



# The Power of the Girl Scout Gold Award: Excellence in Leadership and Life



A Report from the Girl Scout Research Institute  
2016

*Celebrating 100 Years  
of **Changing the World***



## Introduction and Background

Girl Scouts is the preeminent leadership development organization for girls, with 2.7 million active members and an estimated 59 million alumnae. In Girl Scouts' centennial year, the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) conducted a large-scale mixed-methods research study<sup>1</sup> and reached the following conclusion: Girl Scouting works.

Women who were Girl Scouts as girls display more positive life outcomes with regard to sense of self, community service, civic engagement, education, and income than women who were not Girl Scouts.

And this is the case for all Girl Scout alumnae, across ages, social classes, races, and degrees of engagement in other extracurricular activities.

The Girl Scout Gold Award is the highest and most prestigious award in Girl Scouting, comparable to the Boy Scouts of America's Eagle Scout merit. Girls who pursue their Gold Award aspire to transform an idea and vision for change into an actionable plan with measureable, sustainable, and far-reaching results. It's not only Girl Scouts who understand the value of the Gold Award. Some universities and colleges offer scholarships unique to award recipients, and girls who enlist in the U.S. armed forces may receive advanced rank in recognition of their achievements.

Since 1916, Girl Scouts have been planning and executing significant "Take Action" projects in response to pressing community needs.

The Golden Eaglet, the highest award in Girl Scouting from 1916 to 1939, marked the beginning of a long tradition of recognizing the extraordinary efforts of extraordinary girls. From 1940 to 1963, the Curved Bar Award was the highest honor in Girl Scouting. From 1963 to 1980, the highest award was called First Class. And since 1980, the Gold Award has inspired girls to find the greatness inside themselves and share their ideas and passions with their communities.



<sup>1</sup> Girl Scouts of the USA (2012). *Girl Scouting Works: The Alumnae Impact Study*. New York, New York. [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org).







## ***Introduction and Background*** (continued)

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Girl Scout Gold Award projects tackle a broad spectrum of important issues—among them green energy, gender-balanced leadership, STEM education, and violence prevention—plaguing the nation and the globe. A selection of examples of exemplary projects from Girl Scouts’ 2015 National Young Women of Distinction<sup>2</sup> illustrate the diversity and depth of this work:

- **Pooja Nagpal** focused on ending violence against women worldwide by teaching self-defense to women and girls in rural villages in India and battered women’s shelters in Los Angeles, California. These women and girls gained physical as well as mental strength, including through discussions and activities involving leadership, community service, confidence building, and education.
- **Hadiya Harrigan**, an advocate for girls’ increased involvement in STEM fields, created a web development handbook with more than 20 lessons to help students and the public learn ASP.net and MySQL.
- **Julie Kapuvari** addressed the worldwide decline of honeybee populations, receiving a grant from the Long Island Beekeepers Club (LIBC) for a nucleus of 1 queen and 5,000 honeybees, which resulted in a local, sustained pollination source that will help with food production on a local farm for years to come.
- **Rebecca Pober** produced, filmed, edited, and narrated a documentary on domestic human sex trafficking that the FBI now uses for training purposes.
- **Elizabeth Martin** addressed bullying by nurturing a strong sense of self-worth in hundreds of preschool children and helping them form positive relationships with others, as well as developing relevant resources for teachers and parents.
- **Liza Villaneuva** established a nonprofit organization that creates mobile learning centers around the world. Program components foster imagination and discovery and involve research, education, art, and music.
- **Jamielee Buenemann** designed and constructed a residential-scale wind turbine in an effort to promote new sources of energy and demystify renewable energy for the average person.
- **Annie Cai** created a career development conference that teaches students about public speaking and entrepreneurship and builds their confidence, to address the gap between what the career world expects from students and the education system preparing students for that world.
- **Alexa Iannace** addressed the issue of child pornography through a documentary featuring experts from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Pennsylvania State Police.
- **Sarah Schurr** developed an educational booklet, toolkit, and website to help professional and familial caregivers better communicate with elders suffering from dementia, Alzheimers, and/or social detachment.

