Chapter Name
Junior Auxiliary of Tupelo

Submitted by Name and Email Address
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Chapter Address
PO Box 673
Tupelo, MS
38804

Population Category
30,000+

Name of Project
SHINE

Active Membership of Chapter
89

Number of Members Participating
14

Total Hours of Service Given by Members
445

Cost of Project
4000.00

**Number of Persons Served**
39

**Upload an Entry Essay (1000 Words or Less, Double Spaced)**

**Upload one digital photo**
SHINEGROUP.jpg

Sent from National Association of Junior Auxiliaries, Inc.
Wilma Johnson Wilbanks National Focus Award
Junior Auxiliary of Tupelo

SHINE

“We are Strong! Healthy! Independent! Non-Judgmental! Empowered! And we SHINE! — we what? We SHINE!” The voices of excited leaders and nervous campers fill the room with the SHINE cheer as the annual camp for rising seventh grade girls kicks off its fun, action-packed, educational week. Each of the words that make up the SHINE name and cheer are concepts that leaders try to instill in the camp attendees.

SHINE is a service project of the Junior Auxiliary of Tupelo. The camp was first imagined in 2009 by Junior Auxiliary of Tupelo members who wanted to help struggling young ladies prepare to enter middle school. Girls are invited to SHINE on recommendation of guidance counselors and teachers of area sixth graders. The girls invited to SHINE come from all backgrounds. Some of them are natural leaders and some are very shy. SHINE committee members serve as small group leaders. The leaders work to develop mentoring relationships with the girls throughout the week’s activities. The relationships formed through SHINE do not end on Friday. Group leaders reach out to “their girls” several times throughout the following school year by sending them encouraging notes and cards. The bonds formed through SHINE last years. “It gives me such joy when I run into my SHINE girls. I love catching up with them. They all seem to say that the week of SHINE was so good for them, but I honestly think that I am the one who continues to be blessed by the experiences and relationships formed through this project,” said one committee member.

The evenings of SHINE are packed with a variety of activities that are all thoughtfully planned to help these girls take-on middle school with confidence! Large group times consist of singing, sharing, guest speakers, and of course, the SHINE cheer! Small group time gives the girls the chance to connect with one another through fun icebreakers and more serious group conversations. Between each session,
girls get to show their creative sides by designing and painting bulletin boards that they take home at the end of the week. Each evening the girls also enjoy a meal together with their small groups. Even the shyest of girls seems to open-up over chicken strips and mac n cheese!

One JA leader shared her experience, “I will never forget Courtney who was in my small group my first year. She was very nervous about going to middle school but I already had a daughter that had been there so I was able to answer some questions for her. She told me that she had been interested in choir but didn’t know how to get in it. I gave her some information and encouraged her to try it. I was so happy for her when later that year I went to a choir performance and she was up on stage! She found me after the performance and told me she wouldn’t have been there if it wasn’t for me telling her she could do it! She is in high school now and she is doing very well!”

Special guest speakers cover a variety of topics from etiquette to abstinence to personal safety. One annual speaker, Lee County Sheriff Jim Johnson, never fails to entertain as he shares very serious information about the dangers of social media and the Internet. His information on cyber-bullying, online predators, and responsible social media use always captivates the entire audience. He graciously answers questions from the girls and the leaders! He does a great job of connecting with the girls and showing that their sheriff truly cares about their safety. He gives out his contact information and encourages anyone to contact him if there is ever have a question or concern that he could help with thus beginning relationships with these young ladies that last for years.

Each evening is wrapped up with a fun time in the “big room” with activities such as dancing, yoga, and personal defense demonstrations. The last night the girls are given SHINE t-shirts to wear on Friday. A group leader shared her experience with one camper. “I had a sweet girl one year that kept asking me how much it was for meals and her t-shirt and everything. She was so worried that she wasn’t going to be able to pay. I explained to her that no one who was there had to pay anything, and she stopped worrying about money and started enjoying herself.”
On Friday morning campers meet at a downtown location for scrap-book making and a small group cheer presentation. Group leaders spend time talking with their girls and giving them individual character awards. A visit from the local middle school counselor rounds out the morning session. Following this, all the campers and leaders are treated to a special lunch where manners learned earlier in the week can be shown off at one of Tupelo’s finest restaurants. Lunch always includes one final special guest speaker who shares an inspiring message. The camp ends with a funny, and often sentimental, slide-show of the week, but the memories and wisdom gained lasts much longer.

Junior Auxiliary of Tupelo members have overwhelmingly voted to renew SHINE each year because they know the positive impact this experience gives rising seventh grade girls. Each year project members spend time reflecting on what can be improved. Changes are made to include topics and activities that apply to the ever-changing culture. One day some of these SHINE girls may very well be JA members mentoring the next generation of young ladies.