Little Women, Big Achievers

“I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.” - Louisa May Alcott

“Little Women, Big Achievers” is Girls Inc.’s third author inspired enrichment program which spotlights the groundbreaking literary works and exceptional life of Louisa May Alcott, a true role model for young women. This unique literacy program introduces members to the author of one of the most beloved works in American Literature, a woman who confronted a society that offered little opportunities to women seeking employment as she claimed “I will make a battering-ram of my head and make my way through this rough and tumble world”.

The program incorporates both a book and story creations class where youth craft their own literary adventures, as well as a theater program where girls learn firsthand Alcott’s love for storytelling and creating short plays. The hands-on activities are designed to build self-esteem, improve communication, fluency and vocabulary skills, increase community engagement, and expose youth to culture and history. Louisa May Alcott inspired girls in our summer program to create and perform an adaptation of her extraordinary novel, Little Women. Girls ages 9 to 14 not only acted in the film, but ran lighting and sound, created set designs, props and costumes and filmed the entire production themselves. This innovative literacy production was made possible thanks to a Lowell Cultural Council grant, a partnership with the American Textile History Museum, and our wonderful summer staff. Marlene Roman adapted the play script and directed the play in collaboration with our volunteer, Veronica Iria who assisted as the film editor. The summer film project was a huge success, which ended with a full house during our public showing of the film on Tuesday, August 19, 2014.

Members also participated in a nine week “Book Creations” program, where they read Alcott’s short stories, learned about her life and the roles women played in society, discovered other strong female role models during the 1800s, all while decorating bare books with their own short stories, poems and short plays.

This summer, Girls Inc. was awarded a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant which will allow the program to continue, along with being partially funded for the next two years. Our girls and staff look forward to enhancing our “Little Women, Big Achievers” literacy project and continuing in Louisa’s footsteps!
Girls Inc. Summer Program 2014 Highlights

This summer, our dedicated staff members facilitated innovative hands-on programs (“Choices”) including music, science, nutrition, theater, filming, literacy, fitness, healthy cooking, media literacy, team building and art history. Some of our most unique programs were Music Makers, where girls learned about different instruments and the universality of music; Young Scientists, where our girls learned the ins and outs of exploration and experimentation; and Dig In, a literacy focused choice where girls read Louis Sachar’s acclaimed book Holes, went over literary schemes and vocabulary and then watched the film Holes to create meaningful dialogues concerning the differences between the film and the book.

Our girls also made some memorable expeditions each week this summer, visiting such sites as: George’s Island to discover the historic Civil War era Fort Warren located in the heart of Boston Harbor to uncover hidden passageways and learn some local history, the Boston Science Museum where girls were exposed to hands-on science activities and information, and Strawberry Banke, where girls explored traditional crafts, the inside of heritage gardens, and 15 historical buildings in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Girls Inc. also hosted our annual Family Literacy Night, showcasing a plethora of activity stations that all had the same component, literacy. Whether it was reading, writing, listening, or speaking, our members and their families took part in it all! As an added element this year, each girl was given a punch card to be marked at each station and each had to have a minimum of 6 punches to be entered into a drawing. The girls were extremely excited and in the end our winner was member Jelicity Mercado who received a Barnes and Noble gift card. Way to go!

Mary Sampas Literacy Award Winner 2014 Claudayzia Brown

The Mary Sampas Literacy Award is a special honor that was created in tribute to Mary’s 75 years as a journalist, her commitment to the community, and for being a role model to many women and girls and is awarded to a Girls Inc. member who has a passion for literacy. This year, the staff had a very difficult time brainstorming a good candidate for the award. We had girls who liked to read, but no one girl really stood out… until it hit us. A girl who is a natural born leader, a girl who has an amazing passion and talent for dance and acting and who has been involved in countless programs at Girls Inc. for over 7 years. She is known for her leadership skills and her many talents, including being a Girls Inc. member of the year, which is why her absolute love for literacy wasn’t as evident. But as we sat thinking about her accomplishments, from starring as Ebenezer Scrooge in our “What the Dickens” film production of “A Christmas Carol”, to rewriting a script for our Edgar Allan Poe’s film production of “A Tell Tale Heart” to include an all female cast and starring as the lead role, to her participation in poetry and journaling programs and always having at least two books in her possession that she is currently reading for herself and not for school, books like “12 Years a Slave”, “A Child Called It”, and “The Secret Life of Bees”, it became very obvious that she was the most deserving of this very special award. We were very proud to present Miss Claudayzia Brown with the 2014 Mary Sampas Literacy Award.

