



**Girl Power! Curriculum
Preliminary Evaluation Results**

**Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board
Fairfax, Virginia**

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The Girl Power! Curriculum is a substance abuse prevention program developed by:

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This program is based on the
Girl Power! Campaign
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
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Program Philosophy and Program Description

Girl Power! was created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a public education campaign promoting healthy life choices for adolescent girls. The Prevention Unit of Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB) has built on the initial campaign concepts and worked closely with the national office to create a substance abuse prevention program for 10 to 15 year old girls that:

- Encourages and empowers participants to build confidence,
- Resist negative peer-pressure,
- Do well in school, and
- Become good citizens

This is accomplished by using a four-pronged approach over 32-weeks:

1. Education and skill-building, to help girls make healthy choices in their lives;
2. Community service projects, with focus on altruism and helping others;
3. Alternative activities, to help girls learn healthy behaviors related to risk and to develop positive leisure activity interests through service learning; and
4. Positive Communication Four Part Workshop, the Girl Power! parent/caregiver component.

These groups tend to take place in neighborhood centers or schools in places where youth naturally congregate. Girl Power! takes a comprehensive approach with focus on a range of health issues and promotion of self-confidence and individual motivation. In addition, emphasis is placed on the myriad of opportunities and resources available in the community.

Girl Power! has an underlying philosophy that by strengthening each girl's natural resiliency traits she will be better able to deal with life challenges. For this reason, there is an effort to reinforce positive beliefs and experiences that come about through program activities. There is less focus on risk and problems than there is on resiliency, skill-building, and strength. Research shows that adolescent girls have very strong attitudes about their health and that this is a critical time ongoing transition and developmental milestones in a number of areas:

- Biological, from childhood to adolescence;
- Psychological, with increasing independence and separation from parents; and,
- Social, with transition from elementary school to middle school.

Girls are uniquely at-risk through social, cultural, physiological, and psychological challenges. Early adolescence can set the state for depression, sedentary lifestyles, sexual abuse, and other problems associated with substance abuse. Studies also show that girls tend to lose self-confidence in early adolescence, and, as a result, perform less well in school and neglect their interests and aspirations. These changes reflect, in part, a new set of messages girls can receive at this age that might increase their risk for substance abuse and related concerns.

With this research as a foundation for program design, the Girl Power! program works to reinforce and sustain positive values with lessons targeted to the unique needs, challenges, and interest of girls. Girl Power! works to improve individual resiliency factors that help girls resist alcohol and other drugs and protective, nurturing factors that can increase the resiliency of all girls. Participants in the Girl Power! program have experienced many risk factors within their families and communities. The program focus, however, is not on the difficulties they face but on the building strengths to bolster participants through these challenging years.

The Girl Power! program has a strong- “no-use” message and provides information about the effects of and information about specific alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD). The program educates youth to resist peer and societal pressures to engage in alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use through its focus on problem-solving and mediation skills. The program seeks to heighten program participant’s awareness of ATOD, through the media and education. In addition to the ongoing educational component, program participants regularly engage in alternative activities through cultural, recreational, and social events, all of which focus on building skills that will be useful long after the program ends. Community service is the third program component which focuses on building community pride and a sense of accomplishment.

Population

The Girl Power! program targets middle school and late elementary school girls, ages 10-15, using the four-pronged service delivery approach including educational groups, community service, alternative programming, and positive communication workshops for parents/caregivers. Private-nonprofit organizations partner with the CSB to provide prevention programs in neighborhoods where the need is identified as the greatest. Girl Power! programs are located in these neighborhoods and based in schools or community centers.

Girls come to the group in a variety of ways. For school-based groups, girls are often identified by school counselors, teachers, and parents. For community-based, girls are often recruited through community outreach efforts and other service providers. Girls can be self-referred or come with another participant.

Girl Power! provides culturally sensitive, gender-specific approaches to serve young women effectively. The Girl Power! program takes into account the fact that girls often face problems that are gender-specific. In addition to substance use-specific information,

the groups also address varied topics as identified through ongoing participant input. Examples of topics designed in the curriculum include: relationships, dating, sexual activity, peer support, gang involvement, acculturation, and domestic abuse.

Girls are multidimensional individuals with diverse perspectives, needs, and developmental contexts. Service providers who work directly with girls must be competent in addressing varied aspects of participant identity including race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, disability/ability, and the communities where they live. These all influence girls' actions, attitudes, and ultimately, their futures. Girls benefit from programs and strategies that build on their strengths and encourage them to explore meaningful possibilities for their future.

