

My family has always been environmentally conscious. I grew up with a compost pile in my backyard and a recycling bin bigger than our trash can. In elementary school, my teachers would stress the importance about recycling and guest speakers would come and put on plays about water conservation, recycling and other eco-friendly practices. When Austin started single-stream recycling I was overjoyed. My mom printed out a list of everything that could be recycled and I would always check it before disposing of my waste. After seeing this positive change affect Austin, I took it upon myself to continue to make Austin a more eco-friendly city. In 7th grade I started working on my Girl Scout Silver Award Project by starting a battery-recycling program in my neighborhood. In my house, my family always had a box that we would put our used batteries in and periodically my mom would take them to a recycling center to be properly disposed of. I realized that a lot of families most likely weren't aware that batteries needed to be disposed of in a certain way. I delivered brown paper bags to 300+ houses in my neighborhood with notes explaining my project and let them know that if they put their used batteries in the bags I delivered, I would pick up the bags and properly dispose of the batteries. I explained that when you throw batteries into the trash instead of properly disposing them by taking them to a recycling center, the dead batteries end up in landfills and leak toxic chemicals into the soil. At a later date, when I picked up the bags of batteries, I left notes congratulating the people for recycling their batteries and left specific directions for them to continue recycling batteries on their own. I hoped people would continue recycling batteries once they realized how little effort it would take. When I went to pick up the bags I was overwhelmed by the community's participation. Multiple people had left boxes of batteries on their porches and others left notes thanking

me. Many people contacted me at later dates informing me that I had changed their personal habits; they now were regularly recycling batteries.

In 2012, I started a recycling program at Lamar Middle School for my Girl Scout Gold Award Project. I selected this project because Lamar lacked a recycling system, lacked recycling bins, and faculty was unaware that Lamar was on single stream recycling. As a result, Lamar had a litter problem and much of the litter was recyclable. I addressed this issue by supplying recycling bins for the classrooms and cafeteria along with receptacles in the cafeteria so students could recycle plastic bags. I recruited a PTA volunteer to take the bags to a local store for recycling. Once I procured recycling bins, I discovered that larger recycling bins could not be lifted onto the recycling dumpster. I discussed my ideas with the PTA and received funding to build a ramp for dumpster access. To encourage student's recycling efforts, I created a permanent chart for posting monthly recycling totals. After I started my project, Lamar started a composting program and I was asked to educate staff/students on composting as well as recycling. I made posters that encouraged and educated students/staff about recycling/composting, and posted them throughout the school. After the system was in place, I met with student leadership groups and taught them why recycling is important and how to recycle properly. In turn, the student groups educated the student body by playing recycling games and watching educational videos. By involving student groups, I assured that my project had as much student involvement as possible; ensuring that my project would continue after I left.

I posted information to Lamar's online parent/community newsletter to encourage parents to recycle at home. My project was used for documentation for a Keep Austin

Beautiful award. Lamar won the award and received money to expand green efforts. I was asked to represent Lamar at the award ceremony. The excitement resulting from the award spread beyond the Lamar community to the surrounding neighborhoods as news of the award was posted in various neighborhood newsletters. My project helped teach students, staff, and families the importance of recycling/composting, and helped turn Lamar into the litter-free, eco-friendly school it is today.

After making my community and middle school more eco-friendly, my next goal was to help educate my high school classmates about recycling and other green efforts the school could be making. During my freshman year, I joined my school's environmental awareness club. I initiated an educational program to inform students and staff about single stream recycling. With the assistance of my fellow club members, I printed and laminated small posters that were hung on every recycling bin to explain what could and could not be recycled.

I noticed that a lot of batteries were used and thrown away at school, especially in math and band classes (as a result of the calculators and metronomes needing multiple batteries to function). The environmental club sponsor had already established a battery recycling system for the school's math program but there was no such system in the band hall. I talked to the school band directors and they agreed to let me put a battery-recycling box in the band hall so the used batteries could be recycled.

Every time I walk past a student campus I see litter and recyclables in trash cans everywhere. I hope to take my eco-friendly passions with me to college and help make larger schools and other environments more environmentally conscious. I hope that I can influence my peers to help me make campus a more environmentally conscious place.

Someday I hope to see a recycling system in every city, no matter how large or how small; but to make a change, people have to take action. I hope that the projects I have worked on over the years have inspired people to share green efforts in other communities.