my legs as I prepared for my backpacking expedition. I did this by regularly lap swimming up to a mile and by hiking a total of nearly 400 miles. My Expedition was a week-long backpacking trip in the Sangre de Cristo sub-range of the Rocky Mountains at Philmont Scout Ranch. While there, I saw the beauties of unmarred nature and made friends from across the country. My time at Philmont was, without a doubt, the best of my life. My pursuit of the Congressional Award provided me with unforgettable experiences that I never would have discovered otherwise.

Maria Alverio  
Norwalk, Iowa  
Advisor: Mary Sorenson

Working at the Blank Park Zoo for my Voluntary Public Service was quite an education. Cleaning the animal’s habitats and attending to their diets and enrichment allowed me to educate the public about animal conservation and recreation. For Personal Development, I became a better sight reader of music. I took vocal, piano, and guitar lessons and sang in a select choir that was chosen to perform at the Vatican. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my stamina enough to play an entire soccer game. I trained very hard at home and practiced all year to be prepared once the season started. For my Expedition, I planned a trip for my family in Germany during the summer of 2011. I helped to raise money, created a budget, chose our accommodations, and decided which sites we saw. Completing the Congressional Award has helped me create reasonable goals and showed me that working on them, little by little, can lead to success.
Matthew Connell
Lenexa, Kansas
Advisor: Maureen Mahr
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In earning the Congressional Award, I volunteered hundreds of hours doing various service projects under the direction of National Honor Society. They involved, but were not limited to, assisting the elderly, school improvement projects, and hosting charity events. For my Personal Development, I participated in theatre productions to improve my acting skills and my stage presence. I devoted many days after school to rehearsals for a number of shows. For my Physical Fitness hours, I participated in cross country at my high school. Over the time of my participation, I worked on improving my 5K race time. For my Expedition, I took part in my Boy Scout troop’s trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. Over the course of the ten-day trek, my crew traversed the ranch and carried everything we needed on our backs. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was a great experience as it pushed me to be involved in numerous activities that helped me to become a better version of myself.

Patrick Connell
Lenexa, Kansas
Advisor: Maureen Mahr
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In my pursuit of the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I was fortunate enough to serve my community with several different organizations, including Boy Scouts of America. For Personal Development, I focused on improving my ability to play musical instruments. With the help of weekly professional lessons and hours of practice, I saw vast improvement in my skills. For Physical Fitness, I committed myself to running several miles every day in order compete in weekly 5K races during the fall cross country season. I also committed myself to improving my tennis game by taking professional lessons and participating in off-season practice sessions. For my Expedition, I went on a ten-day backpacking trek at the Philmont Scout Ranch. While carrying everything on our backs, we navigated over 65 miles of trails in the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico. The journey to achieve the Award has truly helped me grow as an individual, and for that I will always be grateful.
To achieve my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by working with the less fortunate youth of the Kansas City area. I volunteered at organizations around my community and raised money by participating in citywide drives. For my Personal Development goal, I took weekly guitar lessons with the aim to learn a new instrument. When I started the Award, I was a beginner but I am now an intermediate guitar player. For Physical Fitness, I improved my tennis skill level. I participated on my school's tennis team and strengthened myself through offseason in preparation for the next year. Finally, for my Expedition, I traveled to Lexington, Virginia, Washington, DC and New York City to explore American history. I visited many national monuments and museums and delved deeper into the roots of the United States of America. The Congressional Award encouraged me to participate in new activities I would not have been involved with otherwise and pushed me to engage in my community.

For my Voluntary Public Service, I dedicated my entire 400 hours at a local no-kill cat shelter. I spent the majority of my time cleaning cages, providing food and water to the cats, and helping the customers at the store. For my Personal Development, I learned about modeling and playing piano. Modeling taught me confidence and poise, while playing piano allowed me improve my music skills by playing more difficult pieces over time. To earn my Physical Fitness hours, I played volleyball and developed my skills on my club and high school teams. I improved my abilities in spiking and passing while also becoming a leader on the team. For my Exploration, I visited Frank Lloyd Wright houses in Missouri, Illinois, and Wisconsin. I analyzed the style Wright used to design his different houses and learned how his style influenced today's architectural culture.
Shivani Lokre  
*Overland Park, Kansas*  
*Advisor: Caroline Kill*

At the KVC Prairie Ridge Hospital, I planned birthday celebrations each month for foster children and children with psychological disorders. I started these birthday celebrations as a means of spreading some joy to children. In addition, I volunteered at Menorah Medical Center in various departments. I learned Bharatanatyam, which is one of India’s most popular classical dance forms. I gave frequent performances of various intricate and sophisticated dance pieces in order to gain experience and understanding so that my dance skills would continue to develop and improve. I worked to decrease my mile time by running at least three times a week for an hour and stretching thirty minutes prior every time. Along the way, I participated in various charity walks on a regular basis which also helped increase my stamina. I wanted to challenge myself by immersing into a much different culture and environment. I chose Costa Rica because I wanted to visit a Latin American country where I could use the Spanish I learned in school and actually be able to converse with the local people. By participating in the Congressional Award, I’ve learned how to balance multiple tasks and tackle challenges on a day-to-day basis.

Grace McGowan  
*Overland Park, Kansas*  
*Advisor: Caroline Kill*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at a local animal shelter. I also fostered seven dogs and cats for several weeks each. While volunteering, I helped socialize dogs while they waited to be adopted. For Personal Development, I took private voice lessons, sang in an a cappella group, and participated in a musical. I was able to perform several times in the community in addition to performing the musical. For my Physical Fitness, I swam on my school’s team and took dance lessons. For swimming, I participated in several swim meets and increased the yards I swam per practice. For dance, I went to a dance convention and performed in a recital. I went to Haiti for my Exploration. While I was there, I visited orphanages and played with the kids. Before my trip, I organized a fundraiser to buy chickens for the kids and raised $8,000.
Anna Rogers  
Somerset, Kentucky  
Advisor: Donna Kim Moore  
Affiliation: HOBY

For Voluntary Public Service, I co-founded a Special Olympics softball team and had two equipment drives for the players. I made blankets for the Community Outreach Center and co-founded “Happy Birthday to You,” which gives cupcakes to children in the Backpack Program and in Hospice. My Personal Development goal was to take weekly lessons to learn how to play the flute. I also had art lessons and entered the Congressional Art Competition. I rode my horse five days a week and had a lesson every Saturday with my trainer for Physical Fitness. My Exploration took me to Cherokee, North Carolina to visit the birth place of my Great Grandfather. I attended the World Festival of Native Peoples, which opened my eyes to the lives of America’s indigenous people. When I first started working towards my Gold Medal I didn’t think I could do it, but I realized that when you start with small goals, you can achieve whatever you want to over time.

Lorne Wasserman  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
Advisor: Dr. Dana Krempels

I logged over 900 hours of Voluntary Public Service at a wildlife center to help keep it operational and assist with caring for animals in need. I performed grounds maintenance, prepared animal diets and built habitats. I was employed for three years in a work-study position in college for my Personal Development. I was responsible for document management, indexing, filing, delivering mail, using the Disconnected Scanning System and training new staff. For Physical Fitness, I chose to ride my bike, as well as walk to class and off-campus destinations, instead of using a car. I strived to improve my strength and stamina in an eco-friendly way. My Exploration allowed me to explore Oklahoma City, which is home to a mixture of people, cultures and nature. I walked through Chinatown, Little Mexico, the Arts District, and the South Side, as well as natural areas and parks for a firsthand look at the local flora and fauna. I learned an invaluable amount about myself and the world through accomplishing my goals. I reinforced my belief that perseverance is key in handling and embracing challenges in life. I feel grateful and honored to be recognized as a recipient of the Congressional Award Gold Medal.
Abbie Foster
Longmeadow, Massachusetts
Advisor: Jen Fulcher
Affiliation: People to People International

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the Springfield Jewish Community Center. I worked with special needs children by helping them participate in recreational and enrichment programs similar to their age appropriate peers. For Personal Development, I started a business called Optimistic Sports. I make fashionable caps that display humorous and motivational phrases. For Physical Fitness, I improved my tennis skills and served as captain of my varsity team. I also did strength and endurance training to improve my abilities. For my Expedition, I participated as a People to People Student Ambassador by travelling through Spain, France, and Italy. Through the Congressional Award Program, I have expanded my appreciation of other cultures, gained confidence in athletic competition, experienced the struggles of starting a business and reinforced my passion for public service.

Cassandra Steele
Westfield, Massachusetts
Advisor: Jen Lavoine

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service for Quilts of Valor. I organized an event, which produced 132 quilt blocks, and I also sewed my own quilt to donate to our country’s veterans. For Personal Development, I improved my skills as a classical pianist. I learned one hundred praise songs and joined the church praise team as the Wednesday night keyboard player. For Physical Fitness, I set out to learn épée fencing. I trained at a fencing club to reach proficiency in the sport and competed in two fencing tournaments. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day, four-night trip to Washington, DC I learned how freedom was achieved in our country while navigating through the city and visiting various historical sites, museums and monuments. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal has been the first step on a life-long journey of serving others and being a vital citizen in this wonderful nation.
Catherine Fisher

Needham, Massachusetts

Advisor: Rev. George Hogan

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, both locally and nationally. My activities ranged from serving in homeless shelters, assisting rebuilding efforts in New Orleans and being a WBZ Spotter for the Boston Marathon. For Personal Development, I learned the art of being a coxswain for a highly competitive crew team. For Physical Fitness, I set out to run a fast mile and served as co-captain of the varsity cross country team. I also improved my golf game, became a certified lifeguard and learned to wind-surf. For my Expedition, I hiked the Appalachian Trail in New Hampshire and photographed the various plant and wild life. It was an exhilarating experiencing and required fortitude to continue during an unusual hail storm, making the journey both arduous and treacherous. The Congressional Award program encouraged me to develop my talents, serve others and experience the joy of life.

Jordan Helfand

Newton, Massachusetts

Advisor: Keith Stern

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 350 hours of Voluntary Public Service as a nursing home volunteer at Hebrew SeniorLife and as a laboratory assistant at Brown University. Through these activities, I was able to help others and advance my knowledge in healthcare and science. For Personal Development, I attended Red Cross courses in first-aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and participated in the Model UN and MIT Sports Analytic Conferences. I learned important skills that will help me in all aspects of life. For Physical Fitness, I focused on skill-building and fitness training for soccer and basketball. Finally, I completed two Exploration projects which provided intensive language and cultural immersion in Barcelona and Peru. I gained confidence in my abilities to travel and explore the world on my own. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an amazing experience and I have learned so much.
Ellen Ingwerson
Needham, Massachusetts
Advisor: Katharine Bullock
Affiliation: DiscoveryBound

I volunteered in reception and at social activities at the Needham Council on Aging. I also spent time every Friday as a “friendly visitor” matched with a 95-year-old woman in a nursing home. Finally, I served as a side-walker and lead-walker in a therapeutic riding program for special needs children. I increased my Christian Science spiritual contemplation and incorporated it more in my daily life by reading biographies of Mary Baker Eddy and the Bible. I also took photography courses at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and private art courses at a studio in my hometown. I shaved many seconds off my swimming times to place in the Top 20 individually in butterfly and freestyle at the Massachusetts State Championships. I was recognized for my 27.2 second butterfly leg of a medley relay that broke my high school’s record. For my Expedition, I planned a campout in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado by researching, organizing, and travelling. The five-day Expedition consisted of packing, hiking, cooking, and navigating. When I was just 14, I could not have imagined how much I would grow and gain in confidence over three short years thanks to the variety of hard work I took on.

Arjun Sridhar
Newton, Massachusetts
Advisor: Christopher Hardiman

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Work at Newton City Hall’s Election Commission and at my local community farm. At Newton City Hall, I helped improve the efficiency of local elections. At my local farm, I performed many tasks such as weeding and seeding. For Personal Development, I attended weekly violin lessons and played in multiple orchestras. I had been playing violin for some time before, but I elevated my playing to new heights. For Physical Fitness, I ran both Indoor and Outdoor Track throughout high school. In total, I ran eight ten-week seasons, each featuring six 150-minute practices a week. As a result of my training, I became much faster and set new personal records. For my Exploration, I planned a two-week trip to Cremona, Italy, where I went to learn violin from renowned musical experts. As an added bonus, I learned basic Italian and how to survive on my own in a foreign country. I had a great experience earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal. I learned that I can achieve great things as long as I work diligently.
Sabrine Keane  
*Boston, Massachusetts*  
*Advisor: David Lynn*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I committed myself to Voluntary Public Service by running a club at my school that raises awareness and funds to support the Romanian Children’s Relief Fund. Additionally, over the summer I worked at Triform, a community for people with mental handicaps. For Personal Development, I immersed myself in the world of Model United Nations. As one of three Deputy Secretary Generals, I helped organize a conference called PAMUN that took place at UNESCO’s headquarters. For Physical Fitness, I practiced yoga several hours a week. Over time my flexibility and strength vastly improved. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to the United Arab Emirates to better understand its culture and politics. I learned a lot about how to research and plan visits to a country in which I’ve never previously traveled. Although challenging, each experience was incredibly rewarding and the Congressional Award proved itself a great opportunity to grow.

