



# Girls Group

## “Building a Better Future, One Girl at a Time”

Dear Friends,

As Girls Group starts its sixth school year, we have even more exciting milestones to celebrate. All ten of the senior Girls Group participants graduated from high school and have now begun their first semester as college students. These motivated young women are attending college at Wayne State, Ferris State, Wiley College, Western Michigan, Tuskegee University, and Washtenaw Community College. It is because of generous contributions from donors such as you, that these wonderful young women now have the experience of being first generation college students, and role models for their families and communities.

Girls Group is proud that the young women who graduated from high school are already influencing the younger members of our organization. The original Girls Group participants generally did not know people who attended college, were not sure they were college material, and were not aware of the intense preparation required to be admitted to a respected university. With the success of Girls Group’s first graduating class, the mindset and dynamics of the younger students has changed considerably. Current Girls Group participants assume they will attend college, because that’s what Girls Group members do! We are grateful for this shift in expectations, which allows Girls Group to focus more on tactical college requirements and less on purely emotional and motivational issues.

In addition to helping students stay in high school and prepare for college, Girls Group continues to expand the opportunities available to the young women we serve. During the last year, monthly community service activities have been an important element of programming. The ability to give back to the community has improved the self-esteem and empathy of the Girls Group participants, as well as helping to build their resumes for college and part-time jobs. Another monthly addition to Girls Group programming is the Youth Council meetings, where the young women enjoy the opportunity to meet with staff members in small groups, and to help plan future activities.

As Girls Group grows in experience and maturity, we continue to add programming elements which enhance confidence, leadership abilities, social consciousness, and a sense of self-worth. There are now seven key elements of Girls Group:

1. Weekly discussion groups which increase awareness and develop a positive peer pressure environment;
2. Weekend programs exposing the young women to new opportunities and experiences;
3. Personalized programming supporting each young woman’s need to find success and to have a listening ear;
4. Monthly community service activities which create opportunities for the young women to give back to others and to develop empathy;
5. Homework support and lessons on organization and planning;
6. Weekly college prep, including ACT prep; help with applications, essays, financial aid, scholarships, and college selection; college tours, and motivational discussions; and
7. Summer program experiences which further broaden the young women’s horizons and help to prepare them for college.

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Girls Group is an alliance of women dedicated to helping high school girls achieve emotional and economic security through expanded educational and professional opportunities. All programs endeavor to provide a safe, nurturing environment where young women develop qualities and learn skills that enhance their self-confidence, leadership abilities, social consciousness, and sense of self-worth.

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Weekly discussion group topics over the last year have included financial management, nutrition and healthy food planning, anger management, stress management, career days, dating violence prevention, and families without fathers. We have continued Book Club and, most recently, read “Speak” by Laurie Halse Anderson and “The Perks of Being a Wallflower” by Stephen Chbosky.

Summer camp experiences continue to be an important part of college preparation and maturity. The summer of 2007 was the first time that most Girls Group participants traveled by plane, and each year there is less drama and more maturity about being away from home. This past summer, Girls Group sponsored three young women at the Female Institute (James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia), five young women at the Tavis Smiley Leadership Institute on the UCLA campus, and one young woman at the Wiley College developmental program. Braving her first airplane trip, so that a young woman can grow academically and develop her independence, continues to be an important maturity marker for Girls Group participants. Girls Group also ran a summer sports camp, encouraging the students to increase their comfort level with exercise.

Girls Group is proud to have received grants from the James A. and Faith Knight Foundation, the Michigan Women’s Foundation, the Junior League of Ann Arbor, the Sojourner Foundation, MGM Grand Detroit, and the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation. Girls Group continues to develop both the Board of Directors and the Advisory Board, and is honored that so many excellent individuals and organizations are providing support and guidance.

In a year of financial concerns for all of us, Girls Group would like to remind you that we are primarily a volunteer organization, and fully 96% of funding is directly applied to programming. Girls Group is extremely proud of our results, and we would like to share with you a paragraph from the original Girls Group program description, which reflects how much we have accomplished during the last five years:

“The ultimate ambition of Girls Group is to help these young women define and achieve goals that will break the cycle of poverty and lead them to self-sufficiency. Girls Group focuses on providing the tools necessary for these young women to reach their goals, develop personal and leadership skills, and improve the chances of a better future than would have happened without our involvement. Our ideal is that each girl goes to college, earns a rewarding and well-paying job, finds a good partner, and helps make the world a better place. That ideal might not be reached by every girl, but we want each of them to finish high school, obtain a good job, stay out of jail, avoid drug use, find a safe and supportive partner, delay pregnancy, and move forward in the world with pride and self-confidence.”

We are grateful for your ongoing support of Girls Group. The Board of Directors and I hope that you will be able to join us on November 15 for the fourth annual Girls Group fundraiser. Whether you can attend or not, please use the enclosed envelope to make a fully tax-deductible contribution to Girls Group to support its most important work.

With sincerity and gratitude,

Sue Schooner  
Executive Director