

SOAR

Middle School Leadership Project

Service-Learning Report

As girls transition from middle to high school they develop a new sense of independence. Through SOAR, girls engaged in programming that helped them develop a deeper understanding of how they can create their own leadership path and utilize their skills and talents to care for themselves and their communities.

Twenty-three 6th-8th grade girls from Madison, Tipton, and Shelby County participated in 4 two-hour staff led sessions throughout the month of April. In each session, the girls completed hands-on skill building activities that focused on connecting compassion and leadership; embracing and overcoming challenges and change; understanding their power and leadership capacity and using their leadership to positively change their communities.

Through these sessions, the girls were able to identify issues affecting their communities and began to make preparation on how they would take action to resolve the issue they wanted to address.

The girls were very passionate about the environment and having clean public spaces. They decided to implement a Girl Scout Heart of the South SOAR Clean Up Day on Saturday, July 24, 2021, where they would complete their projects in their respective community, but all on the same day.

We hosted two Zoom check-in sessions, one in June and the other in July prior to their planned event day on the 24th. We worked with the girls on preparing and gathering support for their projects and finalizing their plans. Through using IPARDE methods, the girls determined that they needed more time to prepare and needed to reschedule their cleanup day. The new date was set to Saturday, August 7th.

On August 7th, twelve girls, ages 11-14, cleaned up two locations in West Tennessee, Nancy Lane Park & Softball Fields and Atoka Greenway Trails. The girls invited their friends, families, and members of their communities to help on the cleanup day. To our surprise, girls from West Memphis who also participate in SOAR, were inspired to facilitate a cleanup day at Maddux Elementary and at a vacant lot across the street from the school although they were not specifically targeted for the project. See attached photos.

Pre and post surveys were distributed electronically to all SOAR participants. However, getting the girls to return the surveys was more challenging than expected. Three pre and three post surveys were returned. See attachment.

During the SOAR sessions, check-ins, and following the cleanup day, girls expressed that they:

- learned how to act on issues they care about
- wanted to work toward sustaining the work they had done
- thought more deeply about the well-being of others
- wanted others to enjoy clean spaces
- felt good in helping their communities
- liked having their friends and families involved
- would do more to encourage others to care for the environment
- liked being a leader and would try to lead more often
- learned that it is okay to have to change plans when necessary