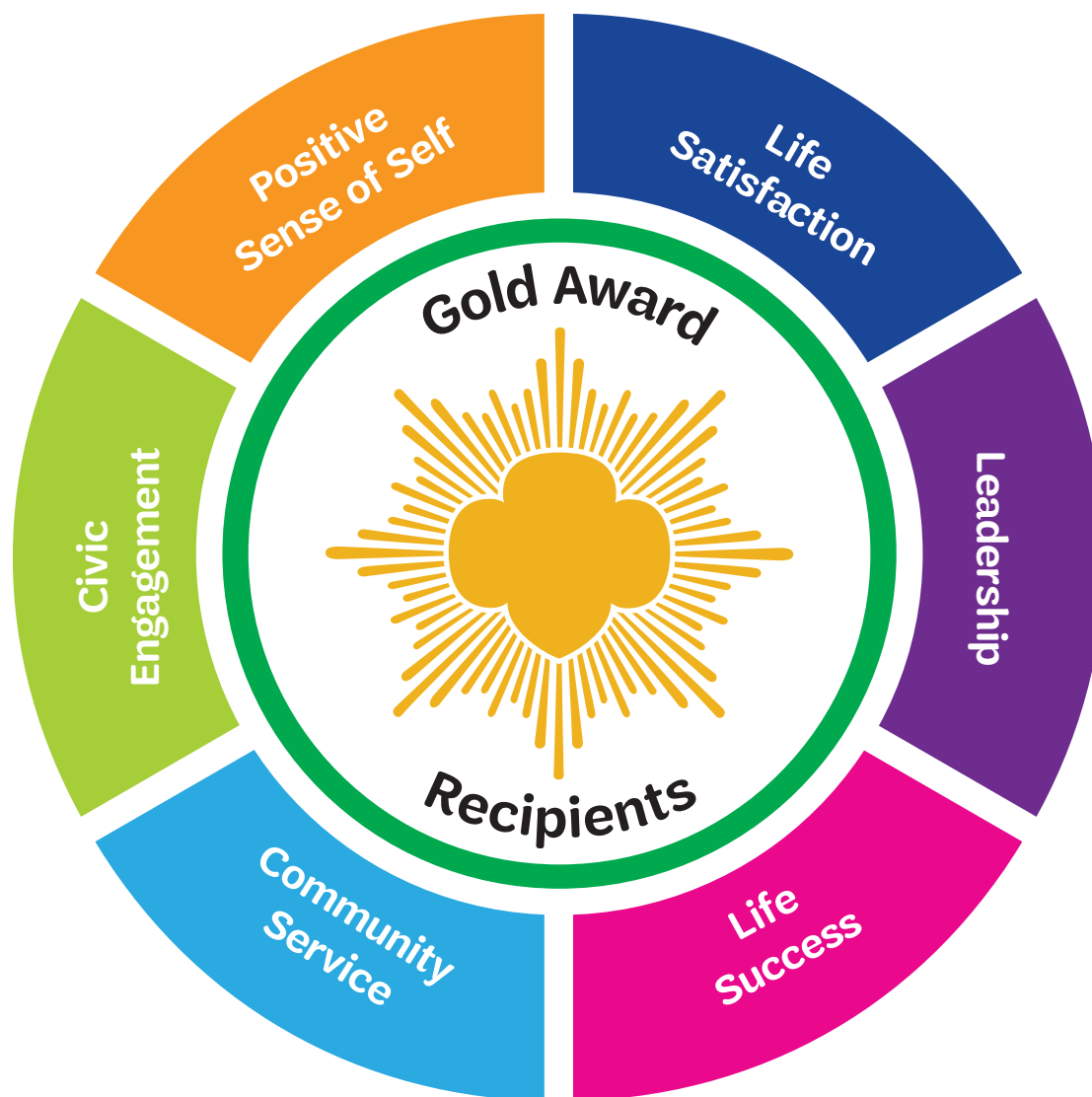
A young woman who has earned her Gold Award has become a community leader in the truest sense. Her accomplishments reflect outstanding leadership and civic engagement. This year—2016—marks the 100th anniversary of the Gold Award, which approximately 1 million Girl Scouts have earned since 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Ten exceptionally inspiring Girl Scout Gold Award recipients are chosen each year as National Young Women of Distinction.

## Research Findings

According to the GSRI report, *Girl Scouting Works: The Alumnae Impact Study*, Gold Award recipients display more positive life outcomes compared with non-Girl Scout alumnae. These outcomes pertain to sense of self, life satisfaction, leadership, life success, community service, and civic engagement. Comparatively, these individuals display more positive life outcomes pertaining to sense of self, life satisfaction, leadership, life success, community service, and civic engagement.

