

At the end of every year, the young women of the church gather for Young Women in Excellence. This event is similar to a Scout Court of Honor. It is an opportunity for the young women to be recognized for the good things they are doing. It is a celebration of Personal Progress.

It's hard to believe that a year has already gone by since our last event. Then we compared Personal Progress to the acorn growing into the mighty oak. The acorn starts out tiny and full of potential. It grows slowly and steadily and takes root deep in the ground to become a mighty oak.

This year we chose a 'county fair' theme and called it a "Blue Ribbon Event." Many of us have been to a county fair before. At the fair, we have a chance to see a wide variety of people and the ways they showcase their talents. Many folks enter their wares in contests, hoping for a blue ribbon prize. Some work hard making homemade foods like pies or jam. Some show produce from their gardens. Some sew quilts and others show livestock animals. We even hear live music at the fair. Each person works hard in order to produce their very best results.

Tonight the young women of Hartwood ward are displaying and sharing their talents and their efforts in Personal Progress. Like the county fair, there is much to see and enjoy. Unlike the county fair, there is no judging- no contest to see who has done the best. Each young woman is working at her own pace to grow. Each is learning to accept and act upon the Young Women Values. Through this Personal Progress program, each is developing habits that will strengthen her faith and testimony of Jesus Christ, as well as develop her unique gifts.

President Gordon B. Hinckley once described the young women of the Church as his best hope for the world:

"When you save a girl, you save generations. She will grow in strength and righteousness. She will marry in the house of the Lord. She will teach her children the ways of truth. ... I see this as the one bright shining hope in a world that is marching toward self-destruction".

Personal Progress can help young women have tremendous power to make a difference in their homes, among their friends, in their communities—and, ultimately, in the world.

Think about it mathematically. It takes at least 70 hours to complete just the value project requirements for your Young Women medallion, and there are about 435,000 young women in the Church today. If each one completed the Personal

Progress program, they would collectively spend more than 30 million hours doing good in their homes and communities. That's roughly a total of 1.25 million days or about 3,400 years. Do you see how this army of young women can make the world a much brighter, better place?

Personal Progress does not need to take a lot of time or greatly interfere with your normal, busy life. In fact, much of what you are already doing can be incorporated in your Personal Progress. If you will simply OPEN your book (or go online) on a regular basis and read through it, you will find things that coincide with your day-to-day life. Some of you are in seminary and have daily required reading. Many of the personal progress experiences have you read a few verses and write down your thoughts about them. (ding) You can be in a choir, a play or a talent show and complete a personal progress experience. (ding) Preparing for college is a personal progress experience. (ding) Doing laundry and caring for clothes. (ding) Money management and budgeting. (ding) Teaching a family home evening (ding)

You may have heard the iPhone commercial "There's an app for that," well, in Personal Progress, there is likely an experience or value project for that! You can even design your own experiences and projects.

In May 2009, Elder David A. Bednar gave a CES fireside address to BYU-Idaho entitled "Things as they Really Are." He said,

I long have been impressed with the simple and clear definition of truth set forth in the Book of Mormon: "The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls"

Sadly, some young men and young women in the Church today ignore "things as they really are" and neglect eternal relationships for digital distractions, diversions, and detours that have no lasting value.... A young man or woman may waste countless hours, postpone or forfeit vocational or academic achievement, and ultimately sacrifice cherished human relationships because of mind- and spirit-numbing video and online games. As the Lord declared, "Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment ... : Thou shalt not idle away thy time, neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known"

Elder Bednar goes on to say:

I raise an apostolic voice of warning about the potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls. The concerns I raise are not new; they apply equally to other types of media, such as television, movies, and music. But in a cyber world, these challenges are more pervasive and intense. I plead with you to beware of the sense-dulling and spiritually destructive influence of cyberspace technologies that are used to produce high fidelity and that promote degrading and evil purposes.

“... one of [the adversary’s] most potent tactics is to beguile you and me as embodied spirits to disconnect gradually and physically from things as they really are. Please be careful of becoming so immersed and engrossed in pixels, texting, earbuds, twittering, online social networking, and potentially addictive uses of media and the Internet that you fail to recognize the importance of your physical body and miss the richness of person-to-person communication. Beware of digital displays and data in many forms of computer-mediated interaction that can displace the full range of physical capacity and experience.

Obedience opens the door to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. And the spiritual gifts and abilities activated by the power of the Holy Ghost enable us to avoid deception—and to see, to feel, to know, to understand, and to remember things as they really are.

Young Women: Working on Personal Progress regularly can help you see things as they really are. It won’t be long before you will be sitting in the bishop’s office for your birthday interview, and you’re talking about how things are at home and in school. Then the bishop asks how your Personal Progress is going. Are you (a) excited to tell him about the things you’ve worked on this year, (b) embarrassed because you haven’t worked on it that much lately, or (c) blushing because you don’t even know where your Personal Progress book is?

I hope you will begin now to work on it. I know that if you will do so, it will change your life for the better. Even after you’ve earned your Young Womanhood Recognition, you can still use Personal Progress to maintain your spiritual focus and keep reaching for your dreams. The members of the Young Women general presidency do exactly that. Sister Susan Tanner set a goal to do one temple endowment for each year of her life. Sister Julie Beck is reading the Book of Mormon in Portuguese. And Sister Elaine Dalton reached her dream of running a marathon. “It took mornings of getting up when my body wanted to sleep,” Sister

Dalton recalls. “But as I crossed the finish line, I was happy. And I decided that this is what Personal Progress is really all about—being focused on good things, becoming a better person, feeling the Spirit, and being happy!”

In keeping with their example, I am committing to begin my personal progress again. I will start all over again and work toward finishing it again. Since most of my young women go to school, I will not work on it during the times they will be in school. I invite my young women to join me if they have not yet begun or to pick up where they left off. Each young woman has a progress sheet. I will post my progress sheet at all YW events for all to see. I will keep you informed on what I am working on if you want to do it along with me. And when we meet again this time next year, I will let everyone know how far I have come. My hope is to lead by example and show the young women the importance of doing personal progress at any age! I am anxious to see the changes it will bring to my life and to those around me. I close with my testimony that Jesus Christ is real and He loves us. He lived for us and died for us. This is His church and I want to live my life to be worthy of all He has done for me.

Sources:

New Era Nov 2006. 5 Reasons to Love Personal Progress by Jan Pinborough

Liahona June 2010. Things as they Really Are by David A. Bednar