Ashley Ryan  
*Hamilton, Massachusetts*  
*Advisor: Jennifer Flynn*

I volunteered for Canines for Combat Veterans as a weekend Puppy Raiser, training a dog to assist a veteran wounded in combat. I received monthly training and brought my dog to movie theaters, malls, airports, and sports games until he was ready to assist his new owner, a Marine with PTSD. I took voice lessons to improve my vocal clarity, increase my range, and harmonize better with others. I recorded songs with my sister, sang with my school’s choir, and have been singing with an acapella group for four years. I learned to become a stronger player in lacrosse by improving my passing skills. In sailing, I increased my boat speed in regattas by better anticipating gusts and wind shifts. In tennis, I improved my serve and understanding of the game. Finally, I trained to improve my stamina in soccer. I planned a trip to the American Southwest which included hikes in the Grand Canyon, the Sonoran Desert, the Red Rocks of Sedona, Monument Valley National Park, Antelope Canyon, and three Ancestral Pueblos built into mesas. I also navigated a boat through the canyons of Lake Powell. I was impressed that when others witnessed the effort I was putting in to achieving my goals, they would support me without me even needing to ask.
James Cook  
*Beverly Hills, Michigan*  
*Advisor: Christine Provost*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I worked at Gleaners Community Food Bank where I sorted and packed boxes of food that were given to families in need within the community. I also led and managed children and adult volunteer groups. For Personal Development, I weight trained three times a week with trainers and independently. I am now stronger which makes me less prone to injury while playing sports. For my Physical Fitness, I focused on being a contributing member of Birmingham United’s varsity lacrosse team by playing year-round and attending all practices and games. All of this hard work led me to the honor of serving as one of three team captains this year. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a trip to Chicago where I researched, studied and mapped out ten National Historical Sites. I learned about the beautiful architecture, history and traditions of the city that I hope to live in one day. I had an amazing experience earning my Award and I learned that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.

Noah Hicks  
*Romeo, Michigan*  
*Advisor: Carol Vinson*

One of my favorite parts about earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal was accumulating 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service while working at my local food pantry. I also had the opportunity to serve by repairing homes in Detroit. To achieve my Personal Development goals, I took guitar lessons, practiced diligently on my own, and led my band through practices and performances. I am now able to play a variety of music. For my Physical Fitness goal I decided that I wanted to become a great soccer player. I worked hard on my defensive skills and became one of the best players in the league. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to many places with rich musical history, including Detroit, Cleveland, and Nashville. I learned so much about the roots of modern music. This journey has been a great experience. Although it has been difficult at times, I am glad that I pushed through because I have become a better person through the Congressional Award.
Robert Hapke  
Burnsville, Minnesota  
Advisor: Val Fogolin

In earning my Award, I volunteered over 400 hours of service at a local food shelf. I mainly worked in the warehouse where I prepared packages of food for those in need. For Personal Development, I resumed practicing the piano after taking several years off and improved significantly. For my Physical Fitness, I worked on improving my alpine skiing ability. I began to practice more often and was able to compete at a higher level. For my Expedition, I hiked a mountain in Colorado where I learned how to survive outdoors and saw a variety of wildlife.

Anne-Marie Prochaska  
Senatobia, Mississippi  
Advisor: Adelia Gaines  
Affiliation: American Red Cross

My Voluntary Public Service enabled me to organize and recruit volunteers for a successful race raising over $4,500 dollars for a local emergency needs service. I asked the city, police, community leaders, service organizations and local businesses to help. For Personal Development, I desired to be in a top level choir and with practice and determination reached that goal. My Physical Fitness was highlighted by my attendance at a Red Cross Certification training for Lifeguarding and Boater Certification for boat driving. I became more alert and aware of my surroundings and developed a keen sense of anticipating the needs of others. I traveled to Hong Kong and China to explore Chinese culture, customs, and architecture for my Exploration. I felt comfortable with immersing myself in the culture because the people were very friendly and helpful. Working on the Congressional Award was legendary!
Jessica Wilson
Pearl, Mississippi
Advisor: Linda Mitchell
Affiliations: 4-H, Girl Scouts of the USA

While completing Voluntary Public Service, I served hot food and distributed canned goods to the homeless. In order to complete my Personal Development goal, I worked part-time at a veterinary clinic during high school to learn more about my career choice. I also started a small pet-sitting business with several clients. I became a member of my high school dance team, basketball team, track and field team, and tennis team for Physical Fitness. My Exploration was a mission trip to Peru and Chile for ten days where I climbed the Andes Mountains to distribute food and other items to the poor in a squatter’s camp there. While participating in the Congressional Award, I have gained a new understanding and appreciation of the world.

Rachel Wilson
Pearl, Mississippi
Advisor: Linda Mitchell
Affiliations: 4-H, Girl Scouts of the USA

My Voluntary Public Service was completed through a homeless shelter in my area. I distributed canned goods, toiletries, and clothing on an as needed basis to the homeless population. I showed sheep, horses, and cows for 4-H for my Personal Development goal. I cared for the health, groomed, and fed the animals. For Physical Fitness, I played on numerous sports teams in high school. These included the softball, basketball, track and field, and tennis teams. My Exploration was a trip to Chile and Peru for ten days where I climbed the Andes Mountains to distribute food and other items to the poor. We carried non-perishable foods and toiletries from house to house in an extremely impoverished area. While participating in the Congressional Award, I have learned many things about our world. One of which is that people are different but at the same time, we are all alike in many aspects.
Mary Ann Cahoon  
*Webster Groves, Missouri*  
*Advisor:* Helen Gannon  
*Affiliations:* Girl Scouts of the USA, St. Louis Irish Arts

In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered with the Webster Community Arts Foundation, promoting and supporting artists in my local community. I also performed and taught with St. Louis Irish Arts, educating people about traditional Irish music and culture. For my Personal Development, I worked to improve my Irish flute playing skills. I learned new tunes, techniques, and the history of Irish music and traditional composers. I studied yoga for my Physical Fitness. I began with basic positions and worked with my teacher to build up to a full mala of 108 consecutive sun salutations. For my Expedition, I spent a week living in a monastery and experienced the life of a nun. The highlight of the trip was helping the nuns take their therapy dog on his daily visits to the local hospital. Earning my Congressional Award was a lot of fun but it also taught me how to set goals and work towards achieving them.

Jacqueline Wong  
*St. Louis, Missouri*  
*Advisor:* Gail Workman  
*Affiliation:* Girl Scouts of the USA

To complete my 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, I divided my time volunteering with local organizations like the county library, Girl Scouts, Ladue Strolling Strings and National Honor Society. I am most proud of my involvement with our county libraries as we inspire future readers and learners through our events and programs. For Personal Development, I practiced violin and learned many new and challenging pieces. I now have a higher range on my violin and improved my bowing techniques. For Physical Fitness, I swam on my school team and independently over the summer. I also grew stronger by learning pilates through online videos. Finally, I completed a Pacific Northwest Exploration in Seattle, Washington. Highlights of my journey included camping in Olympic National Park and visiting Pike Place Market. The Congressional Award has changed my outlook on life and given me the opportunity to grow into a more prepared leader.
Emily Chiles  
*Kirkwood, Missouri*  
Advisor: Mary Walsh

To earn my Award, I volunteered at Mission Joplin and coordinated a coat drive in St. Louis for families in need of aid after the tornado of May 2011. I also helped build homes for residents in Puerto Rico. For Personal Development, I practiced on my own to prepare for international competition in Irish music, where I earned three bronze medals. Additionally, I broadened my journalism skills to become a better writer. For Physical Fitness, I trained to run 5K and 10K races. The money I raised supported the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and animal shelters. For my Expeditions, I spent a week on a farm in Southern Missouri. Through farming and cooking the food from the land, I gained a greater appreciation for hard work and dedication. The Congressional Award allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and realize I can accomplish things I never imagined myself doing.

Bri Flaherty  
*St. Charles, Missouri*  
Advisor: Rosemary Colandro  
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

For my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by building and planting a garden for the Head Start Preschool and helping the kids grow plants of their own. I also facilitated programs at the Greene County Juvenile Justice Center. For Personal Development, I worked at Baskin Farms, a horse farm where I learned how to train, show and take care of horses. I achieved my goal of being able to jump raised cross fences. For my Physical Fitness, I trained to complete a ten-mile race in under two hours. I gradually built up my speed and endurance before completing the race with six minutes to spare. Finally, I planned a multi-day canoe Expedition to the Canadian Boundary Waters. We traveled over 100 miles to enjoy the beautiful scenery, sleep under the stars, brave the elements and work as a team. Through setting and achieving my goals, I have proven to myself that as long as I go forward with confidence and motivation, almost anything is obtainable.
Merran Waller
Ballwin, Missouri
Advisor: Dr. Karen Eckert

To earn my Congressional Award, I helped start a non-profit organization called Forever Forest Group. FFG helped support the conservation work of the Friends of the Children’s Eternal Rainforest, protecting habitat to ensure the survival of many endangered species. For Personal Development, I dedicated my time to religious studies by committing to a daily Bible Lesson. For my Physical Fitness, I became a more accomplished soccer player on the varsity team. I attended a minimum of 90% of all practices and games and improved fundamental skill levels like passing accuracy. For my Expedition, I planned a five-night trip to Chicago for my family. I learned valuable skills like how to navigate a city, create an itinerary, find parking and book hotel reservations. Working towards the Congressional Award Gold Medal taught me that having the courage to wholeheartedly commit to something can allow you to accomplish any goal.

Mary Turney
Eureka, Missouri
Advisor: Helen Gannon
Affiliation: St. Louis Irish Arts

While volunteering, I used the skills I developed through St. Louis Irish Arts to entertain people living in health care facilities. Our music and dancing made people smile and brought them joy. For my Personal Development, I learned and practiced traditional Irish tunes on the harp. Learning about the composers and their lives gave me an appreciation of the history behind the music. I spent hours learning and perfecting Irish step dance to improve my Physical Fitness. My Exploration was to Derry, Northern Ireland. I enjoyed the challenge of planning meals and my own itinerary. It was great to see the people and experience the culture that I have spent many years of my life learning about. The Congressional Award experience has provided me with inspiring mentors who have helped me become the person I am. I have learned the value of commitment and following through to accomplish goals. I see the positive effects I can have on my community and hope to continue contributing to the common good in the future.
Sarah Kopsa  
*Elkhorn, Nebraska*  
*Advisor:* Jeremy Wissink  
*Affiliation:* Boy Scouts of America

To earn the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered at Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy. I enjoyed working with the horses and with the therapy students. The relationships that I have built with the students, their families and other volunteers are very valuable to me. For Personal Development, I advanced my knowledge in music theory and piano performance. I also served the elderly at a local care home as a Certified Nursing Assistant. Providing basic care and learning new skills gave me much satisfaction. For Physical Fitness, I was captain of my JV volleyball team. I worked to improve my passing, serving and attack strategies. For the Expedition, I went on a twelve day trek backpacking trek in New Mexico. As crew leader, I was responsible for ensuring the safety of the crew as well as planning and preparation beforehand. I am thankful that I was involved in the Congressional Award because I met leaders who are serving others, made valuable connections, and developed knowledge of my community.

Arbab Khalid  
*Las Vegas, Nevada*  
*Advisor:* Hikmet Erdogan  
*Affiliation:* Nevada Congressional Award Council

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by tutoring mathematics in my community and participating in various clubs. I tutored kids every weekend and, through clubs like National Honor Society, I participated in various other service projects. For Personal Development, I improved my public speaking ability and rhetoric in debating. I practiced every week, studied independently, and wrote cases. As a result, I’ve placed at many tournaments. For Physical Fitness, I practiced basketball at the recreational center and with the school team to improve my free-throws and dribbling. I achieved a 65% free-throw rate and improved overall. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a nine-day cultural trip to Turkey with the help of my Advisor. While in Turkey, we visited various cultural sites, saw palaces and mosques, ate delicious food, and experienced the wonderful culture. Earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal has taught me a lot and made me a better person.
Michael Negraru  
Henderson, Nevada  
Advisor: Hikmet Erdogan  
Affiliations: US Air Force, Nevada Congressional Award Council

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I spent approximately 500 hours of Voluntary Public Service working on projects related to National Honor Society and my local hospital. I worked at the hospital for eight hours a week and participated in events with NHS. My Personal Development enabled me to utilize my time properly while attending weekly Civil Air Patrol Meetings. Along with these meetings, I also learned how to fly, strengthen myself as a leader, and live by the Core Values. I am now proficient in healthy/ professional ethics. Partaking in Civil Air Patrol’s Colorguard, I have the intention of making a spot in Cadet Competition with the Colorguard team. Training in weekly cardio and riflery improved my Physical Fitness. I planned an Expedition to Boston for its historical significance. I visited both the Boston and the North Shore areas of Massachusetts and learned a lot about our nation’s history. My overall experience was very unique as I endured many challenges. I definitely recommend this program to anyone thinking about executing their goals.

Corbin Chance  
Millville, New Jersey  
Advisor: Donna Cedermark  
Affiliation: American Red Cross

In the past three years, I have dedicated over 500 hours of my time to the Holly City Family Center in Millville, New Jersey. I volunteered at the Center’s summer camp program and aquatics department. I worked long and hard to achieve my Personal Development goals of becoming a certified Water Safety Instructor. I developed a new perspective on Physical Fitness by working hard in the gym and on the field to make myself a better athlete. I used the knowledge I learned from my father to complete our camping Expedition. I was able to use these skills to plan a wonderful week for our family. I loved participating in the Congressional Award program and I am proud of who it has made me.
Frank Faverzani  
*Ocean City, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Katie Haviland*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of service. I volunteered with my public library’s young adult program, worked in the activities department of an assisted living home, and assembled skateboards for the Boys and Girls Club of Camden, New Jersey. For my Personal Development, I participated in a youth group at St. Damien Parish where I grew and developed my faith. For my Physical Fitness, I trained to improve my surfing ability in order to make the St. Augustine Prep surf team. For my Expedition, I planned a trip to the Grand Canyon during which I hiked overnight from rim to rim. I had an incredible experience earning my Gold Medal and I learned that I can achieve anything I set my mind to.

