

# SILVER CORD

## ALL THE WRONG REASONS

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### Students Enrolled

2018

The numbers decrease each year as students that don't fulfill the requirements get dropped.



**Sophomores: 227**

**Juniors: 181**

**Seniors: 131**

**S**INCE ITS INSTALLMENT BY THE 2011 Johnston High School Student Council, the Silver Cord program has distinguished students who went above expectations to improve their community through at least 150 hours of volunteering, commemorated by a silver cord to be worn around their collar during graduation. The intended purpose of this award was to encourage other students to strive to give back to the community that played a major role in their upbringing.

Everyone benefits from a strong and healthy community; I doubt any will argue this fact. However in its attempts to encourage students to volunteer, Silver Cord became for many an activity about individual gain.

It is not required to take part in Silver Cord



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to volunteer, it is only required for those who wish to prove they did it. And consequently, alongside things such as course load, G.P.A., class rank (rest in peace), and ACT scores, Silver Cord has created another platform for competition among students. For many, volunteering is no longer about bettering the community, but rather about bettering themselves in the eyes of those handing out scholarships and college acceptance letters.

Silver Cord applies immense pressure for students to volunteer just to help themselves look better. Because the purpose of the program is to achieve recognition, it removes the internal motivation to volunteer altruistically.

Silver Cord, in essence, is a program about community.

Yet, within Silver Cord itself, there is hardly a trace of a community of its own. By joining the students of Silver Cord together, the program could actively combat the disengaged volunteering.

Many students have amazing experiences that should be shared and learned from. These experiences could even go so far to encourage those struggling to find the motivation to volunteer. But with no platform to present their stories, they often go unheard.

Libbie Smith '18 went to volunteer at the Animal Rescue League (ARL) when having a bad day. She planned to spend an hour there, but started and did not want to leave. "One of the dogs I went to play with just blindly trusted me," she said. "He made my day better within minutes. I realized that the ARL was

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kind of my therapy. It's given me humbling experiences more than anything."

Unlike groups and organizations, Silver Cord is a program, so it doesn't hold meetings. Without this group activity, students lack the opportunity to connect with other members to share new experiences. Instead, they are left alone to reflect on the work they have accomplished. Students who volunteer just for the cord could be reminded of the positive impacts of volunteering. The required

paperwork does have questions such as "how has this experience influenced your life and how were you helpful?" but without holding discussions, any question asked can lead to a closed feedback

“**SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEES  
AREN'T GOING TO KNOW OR  
UNDERSTAND THE REASONS WHY  
YOU MIGHT NOT BE A PART OF  
SILVER CORD. THEY ARE JUST  
GOING TO KNOW YOU  
AREN'T A PART OF IT.**”

- Student A

loop.

If there were group meetings, Silver Cord could act as its own supervisor, watching over their members and keeping them focused on what volunteering is really about: the community.

The Silver Cord program is a cornerstone for much of the volunteering that students do. But Silver Cord, a program about helping the community, needs a community of its own. By holding even the occasional meeting or sending out a newsletter to tell their stories, members could encourage their fellow students to seek their own motivations in volunteering instead of relying on rewards. Silver Cord could become a program not just about getting kids volunteering today, but volunteering tomorrow and throughout their lives.

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