Gold Award recipients represent our most successful and engaged—and happiest—Girl Scout alumnae.









# Life Outcomes of Gold Award Recipients Versus Non-Girl Scout Alumnae

## 1. Sense of Self

Gold Award recipients have more positive attitudes about themselves and the lives they lead.

- 73% strongly feel they are competent and capable in the activities that are important to them, compared with 52% of non-alumnae.

**70%**

strongly feel they lead a purposeful and meaningful life, compared with 42% of non-alumnae.

## 2. Life Satisfaction

Gold Award recipients are more satisfied with life and optimistic about the future.

- 89% are optimistic about their future, compared with 76% of non-alumnae.

**98%**

are happy with their life, compared with 87% of non-alumnae.

## 3. Leadership

Gold Award recipients are more likely to see themselves as leaders and to have had leadership experiences in volunteer activities, school, their communities, and politics.

- 81% think of themselves as a leader, compared with 50% of non-alumnae.
- 84% feel they have had success in leadership, compared with 64% of non-alumnae.
- Gold Award recipients have had more leadership experiences in volunteer activities (66% versus 37% of non-alumnae), in school (54% versus 39% of non-alumnae), in the community (50% versus 26% of non-alumnae), and in politics (21% versus 8% of non-alumnae).



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#### 4. Life Success

Gold Award recipients are more ambitious, placing more emphasis on a successful career, financial security, and being a leader; and are more likely to believe they are achieving their ambitions in life.

- 94% feel they have had success in education, compared with 80% of non-alumnae.
- 92% feel they have had success in their career, compared with 62% of non-alumnae.
- 78% feel they have had success in their financial life, compared with 61% of non-alumnae.

**95%**

**feel they have had success in life,**  
compared with 82%  
of non-alumnae.

#### 5. Community Service

Gold Award recipients are more likely to currently be involved in volunteer work and community service, and to make charitable donations.

- 60% are currently involved in volunteer work/community service, compared with 31% of non-alumnae.
- 75% feel they have had success in volunteer work, compared with 54% of non-alumnae.
- 79% have donated time as a volunteer, compared to 50% of non-alumnae.
- Gold Award recipients have done more in terms of pledging future earnings (40% versus 10% of non-alumnae) and making charitable bequests in their will (19% versus 4% of non-alumnae).

**70%**

**are very active in volunteer work/community service,**  
compared with 41% of  
non-alumnae.

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## 6. Civic Engagement

Gold Award recipients are more civically engaged, including in politics.

- 58% have been involved in politics, compared with 40% of non-alumnae.

## ***Gold Award Recipients' Positive Evaluation of Girl Scouts***

Gold Award recipients recognize the power of being a Girl Scout. They have positive attitudes toward Girl Scouts, including how it has shaped their lives.

- 99% say belonging to Girl Scouts has positively impacted their life.
- 92% say some of the experiences they had in Girl Scouts could not have occurred anywhere else.
- 92% say they are proud to have been a member of Girl Scouts.
- 91% say Girl Scouts played an important role in their childhood.
- 90% attribute their success in life to Girl Scouts.

Belonging to Girl Scouts has left a number of unique, powerful, and lasting impressions on Gold Award recipients.

- 96% attribute Girl Scouts with encouraging them to set ambitious life goals.
- 96% attribute Girl Scouts with providing leadership opportunities they couldn't get elsewhere.
- 91% attribute Girl Scouts with making them a more responsible member of their community.
- 90% attribute Girl Scouts with providing them with an adult role model.
- 93% attribute Girl Scouts with empowering them.

## ***Conclusion***

In 2016, Girl Scouts celebrates 100 years of girls changing the world—girls who have made meaningful, sustainable change in their communities and across the globe. The Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest honor a Girl Scout can earn, acknowledges each recipient's power and dedication to not only bettering herself, but to making the world a better place for others. These young women are courageous leaders and visionary change makers. They are our future—and it is bright!



*Every Gold Award  
recipient makes the  
world a better place.*



A stylized sun graphic in shades of yellow and orange. It features a large, solid-colored circle in the upper right quadrant, surrounded by numerous rays of varying lengths and thicknesses that curve around it. The background is a solid, lighter shade of yellow.

**Girl Scout Research Institute**

420 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10018  
[www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org)