

# A Gold Award that's gone to the dogs - and cats

Berlin Girl Scout Stephanie Kohler earns organization's highest honor with project at AWA

By KRISTEN DOWD

The Sun

Stephanie Kohler knows firsthand the benefits of adopting a pet from a local animal shelter. Her family has two adopted pets - a dog named George and a cat named Molly - and the Berlin 16-year-old has been volunteering with the Animal Welfare Association in Voorhees since 2014.

When Kohler needed to choose a Girl Scout Gold Award project last year, she knew from the start she wanted to do something with animal adoption. She honed in on hosting an adoption fair at the AWA, but while this decision may have been easy, carrying out the seven-step project was an enormous feat.

"I wanted to encourage people to save a life - adopt a pet from a shelter," Kohler said. "I think it turned out very well."

The Girl Scout Gold Award is the organization's highest achievement, open only to girls in high school. Kohler, who is homeschooled, is a rising high school senior. The animal-loving teen is planning to be a pre-veterinary major when she heads to college.

The adoption fair was held Aug. 27, 2016, and Kohler received her Gold Award in May. She provided goodie bags for families



KRISTEN DOWD/The Sun  
Berlin resident Stephanie Kohler, 16, smiles with adoptable pooch Celia at the Animal Welfare Association. Kohler completed her Girl Scout Gold Award project at the Voorhees shelter.

adopting pets at her event, filled with treats, toys and t-shirts of

her own design. She organized and advertised the day, provided

refreshments and passed out homemade brochures highlight-

ing the importance of animal adoption. At the end of the day, five dogs and three cats were adopted. But Kohler's efforts didn't stop there. She also wrote and published a book, "Going Home," detailing a dog's journey of adoption, which is available for purchase on Amazon in the United States and Europe.

"It was a nice idea," AWA shelter manager Nanci Keklak said. "I love when the kids come through here, whether it's with blanket and towel drives or something else."

The AWA is a private, non-profit animal welfare organization located on Centennial Boulevard in Voorhees. The organization doesn't receive funds from the government or national groups and relies on the community - and people such as Kohler - to support its life-saving programs.

Kohler was the first in her Girl Scout Troop 30430 to earn the Gold Award, although there are several Girl Scouts in the group working on their own achievement. Kohler is continuing with the Girl Scouts for her final year of high school, even though she has achieved the organization's highest honor. She's enjoyed the Girl Scouts since she joined as a

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Daisy a decade ago, and has been with the same troop leader, Debbi Silverman, since the early days.

"Now it's just a year of fun," Kohler said with a smile, adding she'd encourage anyone interested in the Girl Scouts to join. "It's lots of fun. You'll make lots of friends. You'll have the time of your life."

To learn more about the Girl Scouts, please visit [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org). To learn more about the AWA, please visit [www.awanjan.org](http://www.awanjan.org).