Matthew Halloran  
*Millville, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Donna Cedermark*  
*Affiliations: American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours with the American Red Cross and the Boy Scouts of America. I worked at countless blood drives and helped construct many useful things for the community. For Personal Development, I attended Tae Kwon Do classes and advanced from a white belt to a green belt. For Physical Fitness, I ran independently and on the varsity cross country team. I completed a half marathon in under two hours. Finally, I planned an Exploration trip to Quebec where I practiced my French learned about traveling abroad. Overall, the Congressional Award has made me a more knowledgeable person.
Juliana Kemenosh
Ocean City, New Jersey
Advisor: Donna Cedermark

To achieve the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I spent 400 hours volunteering at a local nursing home. I worked alongside staff to assist the residents in any way possible. For my Personal Development, I took an online Chinese lesson once a week and studied each weekend. I am now able to hold a conservation in Chinese. For my Physical Fitness, I worked out in the gym and on the water to become a better rower. I won four medals and significantly improved my 2K time. For my Exploration, I went on a trip to the Southwest. There, I visited the Grand Canyon, Zion National Park and Las Vegas. It was a fantastic experience to see such naturally beautiful places. Overall, the Congressional Award was an exceptional experience where I learned a lot about myself and the world around me.

Samantha Price
Millville, New Jersey
Advisor: Donna Cedermark

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service throughout the past three years. I volunteered at the Latch Key Program at Mount Pleasant and its Summer Fun Camp. For my Personal Development, I worked to improve my technique and tone quality on the saxophone. For my Physical Fitness, I mastered the necessary stamina and footwork to excel at soccer while participating on both my school and club teams. Finally, I planned an Expedition to Chincoteague and Assateague, Virginia. This trip pushed me outside of my comfort zone because I was responsible for myself and all three people that came with me. Throughout the entire Congressional Award experience I have gained a deeper appreciation for self-discipline, public service, hard work, and self-reliance. The Congressional Award has helped me understand that these are crucial aspects to being successful in life.
Chelsea Smith  
*Millville, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Donna Cedermark*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked as an usher at the historic Levoy Theater and promoted the arts in my community. For my Personal Development, I sought to improve the quality of my writing by drafting short stories and poems. I improved my stamina, agility, and endurance by taking tennis lessons as part of my Physical Fitness goal. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to historic Williamsburg to experience life during colonial times. The entire Congressional Award experience has allowed me to develop life-long relationships with members of my community.

Alana Gross  
*Ocean Township, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Ben Laskowitz*  
*Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA*

Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been one of my most fulfilling experiences. I volunteered over 400 hours at Seabrook Village, a retirement home and assisted living center. I created many relationships with the residents through helping them learn to use computers. Throughout high school I studied and practiced the Hebrew language. I became proficient enough to be named Master Torah Reader at my synagogue. I improved my Physical Fitness by decreasing my mile time through track and cross-country. My coach and teammates were a great support system for encouragement and motivation. My Exploration living with an Amish family and working on a farm was remarkable. Waking up at 4 A.M. each day to milk the cows was a contrast to my daily lifestyle and learning about a diverse culture so close to home was unforgettable. Setting goals for the Congressional Award has provided me motivation and passion for accomplishing innumerable future endeavors.
Avani Pavuluri
Robbinsville, New Jersey
Advisor: Jean Antinoro

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours at the Trenton Soup Kitchen, Rose Hill Assisted Living, and NAMI Mercer, an organization that raises awareness for people with mental illnesses. For Personal Development, I took art classes and painted on my own. I learned many mediums of art, including pencil drawing, oil pastel, and watercolor paints. Many of my art pieces were featured in art shows. For Physical Fitness, I trained as a level nine all-around gymnast. I have participated in gymnastics since I was three years old and have earned many state and regional titles. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a trip to New York City. We biked in Central Park, learned how to row, and shared many memorable city experiences. Working towards the Congressional Award has taught me that anything is possible if you believe in yourself and work hard.

Kevin Ng
Oradell, New Jersey
Advisor: Cochi Ho
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I performed over 400 hours of community service. I tutored high school and first year college students in mathematics, chemistry and music. I also worked with senior citizens and children at the Bergen Family Center of New Jersey. My Personal Development activities included being a drum major in high school, an undergraduate student trustee, a campus tour guide, and a student coordinator at a college civic engagement center. For Physical Fitness, I trained and rehearsed with my high school marching band and I played Ultimate Frisbee throughout every season in college. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned and completed a 50-mile Boy Scout canoe trek on the Delaware River, spending all four nights in a tent and camping alongside the river. I found earning my Gold Medal to be a very challenging and rewarding experience.
Mollie Somers  
*Monmouth Beach, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Katrine Rempel*

In earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 500 hours as an Ambassador with Soccer Without Borders (SWB). I served with both SWB Boston and SWB Nicaragua where we used soccer as a vehicle for positive change. In the area of Personal Development, I worked to further develop my leadership and problem solving skills by obtaining a Prefect position on my boarding school campus. For my Physical Fitness, I set a goal to run my personal best in the 800M. I trained hard on my high school track team, improved my nutrition and set short distance goals. Finally, for my Expedition, I explored the Mid-Atlantic states and their history in Early America while biking from New Jersey to Washington, DC. I visited the local libraries, researched my area of interest, mapped out my trip and completed several training bike rides beforehand. Overall, I have gained a stronger sense of what it means to be a leader, developed new passions, improved the community around me, and learned to trust my instincts when stepping outside my comfort zone.

John Dadouris  
*Annandale, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Denise Kenny*

I coached and officiated youth soccer, lacrosse and karate to achieve my Voluntary Public Service. I also established a collection and distribution network for used lacrosse equipment. In achieving my Personal Development objectives, I participated in Destination Imagination. I improved my skills in public speaking and acting and increased my creativity through problem solving. As a student-athlete, I appreciate the importance of physical fitness and education. I trained and played lacrosse, soccer and competed in Isshinryu Karate. For my Exploration, I traveled to Jamaica with lacrosse equipment I collected. While studying the culture and local customs, I met with the children and their families to share the common language of sports. I was able to set goals and work hard to achieve them. It was a great feeling of accomplishment when I earned my Congressional Award.
Samual Kuster  
*Clinton, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Janet Riley*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by soliciting donations and managing a project to install solar panels on the roof of an orphanage in Colombia. During the summers, I served at camps in underprivileged neighborhoods in Delaware, Rhode Island, and Virginia. For Personal Development, I attended weekly piano lessons for several years that culminated in recitals on stage for both solo and duet performances. I also completed a three week summer college prep course in Game Theory to better understand the application of mathematics in real world situations. For my Physical Fitness portion, I dedicated myself to improving my golf handicap from 16 to 7 through lessons and continuous practice. I am now a leading member of our High School golf team, which qualified for the New Jersey State Tournament during both my junior and senior years. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned an eight day golf trip abroad with my father and grandfather. We visited castles in Grenada, toured historic Sevilla, and saw the Rock of Gibraltar. I have truly enjoyed the challenge of developing personally in the four different program areas. I especially have a sense of accomplishment around the volunteer service I provided to the community, both at home and abroad.

Taylor Murphy  
*Bedminster, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Cheryl Machusky*  
*Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA*

The goal of my Voluntary Public Service was to assist people in difficult transitions. I worked with organizations who gave support to those facing homelessness, poverty, teen peer pressure, and debilitating illness. I then created and donated sets of relaxation activity cards. Under the direction of my mentor, Karen Santry, and by using techniques I learned online, I created a collection of jewelry using pieces reclaimed from vintage stores and rummage sales. I also wrote and illustrated a book that was inspired by fables that I remembered from childhood. To achieve my goal of becoming a Division 1 hurdler, I overhauled my preseason strength, speed and endurance workouts by researching new methods and finding mentors. By the end of my junior year, I was competing at the state and national championships and was recruited by a Division 1 university. I chose to travel to the South for my Exploration, where I immersed myself in the food, conversation, religion, art and history. While different from where I grew up, I truly valued the open and honest conversations.
I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by helping to feed, cloth, and connect with homeless people. I volunteered at Hope Ministries, a food pantry in Wayne, New Jersey and I built homes with Habitat for Humanity. For my Personal Development, I took cuatro lessons, which is a native Puerto Rican guitar. I have learned how to play with ease and can now read notes for this instrument. For Physical Fitness, I worked hard to improve my soccer abilities and gained a better understanding of the game. I also went on to play college level soccer. I planned a five night stay at a homeless rehabilitation center, The Timothy House, in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I created a YouTube documentary of the men’s lives and learned that they are ordinary men with a story. The Congressional Award was a humbling and life changing experience.

Daniel Cho

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey

Advisor: Brian Hall

I volunteered in the Korean Medical Program, a program made to address the gaps in language and culturally appropriate health care services of the Korean-American population in the greater New York and New Jersey area. When I began high school, I set a goal to learn more about the United Nations Children Fund. I joined the UNICEF club as a freshman and became actively involved. I grew as a leader throughout my involvement and eventually became President of the club. I wanted to improve my running abilities and footwork, so I began an intensive tennis training regimen. The training was tough but rewarding. I served as captain of my varsity tennis team and fulfilled my running goals. I spent my Exploration in Appalachian, Virginia, learning about life from Hazel Littrell in the coal-mining town of Big Stone Gap. Comparing the two cultures of my home in New Jersey to Big Stone Gap was an incredible experience. Earning the Congressional Award has been a long and rewarding journey and I have grown greatly over the past four years during my pursuit of the Gold Medal.
Matthew Grillo  
Secaucus, New Jersey  
Advisor: Cathy Wolf  
Affiliation: People to People International

Along my amazing journey I was able to help so many people in need. Over the 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, I helped in soup kitchens, packed hygiene supplies, and tutored at my high school. Through Personal Development, I enhanced my leadership skills and became more discerning while working with others. Achieving my Physical Fitness allowed me to stay in shape and work with a team in order to succeed together. Being fortunate enough to have traveled on an Expedition to Japan enabled me to learn about different cultures and was a memorable experience. The journey to earn this Award has molded me into the better, happier, and more grateful person that I am today.

Stephanie Quinton  
Morris Plains, New Jersey  
Advisor: Fatima Latif  
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I completed over 400 hours of community service through Alpha Phi Omega, Phi Sigma Sigma and independently. This included planning a 5K, assisting at a soup kitchen and participating in Relay for Life. My Personal Development goal was to develop skills in fund development. I served as VP of Fundraising for the American University Dance Marathon and VP of Fundraising for Alpha Phi Omega, raising over $7,500 collectively, and planning a Rock-A-Thon for Phi Sigma Sigma, raising over $1,000. My Physical Fitness goal was to get in better shape. I achieved that by training for a 5K that I would have been unable to complete beforehand. I also gained muscle strength through hiking. My Exploration included traveling to various Caribbean Islands to learn about their cultures and food. This included going on expeditions to significant landmarks, trying authentic food and observing how residents in these countries live. Earning the Gold Medal took a long time but it has helped push me forward to do great things!
Thomas Sych  
*Madison, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: John Kennedy, Ph.D.*  
*Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America*

I dedicated over 700 hours of Voluntary Public Service to helping develop an annual multi-site Blood Drive that occurs every ‘Black Friday.’ This event now has seven locations, collecting 200 pints annually and over 1,000 pints total. My Personal Development goal was to increase my leadership capabilities by becoming a volunteer firefighter in my hometown. I accomplished this by completing all Level 1 training and certification. In working towards my Congressional Award, I first focused on my Physical Fitness goal of overcoming health issues that came with my bout with Hodgkin’s Disease. These hours spent working out allowed me to successfully accomplish the remainder of my goals. My Expedition was to complete a backpacking trek at Philmont Scout Ranch in the mountains of New Mexico. For this effort, I received the 50 Miler Award and the Venturing Silver Medal. The Congressional Award program was key in achieving my goals!

Amrita Mojumdar  
*Monmouth Junction, New Jersey*  
*Advisor: Stephen Dentler*

For my Gold Medal, I completed my Voluntary Public Service hours with the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. I helped launch an arts and crafts program and delivered get well cards to patients with cancer. For Personal Development, I interned with former Congressman Rush Holt at his District Office. The experience reaffirmed my interest in studying politics and provided valuable insight into the responsibilities of a US Representative. For Physical Fitness, I decided to improve my cycling speed and stamina by setting weekly goals. For my Expedition, I had the opportunity to organize a memorable trip to Nova Scotia. My family and I explored the landscapes and learned about the island’s rich cultural heritage. Through the Congressional Award experience, I learned the importance of achieving my goals and managing my time efficiently.
Kavya Tangella  
*South Setauket, New York*  
*Advisor: Sharvani Srinivas*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I performed Indian Classical Dance for the community. I also volunteered my time to non-profit organizations that promote human values by acting in dramas, singing, and serving food to the homeless. For Personal Development, I spent over 200 hours taking classes and practicing for an Indian Classical Singing performance that I plan to complete in the summer of 2016. By preparing for this intense performance, I learned key life skills such as perseverance and commitment. For Physical Fitness, my goal was to practice and improve my stamina so that I would be able to dance continuously for two hours. With continuous practice and dedication, I was able to improve my stamina enough to achieve this goal. Finally, for my Exploration, I organized a trip to Washington, DC in order to learn more about the history of the United States by going to museums and historical landmarks. Working towards my Gold Medal has taught me the value of dedication and independence, both of which will motivate me for the rest of my life.

Nicole Farese  
*Sayville, New York*  
*Advisor: Michael Pace*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I worked with and now help run a non-profit organization called “Operation Sports Equipment.” I volunteered more than 400 hours to collecting, refurbishing and distributing more than 15,000 pieces of sports equipment to underprivileged sports organizations in nearby areas and other countries. For my Personal Development, I strived to improve my soccer and softball ability after an ACL injury and operation. I overcame this setback by constantly practicing on my own and ultimately earning roster spots on my high school varsity teams. My passion to get back to playing sports after my ACL injury allowed me to fulfill many hours of physical therapy for my Physical Fitness activity. For my Expedition, I planned and traveled to England during Fashion week where I immersed myself in the industry’s events. I was able to gain first hand experience that I plan to use in my college studies and career. The Congressional Award program has been a life-changing experience. It has helped me challenge myself, give back to my community and prove to myself that I am truly capable of anything.
**Arjun Kapoor**  
*Old Westbury, New York*  
*Advisor: Shobha Chheda*

To earn my Gold Medal, I founded and ran Project Kibaoni, a charity which supports a school in Tanzania. I also volunteered at my County Executive’s Office, tutored fellow students at my school, and aided a local professor in running his research program. Overall, I completed more than 1,200 hours of Public Service. For my Personal Development, I mastered the oboe. In doing so, I practiced diligently every day and participated in a variety of orchestras and bands such as the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra, All County Orchestra and Band, and NYSBDA State Level Band. To complete my Physical Fitness goals, I practiced tennis two or three times a week to increase my consistency, serve speed, and accuracy. It was with dedicated practice that my abilities improved greatly, surpassing my expectations and goals. Finally, eager to immerse myself in a new culture, I planned an extended Expedition trip to China with a friend. My two most memorable experiences were climbing a famous mountain, Mount Tai, and touring a world-class supercomputing facility in Jinan. Earning the Congressional Gold Award has truly been a wonderful and enriching experience, and it has helped shape who I am today.

