On February 11, 2015 a group of five girls from the Traverse City area will be presented with a “2015 Project of the Year Award” at a ceremony in Washington D.C. as part of the annual conference of The Corps Network, a national association of over 125 Conservation Corps from around the country.

The girls are part of a SEEDS project, entitled “G.U.R.L.S! Corps – Girls United for Resilience, Leadership, and Service.” GURLS was created through a partnership with Child and Family Services of Northwest Michigan to provide opportunities for teenagers aging out of the foster care system and was supported financially by the Biederman Foundation. The SEEDS Youth Corps hosted 11 students in the foster care system, five of whom formed this all-girls team. “The award was less about the work they did, though they did a lot, and more about the work they did on themselves and each other,” says advisor Bill Watson, of SEEDS.

Before heading off to Washington D.C. to receive their award, MyNorth.com asked Savanna Crowell, one of the five girls from GURLS Corps! to write about her experiences as a member of the group. Savanna is the youngest member of the group and says that she hopes to return as a GURLS Corps! member again this coming summer. Read on for Savanna’s written account.
A summer full of joy and laughter along with hard working and learning, is the best kind of summer, in my opinion. There are many things that my team and I did this summer that were hard but fun. We all learned things that may have changed the way we thought from then to now. I changed over the summer, learning about myself and thinking about my future.

What our team did last summer:

- We worked at the SEEDS farm at Historic Barns Park
- We worked on trail maintenance for Power Island and North Manitou Island
- We helped set up and take down the huge screens and sound panels for the Traverse City Film Festival
- We did a lot of things for the Grand Traverse Commons, such as putting up fencing around the grounds for parties and festivals, helping take down stages and clean up around the grounds. The first time we put up a fence it was raining. The second time lightning struck beside us all as we were under a stage taking it down. It wasn’t even raining when the lightning struck.

Times like these made me learn some things.

What have I learned? I learned that making a rough time into a fun time makes a bad time a good time. When the lightning struck, I laughed! Not only because it was awesome, but because I was a little freaked out. I thought I could have died but I was also with friends and we were enjoying our work together.

I learned that complaining can cause annoyance to teammates and that it doesn’t get you anywhere.

We all learned how to use many tools and the names of different rakes, like the garden rake, which has the sharp metal ends; the leaf rake, which has plastic ends; and the pitchfork, which is like a huge fork and helps pick up leaves from huge piles of hay.

The biggest thing I learned this summer is that either you work hard or you get less hours. Less hours means less money – and as young teenagers, we like having money! We also earned a big scholarship award. If you work a minimum number of hours, then you earn a scholarship for college or other trainings after high school. I want to keep working and get money so that by the time I’m old enough to move out, I’ll have money for an apartment.

My time with SEEDS really influenced me. I used to be something that I’m not anymore. I used to be very shy and I wasn’t carefree. I’m not that immature, scared little girl anymore. SEEDS has helped me grow up some and realize what ‘real life’ can be like. I am a lot braver and carefree. I can actually ask someone questions – even when I know they are a very important person. I know when to act mature and also when I don’t need to.