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High school students learn grant writing

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(Courtesy photo)

Its members present Gena VanOsselaer of the Austin Children's Shelter a check for \$2,100 in April.

Instead of gaining experience about the nonprofit sector in college, two Westwood High School students will graduate from high school knowing the fundamentals of writing and reviewing a grant application, thanks to the Girls Giving Grants program.

Austin Children's Shelter is receiving the Girls Giving Grants first grant of \$2,100, said Lisa Lyons, director of Girls Giving Grants. This grant will fund gift cards to provide clothing and necessities for 42 children and adolescents admitted into the shelter.

"We wanted the youth of Austin to learn how to give philanthropically, but in an informative way," Lyons said.

Before rewarding the grant to the Austin Children's Shelter in April, members conducted site visits of the two finalist organizations, the Austin Children's Shelter and the Center for Child Protection.

The Center for Child Protection provides a home-like environment in Austin where abused and traumatized children go for forensic interviews and medical exams. All services are provided at no charge and referrals to the Center are made exclusively through law enforcement and Child Protective Services.

Over the past year, Lyons and the student Girls Giving Grants volunteers built the organization from the ground up by naming, branding and launching the organization's Web site and learning about the grant-writing process. The slogan for Girls Giving Grants is "Changing the Face of Giving."

"They [the girls] have complete ownership," Lyons said. "The girls came up with the name, logo and everything."

Westwood High School senior Miriam Kalk became involved with Girls Giving Grants because her mother is a member of Impact Austin, the parent group of Girls Giving Grants. Miriam said the experience and being around her family has helped instill her belief in helping others and has given her a new perspective on philanthropy.

"You have a direct way of helping people through this," Miriam said. "I've immediately become interested in the grant-writing process. At my young age, this power to help people is not always given. This isn't just about delegating a project, it's about fully seeing it through because it's your money you've invested. I've learned so much about the Austin area through this and the needs out there that need to be met. For the rest of my life, I want to help those whenever I see a need. This has definitely fulfilled or exceeded my expectations so far."

Like Miriam, Brittany Burch, also a Westwood senior, become involved with Girls Giving Grants because her mother volunteers with Impact Austin. Brittany then become further involved with the organization serving as vice-chair of one of the groups looking through about 16 grant applications. As vice-chair, Brittany conducted meetings and completed site visits.

"It was neat to be able to interview the executive director and the program director from each organization involved," Brittany said. "They are interested in what you have to say."

Membership requirements for Girls Giving Grants state members must be females in eighth through 12th grade and must contribute \$100, which is combined with other members' donations to form the grant. They also must attend meetings every other Sunday to learn how to review grant applications. The next grant cycle begins in September.

Lyons said this year's goals for the organization include adding 10 new members from the Central Texas area and increasing the grant funds to \$3,000.

For more information on Girls Giving Grants or to join the organization, contact Lisa Lyons at llyons@impact-austin.org.