**Ryan Buraus**  
*Staten Island, New York*  
*Advisor: Robert Gullikson*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed over 450 hours of Voluntary Public Service. I volunteered at a summer camp, the New York City Marathon, a soup kitchen, Ronald McDonald House and other community events. I completed over 585 hours of Personal Development activities. I took piano lessons and practiced at home. I also achieved the rank of Eagle Scout through the Boy Scouts of America. For my Physical Fitness, I dedicated over 280 hours as a member of my high school bowling team and practiced on my own each week. For my Expedition I planned a ten-day trip to Maine with my family. While we were there, we visited state parks and photographed nature, wildlife, and light houses. We also visited the State Capitol in Augusta and a county fair. While earning my Gold Medal, I experienced many new adventures and was able to learn and expand my knowledge across many areas.
Jordan Marino  
**Staten Island, New York**  
*Advisor: Bob Gullickson*

I volunteered over 400 hours at a summer camp and with the Special Olympics program in my area. I have learned never to underestimate what the human spirit can achieve when given love and support. I completed my Personal Development goals by participating in the Holy Rosary Theater Group. Balancing responsibilities, learning time management and building confidence as a performer were lessons that I learned through this group. For my Physical Fitness, I spent 1,300 hours dancing at my local dance center. I was also a member of the Moore Catholic Cheerleading Team where I served as captain for one year. Dedication and commitment are valuable lessons I learned from these activities. For my Exploration, I planned a five-day trip to Washington, DC. This trip exposed me to many new experiences. Being a part of the Congressional Award Program has challenged and inspired me. It has given me the opportunity to be part of something that I will never forget.

Michael Javier Ivkov  
**New York, New York**  
*Advisor: Cath Gulick*

Receiving the Congressional Award has prompted me to reflect on the virtues of voluntary service. I worked with elderly citizens in New York City by volunteering at a nursing home and assisting senior immigrants who faced language and transportation difficulties. I set out to improve my knowledge and appreciation of Jazz by developing my keyboard, vibraphone, and synth skills. By learning and performing a repertoire of songs, my work in the field of Jazz improvisation and Jazz studies has enabled me to understand the wonderful intricacies of the music, its culture and history. Rebounding from a summer of research on a desert island, I improved my physical fitness by boosting my weight lifting capacity and cardiovascular stamina. I also had the pleasure of planning a trip to Ecuador. I practiced my Spanish, travelled to different townships across the Northern foothills (including villages in the Eastern cloud forest), and immersed myself in the rich history and culture of Quechua people.
Kobi Axelrod
West Nyack, New York
Advisor: Diane Fink

For my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at a nursing home where I run a critical thinking activities group to combat dementia. I also volunteer for my local ambulance corps assisting EMTs on calls and for Special Olympics, helping individuals with special needs learn tennis. For my Personal Development goal, I took lessons and practiced daily to improve my piano skills. I participated in the annual New York State School Music Association festival where I proudly reached Level 6, the highest level. For my Physical Fitness goal, through instruction and practice, I made the varsity tennis team throughout high school and earned a position playing singles and doubles matches. For my Expedition, after considerable independent planning and preparation, I helped build a greenhouse for an impoverished community in Peru. It was life-changing to be immersed in a foreign culture, navigate language barriers, witness such poverty and provide aide. In earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned that with hard work and perseverance, I can experience great personal growth and success.

James Grubbs
Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Advisor: David Hoyle
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service, I worked with the Appalachia Service Project, Special Olympics, and North Carolina Botanical Gardens. My goal for Personal Development was to obtain the rank of Eagle Scout within my Boy Scout Troop. This involved over 100 nights of camping, 200 hours of community service, and completing my Eagle Project, which aided the study of the eating habits of deer. In order to meet my Physical Fitness goals, I swam with my school’s varsity swim team for five years. In my third year, I improved enough to be on my team’s A relays, went on to break every school relay record, and won the state championship for the men’s 200 yard freestyle relay. For my Expedition, I went to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico, and was elected the Trek Leader for a 67 mile trek with a group of five other Scouts and three adults. I have truly enjoyed earning the Congressional Award, but the part that has meant the most to be was getting to know so many different people along the way.
Eli Parker  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina  
Advisor: Serena Hutcheson  
Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America

For Voluntary Public Service, I served as a junior curator at the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History and as a Junior Interpreter at the Duke Homestead State Historic Site. I helped lead tours, assisted group visits to these museums, and helped conduct special events. To meet the requirements for Personal Development, I interned in a toxicology laboratory where I studied the development of the thyroid gland. I participated in several regional conservation projects throughout North Carolina with organizations such as the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences, MYLES for Science, and the Boy Scouts of America. My Physical Fitness goals allowed me to participate in my school’s golf and soccer teams. Perhaps the most fun aspect of earning this Gold Medal was my Expedition to Yellowstone National Park. I learned so much about the geology, natural habitat, and ecology of this great national park from renowned experts in the field. Thank you to the staff at the Congressional Award office for implementing such an effective program that helped me organize my extracurricular activities in a way that I improved myself and enriched my community.

J. Parker Garrison  
Indian Trail, North Carolina  
Advisor: Denise Hooks

To attain my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered over 400 hours at both the Matthews Help Center and Mecklenburg County Teen Court. My work in the thrift shop included assisting with donations and stocking and displaying new items. At Teen Court I worked with first time juvenile offenders, serving as a juror, clerk of court, bailiff, and eventually an attorney. For my Personal Development, I further explored the field of cybersecurity by participating in camps and online courses. For Physical Fitness, I increased my endurance and physical abilities by decreasing my mile time by 17%, participated in a 5K, and increased my biking endurance to marathon distances. My Expedition encompassed a trip to Silicon Valley where I explored the Computer History Museum, some major technology companies, and the birthplaces of Hewlett-Packard and Apple. I included a trip to San Francisco to explore the technology of the cable car and the infamous Golden Gate Bridge.
Brister Jones  
*Matthews, North Carolina*  
*Advisor: Wade Tapp*

Through my Voluntary Public Service goal, I had the privilege of serving the homeless with weekly Sunday morning pancake breakfasts and annual coat drives. At 4:30 a.m. every Sunday morning you will find me at the grill, flipping pancakes for around 300 homeless men and women of my community. My Personal Development goals were to learn scenic photography and how to play the lap harp. For my Physical Fitness goal, I worked on my basketball skills, sharpening my defensive and rebounding abilities. My Expedition was a 23-day camping adventure with 80 other teens exploring 22 states. During the trip we divided into groups to buy and prepare meals for over 80 people, clean the campground, pack the bus each morning, and research the places we were visiting. Earning the Congressional Award has been a time of discovery and engagement for me, where I have learned the joy serving others and stretching myself to try new things.

Zachary Maxwell  
*Matthews, North Carolina*  
*Advisor: Wayne Sumar*  
*Affiliations: American Red Cross, YMCA*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I worked with Friendship Trays to help feed the needy in our community. It was a very rewarding experience that made me a better person and made me more aware of others’ needs. I studied sculpture for a year and entered and won many sculpture contests for Personal Development. For Physical Fitness, I worked out at the YMCA, lifting weights and running on the treadmill. I hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon for my Expedition. The Grand Canyon was amazing and extremely beautiful. Hiking the site was a very rewarding experience that I will never forget.
Hunter Smith  
*Charlotte, North Carolina*  
*Advisor: Lisa Currier*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To earn the Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service repairing homes that were in poor condition for struggling families. I also volunteered weekly at a local soup kitchen; serving free, healthy lunches to those in need. For Personal Development, I worked as a Veterinarian Assistant. This gave me invaluable hands-on experience to learn and pursue my interest in veterinary medicine. My Physical Fitness goal was to run and bicycle each week to improve my cardiovascular strength and overall physical health. Finally, for my Expedition, I traveled to several provinces throughout China. I explored and immersed myself in China’s rich culture, and it gave me a new appreciation of my country and the opportunities we are given. It has been such an honor to participate in the Congressional Award. I believe the lessons I have learned while working toward the Gold Medal will be invaluable in my life as I continue to strive to make our world a better place.

Rachel Stogner  
*Matthews, North Carolina*  
*Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley*  
*Affiliation: Key Club*

To earn my Congressional Award, I dedicated my Voluntary Public Service towards the care for dozens of birds of prey, preparing their food and cleaning their aviaries. While there, I educated the public about raptor conservation and the threats these birds face. For Personal Development, I learned to identify over 100 local tree species. To gain further knowledge into their biology, I helped to create a dichotomous key and studied several books about dendrology. To complete the Physical Fitness portion, I hiked several local mountains in various weather conditions. Eventually, I increased my endurance to over ten miles in a few hours. Finally, for my Expedition, I hiked 40 miles of the Appalachian Trail in the Shenandoah National Park. Although it rained for the majority of the trip, I was able to take photos, experience dynamic scenery, and have a glimpse of the unique culture that surrounds the trail.
Emma Taylor-Brill  
*Charlotte, North Carolina*  
*Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I shared my passion for science with children as counselor at Carolina Raptor Center’s summer camp and as event coach for local Science Olympiad teams. I was even asked to serve as Science Fair judge and as event supervisor at Science Olympiad tournaments in my community. For Personal Development, I learned to play the guitar. After earning money to purchase an instrument, I taught myself basic chord patterns and then began to work with an instructor to learn music theory, finger picking, and multiple songs. I took up the sport of competitive rock climbing for Physical Fitness. My Expedition was a camping trek through the Shenandoah National Park section of the Appalachian Trail, covering 40 miles in four days. Participating in the Congressional Award program inspired me to continue with a lifelong love of learning, a heart for community service, an appreciation for health and fitness, and a willingness to get outside my comfort zone.

Seth Taylor-Brill  
*Charlotte, North Carolina*  
*Advisor: Elizabeth Hartley*

For Voluntary Public Service, I set the goal to share my passion for strategy games with children by serving 520 hours as a chess coach at a local school and as a counselor at Strategemics summer camps. For Personal Development, I mastered at least two new Science Olympiad events each year, studying independently and meeting weekly with my partners to prepare. For Physical Fitness, I took up the competitive sport of rowing. Last year I made it to Nationals, and next year I hope to be recruited to row in college. For the Exploration requirement, I planned and executed a nine-day trip of Spain, traveling to Barcelona, Sevilla, Granada, and Madrid with my dad. My trip across Spain felt like visiting three different countries, each with its own take on the world. The Congressional Award program gave me the opportunity to set and work toward challenging goals. I was able to share my passion with others and to develop new interests.
Brandon Paul
Lexington, North Carolina
Advisor: Pamela Parker

My Voluntary Public Service involved not only founding the only academic team at my school, but helping start debate programs at five other high schools in my county by leading simulations, facilitating countywide Model United Nations and Model Congress competitions, and mentoring new leaders. For Personal Development, I traveled to South Korea on a full scholarship, participated in Youth Leadership Davidson County, attended the summer programs in science and math, and created two music albums of my own original compositions. For the Physical Fitness portion, I monitored my eating and physical activity to lose 40 pounds while establishing a workout routine. Finally, for my Exploration, I traveled to Washington, DC to live the life of a government worker for one week. I traveled to work by Metro, shadowed at the State Department for three days, and spent time on Capitol Hill with Senator Richard Burr’s office. I absolutely loved the opportunity to be involved in my community and grow as a person, both mentally and physically.

Rajat Bhageria
Cincinnati, Ohio
Advisor: Megan Brenner
Affiliation: HOBY

I experienced the importance of “paying it forward” by volunteering over 700 hours at my local hospital, library, and HOBY conference. It’s been an extremely fulfilling opportunity to help others only for the sake of helping. The Personal Development portion of the Award inspired me to found CafeMocha.org, an online writing community that allows young writers to publish and share their writing with the world. The Physical Fitness portion pushed me to establish a healthy exercising regimen; nowadays I exercise at least three times a week. Similarly, my Expedition permitted me to explore ten European countries. Travelling and exploring the world is now one of my favorite passions. None of this, not CafeMocha, not my intrinsic love for volunteering, not my physicality, and not my international experiences, would be possible without the Congressional Award. I am extremely thankful for all these experiences and implore all my fellow peers to participate in the life-altering challenge.
Atalie Bale  
Lewis Center, Ohio  
Advisor: Suzanne Beighley

In pursuit of the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to international aid organizations. I crocheted sweaters, made baby layette packages, and packaged Christmas gifts for people in need. For Personal Development, I studied and practiced photography and portraiture, laying the foundation for the portrait business I own today. In Physical Fitness, I trained up to three times a week in martial arts and I achieved the goal of earning my black belt in Tae Kwon Do. For my Expedition, I planned and executed a seven-day camping trip in the Canadian Rockies. I hiked a total of 41.7 miles, traversed the Columbia Icefield, learned how to cook over an open fire, and photographed scenery and wildlife. The Congressional Award taught me perseverance, how to dream, and elements of living a balanced lifestyle.