Group leaders are as diverse as the population served and have brought with them a wealth of perspectives and skill areas. Leaders meet on a monthly basis to review materials to be covered with participants and to assure overall program fidelity. Cultural and other diversity topic trainings are provided during this time along with skill-specific training.

Goals and Objectives

A community needs assessment identified a gap in services for youth during after-school hours. The Girl Power! program was developed based on these service gaps and identified community needs. The overall program works to reduce individual risks and resiliency skills among program participants while increasing prevention knowledge and community capacity for science-based prevention practices. The program has three goals:

1. Reduce the incidence of substance abuse and related risk factors while increasing the resiliency skills of girls.
2. Infuse science-based substance abuse prevention practices in organizations serving youth.
3. Increase public information and awareness about proven substance abuse prevention programs.

Objectives have been developed to organize efforts related to these goals along with indicators to measure change. They include the following:

- Increase school bonding and achievement through school-based activities and active partnerships with the schools as demonstrated by:
 - ✓ Improve grade point averages establishment of a recognition program for improved grades.
 - ✓ Reduce negative school behavioral incidents and improve school attendance of program participants.
 - ✓ Increase school request for Girl Power! programming.

- Increase community bonding and healthy leisure interests and encourage family involvement as demonstrated by:
 - ✓ Improve ability of participants to identify healthy life choices as evidenced by pre-and post-test surveys.
 - ✓ Increase participant community service experience and alternative program experience that promote confidence and community pride.
 - ✓ Promote positive interactions with peers and healthy adult relationships through interactions in weekly activities.

- Increase science-based prevention programming service delivery in the community:
 - ✓ Establish formal nonprofit partnerships for service delivery.
 - ✓ Establish ongoing direct service delivery and program manager meetings to monitor project progress, problem-solve, and assure project integrity.
 - ✓ Assure ongoing collaborative involvement in the evaluation process through regular monitoring by CSB and ongoing trouble-shooting contracts and technical assistance with process tracking records.
 - ✓ Encourage the proliferation of science-based prevention practices with increasing private-nonprofit and/or county agencies and encourage these organizations to shift current services to more science-based programs.
 - ✓ Develop media interest in science-based prevention practices.
 - ✓ Host annual countywide Girl Power! conference for at least 200 program participants that includes involvement of elected officials and community stakeholders.
 - ✓ Present program information to all governing boards to increase awareness and support of science-based programs.

Girl Power! Activities

Girl Power! groups are facilitated by service providers from the CSB and the four private-nonprofit partners under the grant from the Governor's Office for safe and Drug-Free Schools. This approach connects directly to the program goals and has allowed the CSB to serve a large number of girls who benefit from the groups *and* spread science-based practices to many community organizations. Project management, training, and technical assistance are provided by the CSB. The CSB meets monthly with all facilitators of Girl Power! groups and quarterly with all managers of the partnering organizations. During these monthly /quarterly meetings the following areas are covered:

- Risk management and emergency practices applicable to all sites and service providers
- Curriculum and group process training
- Evaluation and process-tracking requirement review and progress monitoring
- Girl Power! documents and materials dissemination
- Project marketing strategy

The program includes prevention efforts and activities that focus on the individual, community, and policy levels. Activities implemented to meet the program goals and objectives are as follows:

- Girl Power! groups, held weekly for 1.5 hours, spanning 32-weeks, that include education and problem-solving-skill development.
- Alternative activities and community service projects that provide meaningful opportunities for girls and promote confidence and community pride.
- Weekly activities/interaction with peers and healthy adult relationships.
- School-based activities –either through educational groups or other activities—to increase school bonding and success.

Domains and Strategies

The program focuses on the individual and peer levels by providing quality after-school activities and substance abuse prevention in the form of Girl Power! groups. These groups include the following strategies: information dissemination, education, alternative activities, and problem identification and referral. As Girl Power! Program participants become actively involved in the activities, they are increasingly encouraged to assist with the planning of activities and in the decision-making about community service activities. These groups are located in schools or community centers, and generally encourage positive behaviors and skills in the school domain. The family domain is also included in programming as skill-building addresses family bonding. In addition, family members are encouraged to become involved in program activities.

The program focuses on the community level by spreading best prevention practice information and community education throughout many private-nonprofit organizations. This has greatly increased the number of Girl Power! groups throughout the community as well as the number of youth receiving services. It has also increased the clinical expertise in delivering science-based prevention programming beyond the present capacity. The project management and technical assistance have strengthened community networks of support for substance abuse prevention programming. The great needs identified is one approach to increasing the buy-in while increasing service availability at the same time.

