

My name is Anjana Murali and I am a junior at Shorewood High School, WI. For my girl scout gold award project, I conducted a free 2-day chess camp for girls in Milwaukee on Dec.14th and Dec.15th, 2012. I decided to conduct this unique project to encourage more girls to play chess, participate in chess tournaments, and to teach valuable life skills through 64 squares. The 75 girls who came to the camp learned how to play chess, competed in a five game tournament, and received free medals, chess sets, girl scout cinch bags, girl scout pencils, chess videos, chess books etc. In addition, snacks, lunch, and t-shirts were provided for each girl. Those who won the first three place in each category won trophies. The main issue I wanted to address through this camp was to remove the gender disparity in the chess game as chess has been viewed as a male dominated sport for many years.

On the first day of camp, the girls were split into seven groups. Each group had a youth chess instructor in a room equipped with a SMART Board, chess sets, and an adult helper. Each youth chess instructor had a WSCF rating of 800 and above and many years of experience as a chess player. The instructors used the interactive SMART Boards to virtually teach the girls how to play chess and used worksheets to teach the basic skills and tactics involved in playing chess. In between learning sessions, the girls played in a 5 round chess tournament so that they could practice the chess skills they learned.

The inspiration for this project was two-fold. This past summer, I was part of an eighteen-member girl planning team for the Girls' World Forum that taught over 500 girls from around the world about three of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, promote gender equality and empower women, and ensure environmental sustainability. Since I was the one teaching all of these Girl Scouts the importance of taking action to better our world, I decided that I wanted to practice what I was preaching. As a result, I based my gold award project on a topic that would help achieve the MDG regarding promoting gender equality and empowering women. My other source of inspiration for this project, Susan Polgar, is a living example of this double standard when it comes to chess. Rebounding from her past experiences in which she experienced severe discrimination, Polgar initiated the Susan Polgar Foundation so that she could teach All Girls Chess Camps to develop female chess champions. I have been fortunate to attend her camp for the past two years, as I was the WI female chess champion in 2009 and in 2010. Attending Polgar's camps has definitely helped me improve my chess skills as I have gotten the opportunity to play with the top female chess players in the country. Seeing the positive impacts Polgar's chess camps have had on girls, I decided to model my chess camp after hers. However, I didn't want to make my chess camp exclusively for girls who have earned the champion title because in my eyes, every girl is or has the potential to be a champion.

After prompting 75 girls to change the world, I knew I had to have a way for these girls to take a stance and advocate for women and girls. As a result, I taught them about the game of chess and the way of life. I also taught them how the double standard exists in chess and how those who do play chess are judged harshly. By teaching these girls how to play chess and the game's connections to life and gender disparity, I hope I instilled enough knowledge and ambition in them so that they can go out and participate in chess tournaments, take a stance against gender disparity whether its by taking action on their own or playing chess, and share their knowledge about chess with others. I hope

I prompted a chain reaction of girls teaching other girls how chess pertains to life and how one girl can easily advocate for women and girls by playing chess while increasing her mental abilities.

There are many sustainable aspects of my chess camp. First of all, one of the goals of my camp was to empower girls and make them feel like they have the ability to do something about the gender disparity in the world. I gave these girls a head start by helping them take a stance in the male dominated game of chess. Education can never be lost. Similarly, the information regarding gender disparity and advocating for women that the girls learned at the chess camp will never be lost. After all, educating someone is like lighting a candle. Once one candle is lit, the flame of knowledge can then be passed on to a multitude of others quite quickly.

Additionally, at the end of my camp, I equipped each girl with a chess set so that she can go home, practice her chess skills, and play in chess tournaments that organizations like WSCF conduct in Milwaukee area throughout the year to encourage more youth participation. Also, with the chess skills and chess equipment that the girls received, they can share their passion and knowledge of chess with others to make the male dominated sport more popular among girls.

Lastly, with all of the donated chess sets I received, Mr. Bob Patterson, the Executive Director of WSCF assured me that he would conduct an All Girls Chess Camp and Tournament every year from now on because he saw how successful and inspirational my camp was. For as long as I can, I would like to continue advocating for women and girls through chess by conducting my chess camp multiple times each year. However, I know in addition to my chess camp both WSCF and USCF will continue the momentum I have built up for breaking the gender disparity in life through chess by their various initiatives.

I recently received an email from Mr. Robert McLellan, the Director of Marketing for USCF, inviting me to attend the Super Nationals in April 2013. He is now working with Ruth Haring, the USCF President, on a new initiative called the National Association for Girls and Women in Chess. I am so happy that my camp is going to be a small stepping stone of a huge project.

My event was a grand success. I was so impressed with the diversity of the girls. I had girls ages from 5 to 18, girls from different ethnicity, girls with no knowledge of chess, girls with little knowledge of chess, girls who played in one or two chess tournaments, girls with special needs, girls who wanted to learn chess, girls from girl scout, girls from suburbs, girls from inner city, and girls from all over Milwaukee. I wanted to reach all types of girls in Milwaukee and I was so glad to get a variety of girls in my camp. I think I have inspired all of them and made an impact in all of them to carry on the passion.