Felix Guo  
Tulsa, Oklahoma  
Advisor: John Tai  
Affiliation: HOBY

To complete the Congressional Award, I participated in tutoring the Jenks Middle School’s MathCounts team every week. I developed a lesson plan every week and taught children not only the formulas but also problem-solving techniques that can help them succeed. For Personal Development, I chose to pick up the saxophone and began taking private lessons. After many years, I am now able to play difficult saxophone repertoire. For Physical Fitness, I wanted to begin exercising regularly by playing badminton weekly and taking lessons. Since then, I competed in a badminton tournament and won mixed doubles with my friend. Finally, for my Exploration portion, I planned a trip to Singapore. I had the opportunity to explore the cultural and entertainment destinations of the tropical country.
Biraspati Adhikari
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum
Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program

I volunteered to organize students at Penn State University through the formation of the Bhutanese Student Organization. I also helped build literacy skills at the children's library and participated in several blood drives. For my Personal Development, I focused on career development by attending career fairs and participating in leadership trainings. I developed my communication and networking skills to become a better leader. For my Physical Fitness, I improved my stamina and running time. I practiced soccer four days a week to improve my skills and increased my speed by completing an eight-minute mile. I planned and participated in a five-day, four-night camping experience and successfully completed ropes course challenges in the Pocono Mountains. This experience challenged me to try something different and I learned the value of being part of a team. The Congressional Award Program has given me new leadership and problem-solving skills and has shown me the many benefits of teamwork.

Radhika Adhikari
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum
Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program

I volunteered at the Migrant Education Afterschool Program and Saturday Program by helping students learn English. I also served as an interpreter at the Bhutanese community center and helped keep my neighborhood streets clean. For my Personal Development, I focused on afterschool activities that would improve my English, such as culinary class, dance club, and tutoring. I learned how to manage my time and participation in these activities. For my Physical Fitness, I improved my blocking skills in soccer by playing every day. I became a much better defensively and have increased my confidence as a team player. I planned and participated in a camping trip in the Pocono Mountains and successfully completed all ropes course challenges. This experience made me stronger. The Congressional Award Program showed me how much the community needs and how I am able to help. I learned how to adapt to my environment and thrive.
Jamuna Bista  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 
Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum  
Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program  

I volunteered in my community as an interpreter for families and helped them gain access to social services. I interpreted for doctors at bi-weekly health clinics and at the Bhutanese Association of Philadelphia Community Center. For my Personal Development, I led weekly meetings with Bhutanese families to educate adults on a variety of topics, including public transportation, health access, social services, and other resources. I practiced dance three days a week as well as weekends to improve my physical fitness. By achieving this goal, I am able to maintain my cultural heritage and perform our dances with more accuracy. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day camping and ropes course experience in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. This experience taught me how to use climbing gear and I was able to complete multiple adventure challenges. The Congressional Award Program gave me the experience to become a community leader and accomplish all of my goals. I learned how to better communicate with people and to always help people in need.

Rupa Dulal  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum  
Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program  

I volunteered at several Penn State blood drives and served as an interpreter at the hospital and social service agencies. I helped many people learn how to navigate the local services and taught them useful phrases. I joined the Student Health Awareness club so that I could learn about bio health, physical fitness and the great work accomplished by the Red Cross Society. I improved the number of technical moves I can perform in cultural dance by practicing three days a week. I was able to perform in our cultural program with greater control and technique. My Expedition involved planning a primitive camping experience and adventure challenge in the Pocono Mountains. I learned how to deal with the cold weather and completed the high ropes course in rainy and windy conditions. The Congressional Award Program gave me the chance to help the community and learn to deal with challenges in a positive way.
Devika Gurung  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum*  
*Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program*

I volunteered in my community to help new immigrants with translation and interpretation. I interpreted at doctor’s offices, translated household bills, and helped recent refugees feel comfortable in their new environment. I focused on increasing my knowledge of career opportunities and increasing participation in multicultural programs. I attended many workshops at Career Services and multicultural clubs to improve my leadership and communication skills. For my Physical Fitness, I improved my stamina and skill as a right midfielder in soccer. Each day I dedicated time to running and footwork. I faced many challenges and succeeded over the course of my camping Expedition in the Pocono Mountains. I successfully completed all of the ropes course challenges. The Congressional Award Program helped me become a leader in my community, improved my communication skills, and increased my capacity to help others.

Karna Karki  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum*  
*Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program*

I volunteered in my neighborhood at afterschool programs to help children with their homework. I also interpreted for Nepali-speaking community members at the hospital and community center. I obtained my Child Development Associate license so that I could get a part-time job. I attended training every day after school for eight months and learned how to positively interact with children. I improved my two-mile run time from 45 to 30 minutes. I ran weekly and also played soccer to improve my heart rate and blood pressure. I planned and participated in a five-day, four-night camping and ropes course Expedition in the Pocono Mountains. I had to learn how to live without electricity and work together as a team. Participating in the Congressional Award Program gave me the chance to help the community and improve my ability to help myself.
Basanta Lamichhane  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum*  
*Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program*

I volunteered at the Migrant Education Program to tutor students in math, science, and English. I helped at the Bhutanese Center teaching dance programs and interpreting for people as needed. I joined the afterschool Culinary Arts program to learn how to cook a variety of food. I attended three days a week for eight months. I improved my offensive wing position by increasing shots on goal from 30 to 40% which led to playing on the school and community soccer teams. For my Expedition, I planned a camping and adventure trip in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. I was able to overcome my fear of the high ropes and other challenges by working as a team. The Congressional Award Program taught me how to overcome the challenges that I am facing in life.

Ferdinand Luhur  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum*  
*Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program*

I performed my Voluntary Public Service by working at the school library, donating food, and assisting school cleanups and cultural festivals. By volunteering, I feel safer and enjoyed building a better community. My English has greatly improved through my Personal Development activities. I participated in SAT prep class for eight months to improve my English and to learn more vocabulary words. I improved my strength and stamina by joining Student Run Philly Style and running every Saturday morning. I participated in the Broad Street Run and completed ten miles in 1 hour and 42 minutes. My Expedition consisted of camping and successfully completing a ropes course challenges in the Pocono Mountains. I finished all challenges – including Giant’s Ladder - without fear. The Congressional Award Program helped me achieve my personal goals and increased my confidence.
Ni Em Par  
*West Chester, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum*  
*Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program*

I volunteered for the Migrant Education Program as a Teacher Assistant for the 2nd and 3rd grade classrooms’ Saturday and summer programs. I also served as an interpreter at monthly health clinics. For my Personal Development, I completed afterschool technology training programs to learn Microsoft Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and Prezi to be better prepared for college. I improved my stamina by training for the Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon, Broad Street Run, and Philadelphia Marathon and increasing my distance from one mile to 26.2 miles. I planned and participated in a primitive camping Expedition and successfully completed a challenging ropes course in the Pocono Mountains. This experience taught me I want to be a positive example to others. The Congressional Award Program helped me gain confidence to say “Yes!” to challenges when before I would say “No.”

Rishi Prasad  
*Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Mahendra Pattni*

I completed 290 Voluntary Public Service hours at Lankenau Hospital. I primarily transported inpatients to various parts of the hospital and provided good conversation and a smile. I also worked in the Microsoft Registered Refurbishers club at my school to restore and donate used computers. For my Personal Development, I immersed myself in the world of business to gain a better understanding of operations. I joined the Future Business Leaders of America club and won first place in the regional competition. I also shadowed the manager of multiple Dunkin’ Donuts stores. For Physical Fitness, I was determined to improve my mile time from 8:30 to 7:00 and increase my overall body strength by joining a local gym. After much practice, I decreased my mile time to 6:58 and doubled my weight on both bicep curls and the deltoid press. For my Exploration, I planned a road trip with my family from Los Angeles to San Francisco. We saw the giant redwood trees which are only present in California and explored multiple quaint towns along the way such as Solvang, known as little Denmark.
Hunter Benkoski  
*Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Elizabeth Juell Pomeroy*

My Voluntary Public Service included helping young Irish dancers bring dance appreciation and community celebration to intergenerational audiences at venues like nursing homes, hospitals, and shelters where dance is not usually found. For my Personal Development, I read and studied my weekly Christian denominational Bible lesson and periodicals. This study enhanced my understanding of my relationship with God and my fellow man. For my Physical Fitness, I improved my stamina and Irish dancing technique and for performances and competitions. I strengthened my artistic and technical level and advanced to preliminary champion. Finally, for my Expedition, I completed a camping and canoeing trip on Canada’s Michipicoten River. My trip included researching local fauna, sixty-four miles of canoeing and portaging, photographing wildlife, and using wilderness survival skills. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been an exciting process filled with personal empowerment, lasting friendships, and lessons I will never forget.

J. Aaren Barge  
*Sewickley, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Emily Shipley*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal. I built access ramps for the handicapped, tutored inner city youth and helped remodel homes for those in need. For Personal Development, I developed my skills in contest math to become an American Invitational Mathematics Examination qualifier. For Physical Fitness, I worked to improve my golf game my overall fitness level by developing and incorporating a training regimen. To complete my Exploration, I planned a five-day bike trip covering over 300 miles from Pittsburgh to Washington, DC. Through my varied experiences with the Congressional Award program, I have learned how I can best serve the community around me. I have felt a real sense of accomplishment in being able to help improve someone else’s quality of life.
Sophia Lee  
*Wexford, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Barb Adams*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I founded and led robotics teams, mentored younger students in computer programming, and performed harp for charities. For Personal Development, I honed in on mastering harp music, including a concerto, and improving my performance skills. I have performed harp at a variety of places from hospitals and nursing homes to Carnegie Hall in New York City. In order to improve my Physical Fitness, I concentrated on my golf skills. I improved my overall strength and endurance and contributed to my high school varsity golf team. Finally, I planned a ten-day trip to Italy for Exploration. After immersing myself in the culture, history, and architecture of various regions, I returned home with more self-confidence and a better understanding and appreciation for the beautiful country and its people. The Congressional Award Program has been a truly rewarding experience that has helped me contribute to my community. I have acquired important life skills including setting challenging goals, practicing leadership, improving physical fitness, and exploring new areas.

Michael Alvaro  
*Jenkintown, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Mary Rodgers*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at my local hospital. I answered phones for patient information and performed different errands for the nurses, including blood-runs. I also helped with visitor escort and discharges. For my Personal Development, I worked with my choir director to help improve my vocal range, tone quality, and resonance. I placed in Districts and Regions Choir and received a $20,000 Vocal Performance Grant from Susquehanna University. For Physical Fitness, I worked to combat my asthma. I have been challenged with asthma for my entire life and the Congressional Award gave me the confidence and motivation to start running. Now I am able comfortably run and exercise for a longer duration of time. To complete my Expedition, I traveled to Brookville, New Jersey and experienced living a week in the wilderness. I lived a new life by learning how to portion food and live without technology. The Congressional Award has provided me with the tools to live a more well-rounded and healthy life. It also taught me how important it is to always radiate a positive attitude and an open mind to the people and community around me.
Brittany Levy  
Rydal, Pennsylvania  
Advisor: Mary Rodgers

I dedicated my Voluntary Public Service efforts to cancer-fighting organizations, underprivileged children, and children with special needs. I planned a walk at my school to benefit the Leukemia Lymphoma Society and helped plan my school’s THON, a non-sitting event that raises money towards pediatric cancer. For my Personal Development, I successfully set out to increase my SAT scores. Given my dedication to the goal, I was able to see my score rise to the 99th percentile nationally. My Physical Fitness goal was to exponentially improve my tennis skills and endurance. I was able to transform myself from a mediocre to a superb tennis player and from a one-mile runner to a distance runner. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned and executed a ten-day trip to Israel. While there, I toured the Old City of Jerusalem, floated in the Dead Sea, visited the mountain fortress of Masada, haggled in the Carmel Market, and, above all, enjoyed the most satisfying trip of my life. Overall, earning the Congressional Award taught me not only about the merits of serving my community and improving myself, but also about the immense pleasure that I receive from the execution of such actions.

Tara Santora  
Rydal, Pennsylvania  
Advisor: Mary Rodgers

Along my Congressional Award journey, I served as Vice President of my school’s chapter of buildOn, a service organization dedicated to constructing schools in developing countries. I assisted in fundraising over $50,000 for construction costs and physically helped build two schools in Haiti. My favorite Personal Development activity revolves around the cello. To develop my cello abilities, I participated in my school’s extracurricular chamber orchestra and pit orchestras for the musicals Sunset Boulevard and South Pacific. For Physical Fitness, I trained in mixed martial arts, including Muay Thai Kickboxing and jiu jitsu. I competed twice in the Tiger Schulmann’s Challenge of Champions Tournament, winning first place in 2014 Grappling, second place in 2015 Kickboxing, and third place in 2015 Grappling. Finally, my Expedition involved two days of camping, twenty miles of biking, and whitewater rafting in the Pocono Mountains, followed by three days of hiking in the Appalachian Mountains. While biking in the Poconos, I popped a tire with six miles to go which led to some quick thinking, teamwork with another group, and pedaling like a clown back to camp, knees up to my shoulders on a toddler’s bike. Overall, my Congressional Award experience has taught me the importance of balancing a variety of goals and activities and molded me into a well-rounded individual enthusiastic about a potpourri of interests.
Kyle Sukley  
*Rydal, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Mary Rodgers*

For the past three years, I have been part of a traveling a cappella group that sings to the elderly and school children. This year, I took charge of the group. In addition, I have taught photography to over 80,000 individuals via social media and networking. I assumed the title of Director of Marketing and Commercial Art during my first year interning for a cost segregation company. My second year responsibilities revolved around migrating an antiquated database to a new platform. Also, I further developed myself as an actor. For my Physical Fitness, I started my sabre fencing career and will use my acquired skills at the university level next year.

My Expedition took me on a tour of California. I was able to embrace the cultures spanning from San Diego to San Francisco while expanding my photography portfolio and networking with the people. I have learned to never allow your thirst for more to be quenched.