Risk and Protective Factors

It is easy for youth to focus on problem behaviors and risk factors rather than protective factors. The majority of Girl Power! participants experience many risk factors simply by residing in a neighborhood identified as at-risk but the Girl Power! program operates with the philosophy that focuses on building strengths and protective factors are of prime importance. Resilient children and youth are better able to deal with stresses in life because they have coping skills to minimize negative impacts on maintaining their self-esteem and gaining access to opportunities.

The following protective factors are a sampling of those addressed in the program:

- Compassion
- Self-esteem
- Personal responsibility
- Optimism
- Social supports
- Positive risk taking
- Problem-solving and conflict mediation skills
- Positive behaviors/leisure activities and skills

Partnerships

Girl Power! involves successful collaboration with Federal, State, county, and local organizations. The multi-week Girl Power! prevention Program and the national Girl Power! campaign office, under the leadership of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is a strong partnership that is mutually beneficial. The two groups provide consultation and technical assistance with each other, thus supporting the goals of both the program and the campaign. For example, the national Web site includes information about the Fairfax County program activities and features information about the annual Girl Power! conference.

The Virginia Governor's Office of Substance Abuse Prevention has provided funding to the program for two years with Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Governor's Discretionary funds and has funded a formal evaluation to provide for a rigorous third-party program review. The program has brought positive attention to the Governor's Office and has increased prevention program visibility throughout the State. The program was presented at the 2001 National Prevention Network Research Conference.

Girl Power! has become a countywide initiative for girls and the CSB has partnered with other county organizations to provide groups, resources, recruitment, and referrals. The partnerships with the private-nonprofit and county organizations allow ADS to spread science-based prevention practices, one of the goals established in the community-based prevention planning process.

These approaches have also moved the planning process and service delivery efforts to the grass roots level. Community education, information, dissemination, and outreach activities focus on generating interest in research-based, outcome-oriented practices. Written materials have been developed and disseminated throughout the community as additional tools to share information. Media contacts are made throughout the grant period to further meet this effort. In addition, program participants have consistently involved other girls in the program, creating a natural outreach effort that is an unplanned outcome from the groups that continues for each 32-week group.

The CSB and nonprofit organizations also work to influence local policy related to extending substance abuse prevention efforts beyond traditional service provider realm. Contact is made to local elected officials to provide education about Girl Power! and about science-based practices.

The national partnership has created relationships and opportunities that are new to each organization. The State level attention has proven beneficial to the CSB and to the Governor's Office on Substance Abuse Prevention. The local partnerships have increased the number of youth served on the individual level by providing quality after-school activities and substance abuse prevention programs in the form of Girl Power! groups.

Evaluation

The evaluation model for the program is designed to measure change in individual participants and the community as related to each goal, objectives, and activities. This model gives consideration to each goal and includes individual participants, the community, and the environmental level. In addition, this plan seeks to monitor implementation and assure fidelity to the original program design. The evaluation process is led by the CSB project manager with input and monitoring from the personnel assigned on the local and national partnership levels to further ensure project integrity and for ongoing program improvement.

Measures include:

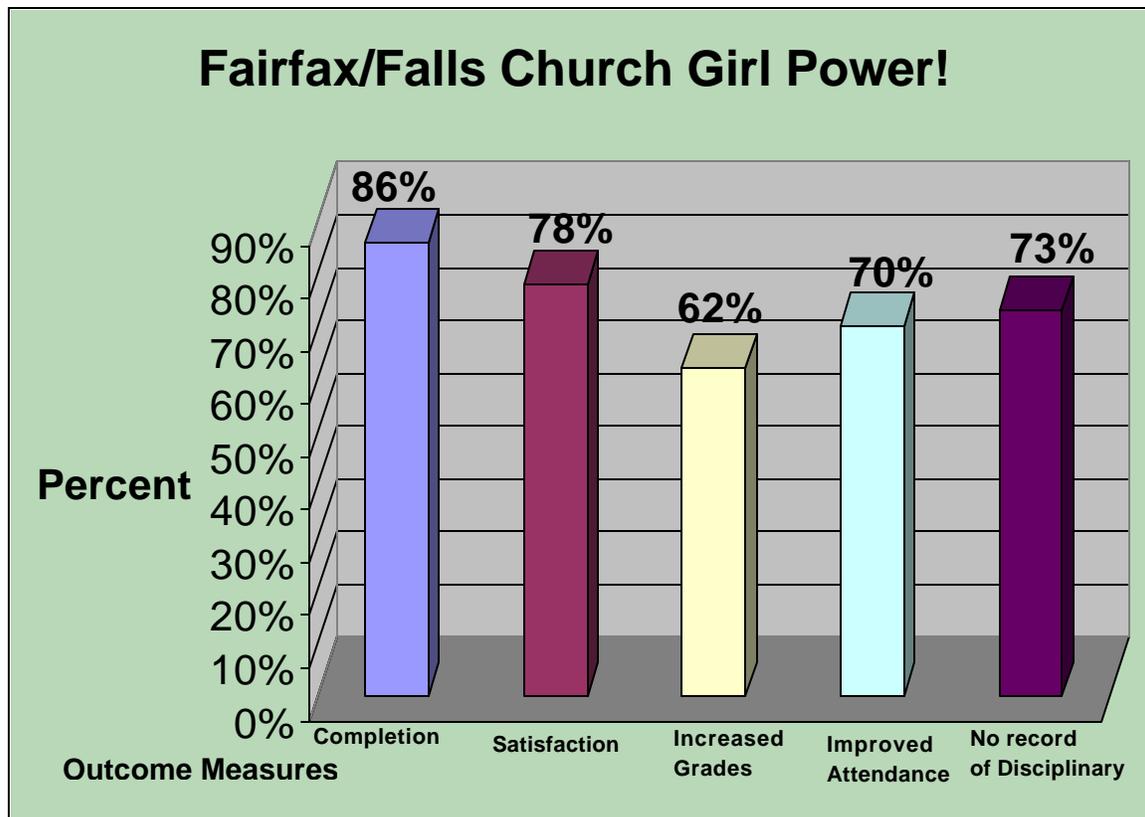
- School data (grades, attendance, behavioral reports)
- Pre-post testing using the Behavioral Rating Index For Children (BRIC) and the Adolescent Resiliency Test. These instruments are designed as a rating scale to identify problems that have appeared in the youth previously.
- A satisfaction survey is administered to all youth upon completion of the program
- Process data includes tracking: attendance, demographic information, and participation level.
- Alternative program data to include the type of program and risk/resiliency factors addressed participation level, and participant satisfaction.
- Community service activity data are collected to include a description of the service, risk/resiliency factors addressed, participation level, and participant satisfaction.
- Information about service learning and recognition (media reports and letters of appreciation) received as a result of these activities is collected as well as participant service contributions to the community.
- Anecdotal information is gathered from parents and teachers and is included in the ongoing evaluation reports.
- Comparative evaluation of each site will be conducted in order to set and maintain high standards of services among collaborative groups.

Present program participants in Girl Power! have increased grades, school attendance, and reduction in behavioral incidents. In addition, program participants have a high group completion rate and indicate a high satisfaction with the program.

Outcomes

During the course of FY 98-00 school years, Girl Power! programming demonstrated the following results:

- Six Girl Power! groups were held throughout the country
- Almost 100 students participated in the program. Of these, 86 students completed the program, with a completion rate of 86 percent
- More than 78 percent were satisfied with the program
- 62 percent had an increase in grades
- 70 percent had an improvement in attendance
- 73 percent of these students had no record of disciplinary behavior in the school during this school year.



Data from the Girl Power! Partnerships project demonstrated solid outcomes for all program participants:

- Ten Girl Power! groups convened during the FY 01-02 period with more than 250 girls participating, and a completion rate of 65 percent
- All participants completed the BRIC; a 13-item instrument. *INTERPRET: More than 41 percent of the program participants rated themselves at a score of 30 or more. The score of 30 is used in the BRIC as a rough clinical cutting point, higher scores indicate more severe behavioral problems and suggest more intensive examination and possible intervention.*
- School grades were collected on 53 percent of all program participants; results show that 63 percent of all participants had a GPA increase after the first nine weeks in the program.
- 86 percent of the program participants improved or remained stable in the area of school bonding (Measured as respect for school property and on school report cards).
- 81 percent of the program participants demonstrated improvement in the area of self-control.

The Girl Power! program received the following recognition:

- Nominated as a CSAP Promising Practice in 2000
- CSB Award for excellence in 2000
- Received the Girl Power! Proclamation from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in 2000 and 2001
- Governor's Office on Substance Abuse Prevention funding awards in 2000 and 2001
- Presented at the 2001 National Prevention Network Research Conference
- National Association of Counties Award (NACo) for youth programming excellence (2001)