Above: George’s Island trip

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Above: Claud accepting her award

Photo courtesy of Harkins Photography
Empowering Girls with Job Skills Counselor in Training Program

The Girls Inc. Teen Program has been ever expanding in the last few years through the dedication of our amazing Board and staff members and the opening of the Carol S. Duncan Teen Center. Giving these incredible teens their own space to grow and learn has had such a positive impact on teens that have been with Girls Inc. since they were very young, and has also provided a safe space for other teens in the community.

Girls Inc. understands that teenage years can be a tough and confusing time for children and parents alike. Right on the cusp of adulthood, yet not quite ready to handle the responsibilities that “real life” has in store for them. Summer can be especially challenging as they are not quite at the age yet to take on a serious job, but need to begin exploring career path options.

Girls Inc. is extremely grateful to have been awarded a grant from the Amelia Peabody Foundation to be able to continue serving those teens year-round with the implementation of a Counselor-in-Training (C.I.T.) Program this past summer. This program has helped to not only maintain our relationship with the teens already in the program, but build connections with more teens in the community while providing an opportunity for learning leadership and responsibility. These teens worked as a team with each other and the staff helping in any way they could, from 1:1 work with a younger member to facilitating activities with a group of members; all while learning what it means to be a positive mentor.

The C.I.T. Program gave the teens a chance to gain valuable work experience, develop new skills, practice leadership, and explore future career possibilities. It gave them the opportunity to give back to Girls Inc. in a way that they could help kids from their own community and grow into great role models, giving them a better sense of responsibility and compassion for their community. This program wonderfully reinforces one of the components of the Girls Inc. Bill of Rights: “Girls have the right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.” We are excited to be able to provide this important experience and help our teens flourish to become even more strong, smart and bold!

Our Strong, Smart, and Bold Team!

Girls Inc. would like to thank our Strong, Smart and Bold Summer Program Staff for a wonderful summer: Katelyn Adams, Program Coordinator; Maritza Grooms, Teen Coordinator; Christa Brown, Outreach Coordinator; and our Program Specialists Kate Burgess-MacIntosh, Kelly Higgins, Jen Vivier, Christa Brown, Anthonia Elegebede, Nicole Lopresti, Alessandra Cecala, Marlene Roman and Melissa Williams.

Most of our summer staff reside in the Massachusetts area and are recent college graduates with B.A. and M.A. degrees. They are highly trained in girls’ growth and development, intentional program planning and implementation, conflict resolution and group management. They have also been educated on how to incorporate literacy and STEM into fun, engaging, and self esteem building programs and are First Aid and CPR certified.

Our Summer Program was a huge success thanks to these talented, amazing role models!
Khadija truly is a shining star. When our team met to decide who the member of the year was, there was unanimous votes for Khadija. This girl is a true inspiration to both the staff and her peers. We all admire her peaceful spirit, strong leadership skills, and the wisdom she possesses at such a young age. Her passion and enthusiasm for programs, learning, and getting involved in the Girls Inc. community is so exciting to watch. She’s a very compassionate and loving person. Khadija is aware of others around her and is always willing to take the initiative to help and give back whenever needed. The team has referred to her as one of the smartest girls they know. The staff love her thoughtful contributions in classes and have said they always learn something new whenever they’re around her. She’s curious, confident, strong, and a quick learner. Khadija has been so influential at Girls Inc. that she has inspired one of our staff members to go back to school to be a teacher. It has been said on many occasions by our team that we see Khadija as our future president. She’s already a very inspiring and powerful leader and we can’t wait to see what is to become of her in the future.