Kabita Thapa  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Nicole Bartels Prum*  
*Affiliation: Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program*

I volunteered in Northeast Philadelphia to help new community members acclimate to the neighborhood by taking them to the hospital, stores and schools. With my assistance and interpretation, people were able to access the services that they needed. My Personal Development goal was to improve my English-speaking skills. I attended the library program and the Help Center at the Community College of Philadelphia to practice my reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. I improved my heart rate and blood pressure by increasing my cultural dance practice time from ten minutes to thirty minutes. I learned different techniques and greatly improved my stamina. I planned and participated in a five-day primitive camping experience in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. I learned how to cook meals over a fire in the woods and to try new things, like successfully completing a ropes course.

The Congressional Award has given me the chance to help different people, provided me skills to apply to the future, and taught me I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.
Juliana Kochis  
*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Janet Rizzo Adams*  
*Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA*

My most rewarding volunteer experience was spent at the Ambridge Center for Hope. For my Girl Scout Gold Award, I mentored children at their summer subsidized lunch program with hands-on activities to promote healthy eating, exercise, and working hard in school. For my Personal Development, I became certified and worked as a YMCA Swim Instructor, lifeguard, and soccer official. I also attended week-long residential summer camps to learn more about Broadcast Journalism and Neuroscience as potential careers. My Physical Fitness goal was to start as a freshman on my high school soccer team. By concentrating on running, biking and a healthy diet, I improved my fitness and earned three varsity soccer letters and was named defensive MVP. For my Expedition, I planned a five-day trip to Bermuda to learn about its relationship with the United States. I enjoyed researching Bermuda’s history, culture, and traditions. I benefited from my first international travel experience by learning about planning itineraries and passport requirements. I have learned the value of mentorships, not only for my own benefit but also for the obligation I now have to mentor others.

Olivia Morton  
*Center Valley, Pennsylvania*  
*Advisor: Kathleen Parsons*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed most of my hours of Voluntary Public Service by working at the Pool Wildlife Conservancy. I was an Assistant Naturalist and I helped supervise environmental programs and educate visitors about the environment. For my Personal Development, I studied the weekly Christian Science Bible Lesson and read biographies about the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy. I now know more about how my religion began. For my Physical Fitness goal, I decided to improve my 5K time for cross-country. I worked my hardest during practice to lower my time and got my personal record this past season. For my Expedition, I went on a five-day camping and canoeing trip in the Canadian wilderness. I canoed 64 miles and learned how to set up tents, cook on camping stoves, and purify water. I am so glad I completed the Congressional Award program because it encouraged me to accomplish so many things that I wouldn’t have otherwise done.
Taylor Kennington  
_Daniel Island, South Carolina_  
Advisor: Melissa Aller  
Affiliation: People to People International

While earning my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by serving as a summer camp counselor at the Charleston Children’s Museum helping to organize activities for the camp and supervise the children. For Personal Development, I continued my involvement with young children. Babysitting allowed me the opportunity to care for children developing a balance between a fun and safe atmosphere. For my Physical Fitness, I played four years of varsity lacrosse at my high school. This hard work and dedication helped lead my team to the South Carolina State Championship. My Exploration activities included two European trips with People to People International. My journey included stops in Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, London, Spain, and Italy. Each stop allowed me to learn and participate in a variety of cultures and customs. The Congressional Award helped me gain the confidence to continue my pursuit for knowledge, adventure, fitness and giving back to my community as I start college and enter adulthood.

Dorothy Grace Smith  
_Columbia, South Carolina_  
Advisor: Karen Newsome

My Voluntary Public Service consisted of knitting hats for special needs and premature infants at the local children’s hospital. I did this for over 400 hours, knitting about 150 hats. I also volunteered at homeless shelters and food banks and helped with my high school’s campaign to collect blankets, coats, and other winter supplies. In the Personal Development area, I grew academically by competing with my school’s math team, reading higher-level books, and completing SAT test-preparation books in order to prepare for the SAT/PSAT. My Physical Fitness improved by swimming, running, and riding my bike. The Exploration helped me learn about my family history as I planned a trip to the towns of my ancestors in Illinois and Indiana. My family and I spent seven days learning about our roots and then enjoying the city of Chicago. The Congressional Award experience helped me grow as a person as I learned more about my community and got more involved in it as well.
Abigail Lockhart  
*Fort Mill, South Carolina*  
*Advisor: Kelly Hunter*

I completed my Voluntary Public Service at the local food bank distributing food to families in need. I also made cookies for families staying at the Ronald McDonald House and helped out as a counselor-in-training at an outdoor summer camp. For Personal Development, I studied the art of crafting fiction. I brainstormed, outlined, drafted, and edited several complete novels. I chose running as my Physical Fitness activity. I started out by running 5Ks, and, after years of running, I completed a half marathon! For my Expedition, I planned a trip to Washington, DC and set up tours to the White House, Capitol, and Library of Congress. I also got the chance to explore the Smithsonian museums and visit many national monuments. I had a wonderful experience earning this award, and it was definitely neat to see what I could accomplish when I set my mind to it.

Sam Walker  
*Rock Hill, South Carolina*  
*Advisor: Steve Miller*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To complete my Congressional Award, I served more than 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service focused on impacting young children in my community. I served as a teacher, camp counselor, friend, and companion for dozens of children. I also completed my Eagle Scout project for the summer camp many attended. For Personal Development, I taught myself the finer mechanics of the guitar, including tablature, sound-tuning, dexterity, and proficiency. For the Physical Fitness aspect, I endeavored to lower my 5K running time by nine minutes in two years. I was successful in that regard and even beat the coach in sprints. To complete the Expedition, I planned my family’s trip to Washington, DC for my great-grandmother’s interment at the Naval Academy. We visited several new museums, monuments, and historical landmarks important to her and my great-grandfather. Through the Congressional Award program, I learned that nothing can hold me back except myself.
Stephen Waldrep  
**Knoxville, Tennessee**  
**Advisor:** Stacy Menard  
**Affiliation:** Boy Scouts of America  

I completed over 455 hours of Voluntary Public Service through my Eagle Scout project, serving as an assistant martial arts instructor at my local YMCA, helping with a therapeutic riding facility, and teaching community STEM workshops. For Personal Development, I improved my debate skills through competitions and my STEM and leadership abilities through four years with FIRST Robotics working on programming, 3D printing, and machine shop tools. I completed my Physical Fitness by learning martial arts and earning my Black Belt. For the Expedition portion, I planned and led a five-day camping trip for my father and sister in the mountains. My volunteer experience helped me understand the rewards of volunteering and serving others, which I am continuing through opportunities on my college campus.

Victoria Cannon  
**Cookeville, Tennessee**  
**Advisor:** Rochelle Lamb  
**Affiliation:** Girl Scouts of the USA  

I worked in elementary schools in my community to improve the literacy of their students for Voluntary Public Service. I also began a small book club for advanced fourth graders. For Personal Development, I worked to improve my knowledge and abilities in classical music. I spent a great deal of time learning about composers and singing a variety of different selections to expose me to different styles. My goal for Physical Fitness was to strengthen my muscles and improve my balance by taking ballet and other dance lessons. I spent a week exploring and analyzing the cultural differences between Europe and the United States for my Exploration. My overall experience with the Congressional Award has taught me so much about service, time management, and dedication to goals. The past two years have been the most rewarding time of my life.
**Amanda Lu**  
*Plano, Texas*  
*Advisor: Dr. Mark Till*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

As the President of the Harvard College Friends of Scouting, I led and coordinated the annual Boston Minuteman Boy Scout Council Merit Badge Conference for over 300 scouts. I also provided Voluntary Public Service through the Foundation Cruzada Patagonica in rural development, agriculture, and education in Mapuche and Criollo communities of Argentine Patagonia. My Personal Development goal reassured my interest and skill in photography. I served a photographer and Assistant Photo Editor for the Harvard Yearbook. Inspired by sailboats on the Charles River in Boston, I joined the Junior Varsity Sailing Team at Harvard and learned the basics of dinghy sailing for Physical Fitness. After graduation, I was inspired to study the ethnobotany of traditional medicine in the Peruvian Amazon for my Expedition. I journeyed up the Mazan River and visited the rural villages of Santa Cruz and Libertad. My experiences under the Congressional Award have been an incredible journey with the help of amazing partners and communities.

**Fernando Osornio**  
*Plano, Texas*  
*Advisor: Raul Magdaleno*  
*Affiliation: HOBY*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service. Through state wide community projects and college readiness initiatives, I have served throughout the State of Texas as an orator of servant leadership and as a champion of higher education. For Personal Development, I improved my communication and management skills through internships and non-profit organizations. I currently oversee an entire non-profit organization while leading professional development sessions. For Physical Fitness, I worked out consistently in cardiovascular training. I can run six miles under an hour and I am able to fit into my prom suit after losing over 15 pounds. For my Expedition, I planned an entire week camping outdoors while learning to navigate and “survive” without the immediate use of technology. Along this journey, I succeeded in accomplishing this challenge while proving one person wrong at the very end: myself. This is why I have an incredible passion to inspire students in signing up for this challenge, simply because it truly is possible.
Nicholas Zamora  
_League City, Texas_

_Advisor: Robert Collins_

_Affiliations: US Air Force, YMCA_

To earn my Congressional Award, I logged Voluntary Public Service hours at food banks and in the Child Watch center of the Perry YMCA. To complete my Personal Development, I played the drums in my church’s youth band and formed my own band. I played on my high school’s varsity football team to complete my Physical Fitness goals. With the skills and strength I gained I was able to completely max out all of the exercises required by the United States Air Force Academy. To complete my Expedition goal, I went hiking through the Nevada desert. I had the opportunity to see many new things that I would not have been able to see in Texas. My pursuance of the Congressional Award has been the greatest experience of my life because it pushed me to extremes I never knew to be possible and it made the extraordinary seem like it was normal.

Camden Brown  
_Waco, Texas_

_Advisor: Beth Williams_

I earned my Congressional Award in Voluntary Public Service through mentoring elementary students, working in food banks, and organizing fundraisers for medical research. I solicited contributions for scholarships by meeting with donors and collected books to fight illiteracy. For Personal Development, I pursued my interests in dance and rose gardening. My Expedition pushed me to take my first solo car trip one hundred miles on an interstate highway to the Texas Hill country. I learned how to fish, identify wildflowers and constellations, and how to navigate with and without GPS on hiking trails. As a result of my experiences, I have grown personally and developed a better understanding of the world around me and how I can make a meaningful contribution.
Jocelyn Hernandez  
*San Antonio, Texas*  
*Advisor: Nichole Connor*

In order to enhance the educational development in my community, I dedicated over 500 Voluntary Public Service hours to tutor students from local middle schools. The goal was to polish their critical thinking skills, develop their research skills, and prepare them for college-level courses. For Personal Development, I conducted breast and ovarian cancer research in an effort to develop a natural cost-effective therapy. I presented at the American Association of Cancer Research meeting in San Diego and placed 3rd in the world at the Intel ISEF. For Physical Fitness, I focused on cardiovascular exercises such as running, step aerobics, swimming, walking, jumping, and elliptical training. For my Exploration, I planned a trip along the Old San Antonio Road to discover the multicultural heritage of Texas and to Monterrey and Guadalajara to identify the biggest challenges in environmental sustainability. Heading into college and beyond without the life skills I’ve developed through the Congressional Award would certainly be a travesty.

Lincoln Abbott  
*Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas*  
*Advisor: Franco Serafinelli*  
*Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, United States Army*

For Voluntary Public Service, I documented the military service experience of veterans for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. I am a steady volunteer at the Veterans Administrations Hospital, local Hospitals, and at a nature center as a citizen scientist. I focused to improve my Scottish Highland bagpipe playing ability for Personal Development. I have participated in many bagpiping competitions, winning 1st place and receiving the “Piper of the Day” award in many of these events. My Physical Fitness goal was to earn a higher degree Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do. I later became a certified coach, official, and instructor. I chose to participate in a five-day, four-night Exploration project which explored the history of the Texas Revolution. I traveled the Texas Independence Trail and walked the battlefields where Texan settlers fought more than 175 years ago and experienced the heroic legacy of early Texans. The Congressional Award did much to teach me about the value of giving back to the community. It also taught me the importance of setting goals and working towards them.
Gopinath Thangada  
*San Antonio, Texas*  
*Advisor: Bertha Golden*

For Personal Development, I took Indian classical vocal music lessons and participated in recitals at my local Hindu temple. In addition, I took Telugu classes, and became fluent in that language. For my Physical Fitness portion, I assisted in teaching yoga classes at the Jewish Community Center of San Antonio. Furthermore, I swam off-season in order to have more endurance when swimming. For my Exploration, I went to Austin, Texas to learn about my state’s military history. My overall experience in earning the Congressional Award was great, since I was able to expand my knowledge and highlight my enthusiasm for working with people, especially the older population.

Karishma Kashyap  
*Manvel, Texas*  
*Advisor: Kotesh Rao*

To complete my Voluntary Public Service, I volunteered at Texas Children’s Hospital, Colonial Oaks Assisted Living, and spent every summer in India working with under-privileged children with a non-profit organization. I was able to interact with sick children and their families on a weekly basis and raise awareness of the importance of education and good health to underprivileged children. For Personal Development, I learned Bharatanatyam, classical South Indian dance form, which is known for its grace and sculpturesque poses. My Physical Fitness goal was to learn tennis starting from a basic level to an advanced level. I took weekly lessons with my tennis coach and practiced with my sister during the week. I planned an eleven day trip from Houston to New Delhi, Kashmir, and Punjab in India for my Exploration. I learned about the cultures, values, lifestyle, cuisine, and history of these cities. By participating in the Congressional Award, I have gained confidence, knowledge, and time management skills.
Laura Mediorreal  
*Richmond, Texas*  
*Advisor: Fatma Tamer*  
*Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service in the Boys and Girls Club of Stafford, Texas. I tutored children of all ages after school and helped them learn about math and science. For my Personal Development goal, I studied Turkish for two hours after school. I can now speak fluently in this language and even won first place in the Regional Turkish Speech contest. My Physical Fitness portion was composed of hours of ice skating before school. I was able to begin jumping and land an axle jump. For my Exploration, I went on a week-long trip to California to experience the difference in culture from my hometown. I visited Lake Tahoe, skied, and even visited the Golden Gate Bridge to analyze its history and architecture! I learned a lot about the people, culture and architecture of Silicon Valley. Because of the Congressional Award, I was able to learn about many people and places in my society that I will always remember!

