

Program Description and Impact

The YWCA is an affiliate member of Girls Inc., a national nonprofit dedicated to inspiring girls to be “strong, smart, and bold.” With roots dating to 1864, Girls Inc. has provided educational and life skills programming to millions of girls, particularly those in high-risk environments.

Fulfilling its mission of empowering girls, Girls Inc. at the YWCA was launched in 2008 to address high rates of poverty, discipline problems, pregnancy, and poor academic performance at selected public Nashville middle schools. A team of community representatives led by the Mayor’s Office of Children and Youth identified a serious lack of structured middle school enrichment programs offering targeted social and academic interventions. Many existing programs had long waiting lists; others were inaccessible to students living in high-risk neighborhoods because of location or hours of operation. Also, the schools and community sites chosen for the inaugural year had no organized enrichment activities designed to meet the needs of at-risk middle school girls.

Today, Girls Inc. at the YWCA serves 26 program sites, including 2 after-school sites, a site at Weaver, Chaput-Avery program, and 4 Train the Trainer sites. Last year we served over 700 girls between the ages of 7-18, this year we are projected to serve 550 with the pandemic creating a few changes in our program offerings. Girls Inc.’s after-school, in-school, spring break and summer camp sessions offer a range of activities that promote healthy choices and a positive future. As a local affiliate of Girls Incorporated, we inspire all girls to be strong, smart, and bold through life-changing programs and experiences that help girls navigate gender, economic, body, and social barriers. We provide research-based curricula, delivered by trained professionals in a positive all-girl environment to equip girls to achieve academically; lead healthy and physically active lives, and discover new talents and interests.

Girls Inc. at YWCA carries out the Shared Principles of Positive Youth Development. The YWCA participated in Nashville’s year-long process involving the Mayor’s Office, Metro departments, and other nonprofits to develop the five principles of Positive Youth Development. Girls Inc. meets the 43 standards of program quality in each of the five Shared Principles of Positive Youth Development. All Girls Inc. activities are presented in ways that promote a sense of physical, social, and emotional safety. The highly interactive sessions foster meaningful participation and engage the girls in learning experiences that build valuable life skills. The girls have opportunities for building purpose by learning to intentionally make healthy decisions and build healthy relationships with their friends and with the adults in their lives.

What our Girls are facing:

- 7 in 10 girls are sexually harassed at some point in High School.
- 1 in 4 girls experience sexual assault or abuse by age 17.
- 78% of girls are not happy with their bodies.
- Women make up over half of those receiving bachelor’s degrees but only 18% of degrees in computer information and engineering.
- 1 out of every 5 children in the US live in poverty.
- 1 in 7 girls report missing school because they feel unsafe at school.

- 1 in 10 children in the US have experienced 3 or more traumatic events.
- More than 1 out of 5 high school girls seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.
- 1 in 3 girls are afraid to take on leadership roles because they are afraid of being labeled as “bossy.”

So far in 2020, the girls achieved the following outcomes:

- 92% of participants increased their knowledge of STEAM
- 95% of participants increased their collaboration and communication skills
- 91% of participants increased their creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills
- 92% of participants increased their healthy decision-making skills

According to the Girls Inc. National Strong, Smart, and Bold Survey in 2019, 95-99% of our Nashville participants reported:

- Having a positive relationship with adults in Girls Inc. that respected them, listened to them, and helped them
- Learned that they can make a difference
- Felt that Girls Inc. was a safe place where they had the chance to be a leader
- That in Girls Inc. they had the opportunity to work together and make decisions
- Having a positive body image