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WEST OF BOSTON

Helping children get past grief she knows

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By Cindy Cantrell
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Sarah Hutchinson was just 5 years old when her father, Edward, lost his battle with cancer. For years afterward, the Concord resident attended support groups at The Children's Room in Arlington and Circle Camps for Grieving Children in Maine, even becoming a camp counselor in training so that younger girls might benefit from her experiences.

For her efforts in extending those hard-earned lessons nationwide, the newly graduated three-sport athlete from Concord-Carlisle Regional High School was recently honored with a Girl Scout Gold Award.

“I know from my experience that many children don't get the support they need for their loss, and their hurt can linger, leading to unwise, pain-driven decisions,” said Hutchinson, 18, in an e-mail. “My project sprang from this insight and a growing passion to expand access to what I'd received.”



Driven by a desire to give back to The Children's Room as a peer counselor, she developed a curriculum in conjunction with the organization to train grieving teens to mentor grieving children—a role usually reserved for adult professionals. The Children's Room then shared it with the National Alliance for Grieving Children, which in turn is making the training program available to its network of more than 900 organizations nationwide.

Sarah Hutchinson worked to develop a program that trains teens to mentor younger children who have suffered a loss.

Hutchinson, a third-generation Girl Scout, says Girl Scouting has “shaped who I am and how I see the world,” including her college and career ambitions.

Inspired as a fourth-grader by a diverse group of engineers who led an event, she will study engineering at Dartmouth College this fall.

Above all, Hutchinson is appreciative to the Girl Scouts for instilling the leadership skills to create something positive from a loss she will always feel.

“I am living proof of the benefits of peer grief support programs,” she says.

“My hope is that every child who suffers this special, profound pain will be as well cared-for and I was.”

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