Karen Yang  
*Sugar Land, Texas*  
*Advisor: Shixia Huang*  
*Affiliation: American Red Cross*

I started my own non-profit organization dedicated to helping less fortunate kids in the Houston region for my Voluntary Public Service. I have volunteered hundreds of hours raising money for education and making sandwiches for these kids. Also, I volunteered at an Alzheimer’s care center. For Personal Development, I spent over six hours each week developing my skills as a realism artist. I pushed myself to draw larger pieces, work faster, and create better quality artwork. My Physical Fitness goal was to spend three hours each week on the dance floor perfecting my ballet skills and training to be a part of my school’s ballet production, Giselle. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to the countries of Italy, Switzerland, Vatican City, and France. I studied the cultures of these countries in order to better prepare myself for this trip and learned how to adapt to new environments and situations. In participating in this award, I learned that although things may seem difficult or impossible at first, with sufficient inclination and dedication, anything is possible.
Raghav Kalra  
*Irving, Texas*  
*Advisor: Vandhana Ralhan*  
*Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, Habitat for Humanity*

To earn the Congressional Award, I logged over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service on-site for Habitat for Humanity ReStore as well as living in rural Andhra Pradesh, India, teaching children about health, disease, hygiene and ecology. For Personal Development, I worked part-time in a gastroenterologist’s office. I also completed a research project at Seton Hall University about behavioral sensitization due to methamphetamine in HIV+ transgenic rats. For Physical Fitness, I powerlifted in the gym until I could deadlift over 400 lbs and squat over 300. I also trained my vertical jump to be able to finally dunk a basketball which has always been a dream of mine. Finally, for my Expedition, I camped at Camp Spencer for a week as a part of Boy Scouts and engaged in many activities such as CPR certification, lifeguard training, wilderness survival and first aid for a variety of camping situations. What I really took away from this experience is the value of consistent daily effort in achieving goals and thus becoming the person I aspire to be.

Adan Gonzalez  
*Dallas, Texas*  
*Advisor: Scott Fleming*

I earned my Voluntary Public Service through my Dallas Trailblazers initiative. I organized initiatives with C-Suite executives to provide comprehensive college access services, volunteer opportunities, and mentorship to underprivileged students in inner city public schools. I completed my Personal Development through the Management Leaders of Tomorrow program where I was able to learn more about myself and be proud of the brand I carry. I discovered a voice that deserves to be heard, and represent my community that does not have one. I committed to over 250 hours of Physical Fitness, from running stairs, jumping rope, hitting the heavy bag, in which each workout prepared of me for my boxing fights. My Exploration allowed me to see a different world. I was exposed to a different culture, and learned to make decisions for myself that taught me the value of integrity and being prepared even when things don’t go my way. I learned that communities don’t need a superman to come rescue us, we need each other to help discover our own powers.
Rebecca Pulley  
Round Rock, Texas  
Advisor: Kate Woodward-Young  
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I completed my Voluntary Public Service with Round Rock Independent School District, where I taught etiquette and dance to students with special needs. I then planned and hosted a formal event to offer these students a more inclusive social opportunity. For my Personal Development goals, I studied viola and voice and participated in solo contests in both disciplines. I received multiple honors including Outstanding Vocal Performer at the Texas State Solo Contest. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my overall exercise habits through regular participation in taekwondo. My Exploration was to immerse myself in Costa Rican culture by experiencing the natural beauty and resources that the rainforest had to offer. I couldn’t believe how many different animal and plant species I was able to see and identify. The Congressional Award process helped me not only set and achieve short-term objectives, but also define lifelong goals.

Michael Boyson  
Garland, Texas  
Advisor: Tim Host

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at Christian Community Action in Lewisville, Texas. I served breakfast almost every Saturday for the homeless and families in need. Additionally, I volunteered at Baylor Medical Center working in the Intensive Care Unit, Gastrointestinal Lab, and information desk. For Personal Development, I chose to enhance my violin skills. I successfully practiced, completed, and performed a solo of Haydn’s Concerto No. 2 in G Major the first movement. I also performed with the New Conservatory of Dallas Orchestra under the direction of the late Arkaday Fomin. For Physical Fitness, I swam after school with the Dallas Mustangs club swim team. I achieved my goal of breaking a minute in the one hundred yard butterfly event. Finally, for my Exploration, I traveled to Abiquiu, New Mexico and volunteered on an archaeological dig at the local library. I helped excavate a section of the library that had been abandoned since the early 1900’s with a team of college students and teachers from the University of California Berkeley, unearthing ceramics, arrowheads, and bones dating back to the 18th and 19th century. The Congressional Award is such an amazing program; I have learned how to manage my time, developed better planning skills and bolstered my confidence that I can achieve anything I put my mind to.
Jeremy Geiger  
*Harlingen, Texas*  
*Advisor: Alicia Elkins*  
*Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America, United States Army*

I assisted the local Boy Scout troop that I had been a part of growing up for my Voluntary Public Service. I was able to teach young men a wide variety of skills that they can hopefully use in future leadership roles. While I participated in the Army JROTC unit at my high school I joined the “Armed Drill Team” for my Personal Development activity. I learned how to function as part of the team. My Physical Fitness goal was to refine my gymnastic skills by going to the gym for four hours a week. For my Expedition, I went to the Philmont Scout Ranch to be involved in their 16 day Ranch Hands Program. The first eight days we were able to learn a lot about horses and the outdoors staying on the ranch taking care of chores. The next eight days we went on a cavalcade into the back country.

John Wesley Orton  
*Salt Lake City, Utah*  
*Advisor: Susan Lews*  
*Affiliation: Boy Scouts of America*

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I served over 700 hours of Voluntary Public Service between my Boy Scout troop and the summer camps my brother and I founded and ran together. I taught Navajo kids math and science in a fun and interesting way and founded a literature and reading camp. For my Personal Development, I competed on my high school mock trial team, serving as captain for four years. During my time, we placed in the top three teams in the state for three years in a row and I was named Best Witness multiple times. For my Physical Fitness, I rowed competitively on my high school crew team for two years and worked out at the gym to increase my stamina, lung capacity and overall fitness level. For my Exploration, I planned a trip to San Francisco’s Chinatown where my brother and I spoke only Chinese, visited local shops, ate at local restaurants, visited a local Buddhist temple and the Terracotta Warriors exhibit, and even played XiangQi with some of the local elders. For me, the Congressional Award journey was a life-changing experience and has truly helped prepare me for the future.
M. Serhat Kariparduc  
*Sandy, Utah*  
*Advisor: Halis Kablan*

To earn my Congressional Award, I volunteered for a public, nonprofit peace and dialogue organization. My duties were to help organize the events, assist guests at events, and make sure everything was working efficiently. For my Personal Development goals, I studied for the SAT and the SAT subject tests for over eight hours a week. I also read a lot of books from the SAT Recommended Book List and memorized vocabulary words. For Physical Fitness, I worked out three times a week. These workouts were aimed to not only increase my physical strength, but also to increase my agility and technique in soccer. For my Exploration, I went on a trip to Turkey and toured many of the world-famous monuments. Overall, the experience I had with the Congressional Award program was amazing.

Alexander Mietchen  
*Salt Lake City, Utah*  
*Advisor: Scott Hansen*

I volunteered with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program of Utah as a big brother to an elementary school boy named José. I also volunteered at the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, and I traveled to Quillahuata, Peru to help in the construction of a school in a village outside of Cusco. For my Personal Development I studied Christian Science. I practiced jazz piano, which lead to increased solo opportunities in jazz band. My Physical Fitness activities focused on participation in soccer and tennis. I spent two weeks in British Columbia, Canada with a group of teens. We sailed for six days on a tall ship in the Pacific Ocean. We also went sea kayaking and hiked Stawamus Chief, which is the second largest granite monolith in the world. Because of my participation in the Congressional Award, I learned to embrace difference cultures and have had experiences that wouldn’t have been possible without my involvement in the program.
I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service work in support of Stafford County Parks by surveying and clearing a 5K hiking trail. I also worked with the Coral Reef Foundation in an underwater coral nursery in Mexico to grow and transplant Staghorn Coral onto local coral reefs. For Personal Development, I took several SCUBA Diving classes and completed over 60 dives in advanced diving conditions in both freshwater and marine environments to depths of 130 feet. For my Physical Fitness, I focused on improving my cross country and track running times as well as completing a half marathon. I reduced my 5,000 meter time to less than 18 minutes and completed the Marine Corps Half Marathon. Finally, for my Exploration, I planned a six-day SCUBA Diving trip in the Florida Keys focusing on advanced wreck diving. I explored eight shipwrecks, taking pictures and conducting reef health and fish population surveys. I completed my Congressional Award work in tandem with my Eagle Scout rank and I learned to set big, audacious objectives and to always believe in myself while completing them.
Erin Lewis  
Culpeper, Virginia  
Advisor: BJ DeJarnette  
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at local schools and also working with Girl Scouts to create a baby supply closet to help teen mothers in my community. For Personal Development, I took dance lessons up to four times per week learning ballet, modern, and jazz. I really enjoyed dancing and wished I had started when I was younger. My Physical Fitness goal was running Cross Country and Track & Field. My goal was to improve my running times and to learn the proper techniques for running. I was able to improve my 5K time by over five minutes and learned how to do the long jump with ease. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-day trip from Culpeper, Virginia to Wilmington, North Carolina to visit historic sites of the Civil War to find out their significance before, during, and after the war. If I had never done the Congressional Award, my life would be less fulfilling and I would never have had the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone and prove I can accomplish what I set my mind to.

Michelle Laker  
Arlington, Virginia  
Advisor: Susan Wildman

In order to complete my Voluntary Public Service and to help my community grow and become more selfless, I worked as a camp counselor, helped with bike race registration, served as an unpaid referee for a volleyball tournament to raise money for breast cancer research, helped at HOPE house, and served food at local shelters. My Personal Development goal was to develop my own business, Sweet As Can Be Cupcakes. I learned how to manage money, time, and employees. I refined my volleyball skills for Physical Fitness. I played on a travel team and worked out in order to keep my spot on Varsity. I was voted team captain and named MVP for the most recent season. My family traveled to Washington, down through Oregon, and ended up in the northern part of California for my Expedition. We saw Mt. Hood, Multnomah Falls, Portland, Pier 39, and the Redwoods. It was an incredible trip and I am so thankful that we could visit family and friends while there because my great uncle passed away a few months after our trip. The Congressional Award was the best decision I made in high school because it shaped me into the mature, caring, and genuine young adult I have become today.
Rachel Bugge  
*Great Falls, Virginia*  
*Advisor: Rachel Thomas*  
*Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA*

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at soup kitchens, an inner-city charter school, and a homeless shelter. Through giving my time to others in the community I was blessed to become aware of my surrounding community. For my Personal Development, I wanted to refine my artistic skills and share my talent with the community. I accomplished this by co-editing my school’s literary magazine, entering art competitions, and taking classes. For the Physical Fitness portion, I wanted to challenge myself by joining the track team in school, getting a varsity letter for my performance on the dive team, and successfully learn new tumbling passes in gymnastics. A lover of architecture, I took the opportunity to explore some of the most unique and notable houses around the East Coast for my Exploration. I planned a trip to visit Monticello, Mount Vernon, the Biltmore, the Fan District of Richmond, and Falling Water to discover and learn more about architecture in America. I have grown and leaned new things about myself and the world in which I live through participating in the Congressional Award and plan on continuing to share my discoveries with the rest of the global community.

Christina Flear  
*Manassas, Virginia*  
*Advisor: Shronda Peake*  
*Affiliation: American Red Cross*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service to earn my Gold Medal. I raised over $2,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society by being a member of their Team In Training, assisted elementary school beginning runners, and removed trash from roadsides, communities, and parks. My Personal Development goals were to earn my American Red Cross Lifeguard Certification and raise my SAT and ACT Test scores by improving my vocabulary, math, and writing skills. For Physical Fitness, I sought to improve my overall long distance running. I focused on improving my running times for both the mile and 5k events. For my Exploration, I planned an eight day, seven night trip to several historic areas in the Southern United States. I researched, explored, photographed, and documented my trip to several sights that date back to the year 1000. Earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been one of the most rewarding, beneficial, and educational experiences I have ever completed to date. This experience has given me the motivation and determination to continue to serve my community.
Nikki Kothari  
*Herndon, Virginia*  
*Advisor: Iris Smith*

Contributing to my community through STEM fields, I coached elementary and middle school students in Odyssey of the Mind for my Voluntary Public Service goal. I was the youngest coach to take a team to Odyssey World Finals in 2014. For Personal Development, I achieved a Moderately Difficult Level for Virginia Festival in piano, six levels higher than where I began my journey. I avidly began to golf as a member of my high school’s varsity team, where I was awarded “Most Valuable Player.” My two week Expedition whisked me on an adventure to Costa Rica, where I experienced life in the traditional village in Pozo Azul, improved my conversational Spanish, and explored natural wonders. The quest for the Congressional Award has been a marathon; I gained perseverance, confidence, and most importantly, the knowledge that life and its biggest challenges can be overcome with time and diligence.

