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Grade 12

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Utah

What Drives You?

My drive is to use science and research to serve others. This passion first started my freshmen year. During that winter, my close friend and I realized it was illogical that we did not have any free feminine hygiene products in our school restrooms. With the help of Deann Tilton, friend and teacher at a neighboring high school, we started the Hygiene Equity Project. We created a survey specifically for menstruating students and distributed it among three separate high schools. This survey assessed barriers students faced when trying to care for themselves during menstruation. In the survey results, sixty-five percent of students answered they had to leave school multiple times due to lack of hygiene products within their schools. Ninety-eight percent indicated that tampons and pads should be freely available in bathrooms. This just heightened our belief that these items should be treated as any other hygiene product.

We approached our principal, showing her the results of our research, and decided to focus on increasing the accessibility of hygiene products in our school. After months of deliberating with our administration, they agreed to provide these hygiene products year-round at no cost to students. The following summer, we were granted the opportunity to present our Hygiene Equity Project to the Utah Sexual Violence Council within Utah's Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice. This experience to try and serve our fellow students was exasperating, gratifying, and valuable. Without further research into the problem at hand and analyzing that data, many more menstruating students would not have had access to hygiene products at school.

Throughout my following years of high school my love of science and research were cemented. This led me to take more AP classes in science and realize the environmental crisis our world is facing. This past summer I was privileged enough to be on an environmental committee researching and visiting ecosystems in Nakuru, Kenya. Being in a city that has one of the highest poverty rates in Nakuru county, many families rely on burning firewood as a much cheaper alternative to gas cooking. To try and combat the consequences using firewood created, our committee planted a variety of easily managed fruit-bearing trees around the perimeter of Muriundu Primary School. By the end of our time there, we had planted over one hundred trees, and it was a gift to see the kids' smiles as they pointed to the saplings with excitement. I shared

in their enthusiasm as I was reminded of my own passion to reduce my impact on the planet and find solutions within my own community. I currently plan to major in Environmental Science & Health in college where I can continue to learn and research the science behind the issues facing our environment today. In my future, I hope to serve and support minority and working-class communities to have access to resources to protect their environment and thus, their well-being. Whichever path I take, I know I will continue my drive of serving others using science.