Austin Smith  
*Great Falls, Virginia*  
*Advisor: Leili Bowers*  
*Affiliation: American Red Cross*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I work for a number of good causes including the American Red Cross and Jill’s House, a respite home for children with disabilities. I also worked restoring and cleaning up the Appalachian Trail in Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia. While in high school I received a concussion from freshman football. I spent a lot of time on Personal Development recovering from this. I did brain training and neurotherapy to work on memory and depression. For my Physical Fitness, I trained for backpacking and mountain climbing. During two summers I covered parts of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. My Expedition consisted of a five-day solo camping trip on the Appalachian Trail. I went with the clothes on my back, five matches, a fishing hook and string. It rained for four days and I survived on stinging nettles, fiddle ferns, ten salamanders and a fish! I learned a great deal about myself and my inner strength over the four years I worked on my Congressional Award.
Tristana Giunta  
*Falls Church, Virginia*  
*Advisor: Lois Wolf*

I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service by developing a “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” program that collected and distributed clothing, shoes, books, and school supplies to students in two low socioeconomic school districts. My Personal Development goal was to foster political awareness. I participated in Running Start and Path to Politics, programs designed to encourage young women to become involved in politics and eventually run for office. I was asked to speak at the annual Women to Watch Awards held at the National Press Club. For Physical Fitness, I trained in activities that would improve my fine and gross motor skills so that I could participate in group sports such as squash. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a camping trip to Maine. This included a trip to Acadia National Park. I am forever changed by my participation in the Congressional Award. I am newly willing to take on challenges and to be of service to my community and, in the broader sense, the world.

Charlotte Heffelmire  
*Vienna, Virginia*  
*Advisor: Dr. Tae Seob Yoon*  
*Affiliation: US Air Force*

In fulfilling my Voluntary Public Service obligation, I founded a charity called Winds of Change to help underprivileged children worldwide. This charity has raised over $104,200 to date. I also perform as “Daisy D. Clown” for orphans, attempting to bring some joy into their troubled and challenging lives. For Personal Development, I completed FAA Aviation Ground School, became fluent in two languages, earned advanced SCUBA certifications, and continued my classical training as a violinist. Additionally, I completed Junior ROTC training and during one summer completed leadership training at all three US Military Academies – Army (West Point), Navy (Annapolis), and the Air Force Academy. For Physical Fitness, I taught myself how to pole vault, where I broke my high school record, earned a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and became a junior Olympic medalist in both sports. I also wrote and teach a rape prevention/self defense class for teenagers, based upon my martial arts training, which I call “Pred-X” (Predator X). For my Expedition, I organized, led, and/or participated in trips to all seven continents, including a true expedition to Antarctica where I journeyed well below the Antarctic Circle. My experience with the Congressional Gold Award directly led me, at age 16, to a full-time position working for the premiere U.S. intelligence agency.
Taylor Lane
Dunn Loring, Virginia
Advisor: Clara Luckett
Affiliation: Girl Scouts of the USA

I completed 485 hours of Voluntary Public Service by engaging in volunteer activities associated with earning my Girl Scout Gold and Silver Trefoil Awards, making sandwiches on a monthly basis for the Lamb's Center homeless shelter, volunteering at running races, and by serving as student council representative on my High School Student Government Board. For my Personal Development, I focused on strengthening my singing and acting skills enough so that I qualified for District Choir both years and was named to the All-Star Region Cast for the “One Act” play. In meeting my Physical Fitness goals, I completed the Marine Corps 10K two years in a row, improving my time along the way as well as qualifying for my county’s district competitions in hurdles. Finally, for my Expedition, I planned a five-night camping trip in the Shenandoah Valley that included a fun white water rafting trip and an eye-opening visit to the local county fair. Overall, earning my Congressional Award has been a truly rewarding experience because all of the various activities I completed allowed me to grow as a person and give back to my community in meaningful ways.

Suhani Sanghavi
Fairfax, Virginia
Advisor: Nimisha Patel

I spent over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service with a local senior citizen group organizing events that enabled them to stay connected with each other. I also worked as a part of the Leadership Board at my high school to provide services to the community such as Breast Cancer Awareness. For Personal Development, I challenged myself to think about data and its visual representation by learning skills in business analytics and applying it to local, community problems with DataRPM, a company that shows the importance of smart machine technology. For Physical Fitness, I joined my high school track and cross country teams for three years in which I was able to maintain an active, healthy lifestyle. To complete my Exploration goal, I embarked on a 14-day journey with my family, traveling to Italy, France, Germany, Netherlands, and England. Overcoming language barriers and cultural differences in each new city made the experience extremely rewarding and unique. The process of attaining the Congressional Award allowed me to find a better self by forcing me to expand my way of thinking, learning how to communicate with people that are completely different, and navigating my way outside of my comfort zone.
Catherine Jessen  
Medina, Washington  
Advisor: Dr. Michele Fang

Working to earn the Congressional Award has been one of my greatest privileges. Throughout this journey I have been given the opportunity to serve my community by tutoring young students, caring for abandoned animals, and contributing to programs that help feed, clothe, and educate families. I have improved my language skills by independently studying Mandarin. I have learned business and professional skills by interning at nonprofit organizations while simultaneously earning my undergraduate degree from the George Washington University. I have learned how to keep my body healthy through consistent physical training, and have improved my ability to contribute to and lead teams. I had the rare privilege to pursue improvement in wilderness safety and cultural immersion in Denmark.

Danielle Heins  
Wenatchee, Washington  
Advisor: Susan Craig

As I worked toward my Gold Medal, I volunteered by teaching in a special education preschool and assisting with activities in a variety of nursing homes. I used my passion for music to entertain the residents with my piano playing, hoping to encourage them in any way I could. Through the years, I have become increasingly passionate about music of every kind and my Personal Development goal motivated me to expand my piano repertoire. This gave me the tools to perform publicly and become a better musician, preparing me to pursue music as a career. I exercised daily with the P90X training program for my Physical Fitness goal. This helped me establish healthy habits that can be sustained throughout my lifetime. I planned a trip to Seattle, Washington, where I worked in a homeless shelter for women and children. I gained perspective as I served and built relationships with women enduring unfathomable struggles, realizing that we are all capable of making a difference to help those in need. The Congressional Award Program has helped me to accept challenges in every area of life and transform them into goals that I can work toward. With this mindset, anything is possible!
Dae Han Seong
Tacoma, Washington
Advisor: Mary Rodgers
Affiliation: US Air Force

To reach my goals for the Congressional Award Gold Medal, I served in my local library and YMCA to teach about computer usage and swimming technique. I joined my Air Force Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (FJROTC) squadron to serve my community and to reach outwards to other countries. I took on Tae Kwon Do to increase self-discipline, perseverance, and to have a courageous mindset. I practiced weekly in the dojo and in my house to become a black belt. I also started to play the guitar last summer and now I help lead praise at my church. I joined my physical fitness team in the AFJROTC to reach my fitness goals, competing in events such as sit-ups, push-ups, and running. For my Expedition, I planned my family’s cross-country road trip from Pennsylvania to Washington State during the summer. The expedition took over three weeks with us camping out and staying at many different hotels. I planned stays around places such as the Rocky Mountains, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite National Park. I gained so much experience, knowledge, and motivation from the Congressional Award. I need to thank all those who aided me on this path to success and for helping me develop into the person I am and will be tomorrow.

Tiffani Webb
Culloden, West Virginia
Advisor: Connie Alfrey
Affiliations: Girl Scouts of the USA, HOBY

To earn my Congressional Award, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at Cabell Huntington Hospital, a local food pantry, and River Park Hospital’s Pediatric Media Center. For Personal Development, I conducted monthly mission projects for local non-profit organizations using mass media and letters, as well as volunteered as a Junior Counselor at Camp Cowen. For my Physical Fitness goal, I began working out and completed two 5K mile runs. Finally, for my Expedition, I researched the genealogy of my mother’s side of the family. Through the research I am now a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of the Confederacy. While earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I learned the importance of being the positive difference in others’ lives.
Bogeun Choi
Madison, Wisconsin
Advisor: Jinkuk Hong
Affiliation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America

To earn my Gold Medal, I completed over 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service at the main information desk at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics. I helped hospital visitors by giving directions and assisting them various ways. For my Personal Development, I played the piano daily and took lessons once a week. My piano performance has greatly improved and I have participated in many recitals and competitions. For my Physical Fitness goal, I set out to run a 5k race in under twenty minutes and trained by running on my schools cross country team. I also played tennis for my high school varsity team and the local tennis club, where I participated in drills and match play. Finally, for my Expedition, I went on a five-day hiking trip through Yellowstone National Park. The wildlife and natural wonders were something unique that I had never seen before. Overall, the Congressional Award has helped me set goals and take actions to accomplish them, helping me in many facets of my life.

Andrew Zehner
Bayside, Wisconsin
Advisor: Martha Kolberg

My Voluntary Public Service included being a site coordinator for the Community Meal Program and performing home maintenance for low income families through the Appalachian Service Project. My Personal Development focused on improving my SCUBA diving skills. I obtained certifications in advanced open water diving, deep diving, fish-ID, and rescue diver. This taught me first-aid, CPR, and techniques for saving distressed and lost divers. For my Physical Fitness, I focused on improving my tennis skills and my first serve percentage. My Explorations included planning family trips to Boston and the Bahamas. The Boston trip gave me a better appreciation of the founding of our country and the Bahamas Exploration gave me an in-depth understanding of a different culture and the struggles of the native Bahamian people. I appreciate the opportunity that the Congressional Award gave me to focus on working to improve my community and myself.
To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I volunteered as an ice skating instructor and as a Meals on Wheels delivery driver in my hometown. These volunteer activities gave me the opportunity to share my love of ice skating and improve the health and well-being of members of the community. I fulfilled the requirements for the Personal Development portion of the award by partaking in several home improvement projects on my parent’s house including the cultivation and maintenance of the family garden. I completed my Physical Fitness goals by playing ice hockey around the country and participating in high school athletics. I went on an eight-day self-planned historical tour that went from Sacramento, California to Omaha, Nebraska. The trip focused on the effect that the First Transcontinental Railroad had on the development of the West and the reformation of the United States after the Civil War. The Congressional Award program was originally a way for me to receive recognition for the activities that I was already involved with in my community but, as I began to mature, I was pushed to try new things and learn important life skills.

James Fantin
Rock Springs, Wyoming
Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato
Affiliation: Wyoming Congressional Award Council

To earn my Congressional Award Gold Medal, I completed my Voluntary Public Service by working at the local senior center updating their database, creating a monthly newsletters, and helping with various events. I also volunteered at the National High School Rodeo by checking in contestants, scanning and selling tickets. For Personal Development, I took weekly piano lessons and practiced on my own. To meet my Physical Fitness goal of increasing my bench press, I participated in circuit training at home. I increased my bench press by 15 reps and 15 pounds. For my Expedition, I planned a five day camping trip near New Fork Lake. I learned to use a GPS, a compass, various styles of fishing and overnight survival skills. The skills I have learned from participating in the Congressional Award program have had such a positive impact on my life and will continue to do so.
KeeGan Johnson
Encampment, Wyoming
Advisor: Janice Peterson
Affiliations: 4-H, Wyoming Congressional Award Council

For my Voluntary Public Service, I helped clean my local rodeo grounds by pulling weeds and throwing trash in a dumpster. Other volunteer service I completed included working at the local thrift store and painting benches and tables in a park. For Personal Development, I worked on an algebra and a geometry program during my summers outside of school. I also worked on the shot group for my archery career. For my Physical Fitness, I worked on weight training, increasing my vertical leap, and I also increased my shot percentage during the basketball season. I traveled to Europe to immerse myself in foreign cultures and languages. I traveled to seven different countries and I was challenged differently in each country. The Congressional Award has taught me that all my hard work pays off and that I will have opportunities to help my community for the rest of my life.

Marianna Pizzato
Rock Springs, Wyoming
Advisor: Alice Paul
Affiliation: Wyoming Congressional Award Council

I volunteered three years helping put on Mason’s Mountain Run in memory of my cousin. I also volunteered at many different community events such as the National Rodeo High School Rodeo Finals and Cowboys Against Cancer. I also volunteered at the WCAC Service Retreats and Golf Tournaments. For Personal Development, I was selected to be a member of the Wyoming All State Marching Band and got to perform in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. I also took and taught singing lessons. My Physical Fitness goal was to improve my dance technique and be selected for higher competition teams. I competed on my studio’s highest team and was then selected for the Rock Springs High School Tiger Rhythm Dance Team. I was able to execute a five day camping trip in Yellowstone National Park. I learned how to fly fish while encountering snakes, both in the water and on land. The Congressional Award provided me with opportunities to take on leadership roles which helped me gain the confidence and skills to pursue leadership offices at my high school.
Jeremy Shockley  
*Jackson, Wyoming*  
*Advisor: Jennifer Swink*  
*Affiliation: Wyoming Congressional Award Council*

I volunteered over 400 hours for the Jackson Hole Special Olympic. I helped teach the kids how to play basketball and we ended up winning the state Special Olympics tournament. It was an incredible privilege to work with the kids. I spent over 200 hours learning about and maintaining vehicles. I played high school basketball for our school team during which I spent over 650 hours in the gym. I also swam on our local swim team to improve my overall fitness. I planned and completed a five day camping trip in the Tetons. While camping, I built a homemade shelter, prepared and cooked all my meals, biked, learned about orienteering, hiked, and cut a cord of wood. The process of earning my Congressional Award Gold Medal has been such an amazing blessing to my life.

Jaynie Welsh  
*Rock Springs, Wyoming*  
*Advisor: Laura Schmid-Pizzato*  
*Affiliation: Wyoming Congressional Award Council*

For my Voluntary Public Service, I was fortunate enough to get involved across my state. Locally, I was involved with a nonprofit organization that raised money for cancer patients. I also participated in multiple service retreats all across Wyoming. For Personal Development I made it my goal to become a better leader by running for Student Body President at my high school. I was elected, and through student council I was able to organize a fundraiser that raised $20,000 for Make-A-Wish Wyoming. I used volleyball as my physical fitness goal. Through all three medals I improved my volleyball skills in quite a few areas including serving, jumping, and blocking. For my Exploration, I planned a trip for my family to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. We got to experience Wyoming’s beautiful scenery and history. We toured the various historical sites in Jackson, my favorite being the Wildlife Art Museum. Through the Congressional Award, I have learned so much about myself and the impact that I can have on the world, and I think that is one of life’s greatest lessons.
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