

WHY GIRLS? WHY LEADERSHIP?

REDEFINING LEADERSHIP

Leaders are all around us yet they often go unnoticed. Leaders are the girls and young women asking questions, looking for answers, and stating opinions. They are in the inner-city girls' group organizing an anti-violence parade. They are young single mothers going back to school. With opportunities and access to resources, girls and young women get involved in their communities, speak out, take action, and make change.

“ Effective leadership is being able to support a group of people so that they become self-sufficient and empowered, able to stand on their own. Leadership is being able to leave when the job is done and for your work to continue on after you leave.”

- Young Woman

“ Leadership to me is the ability to bring people together despite their differences, and to work as a single unit for a common purpose. Leadership is the building of bridges.”

- Heather, White Bear First Nations

“ Leadership is the ability to explain my experiences and how they relate to our society as a whole. It is the ability to then take action to address those issues.”

- Young Woman

“ To me, leadership means making a difference in others' lives and challenging myself to always do what is right for me.”

- Cynthia, Vancouver, BC.



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“ Some girls are afraid to get involved due to judgment from adults. We get put down. Just because we are young, doesn't mean we aren't capable.” - Chelsea



LEADERSHIP: MORE THAN PERSONAL DRIVE

“ I got sick of being spoken on behalf of, patronized, isolated and marginalized as a poor racialized single mother. It has also been very difficult for me to access training because of the reality of economic struggle in my life.”

- Cynthia, Vancouver, BC.

“ I want to empower not only myself, but the community, on issues that affect every single one of us. But in Canada, in our “multicultural mosaic”, people are still told “to go back to your own country!” Something I was told for the 1st time at the age of 5 up until last week!”

- Thao, Montreal, QC

“ Aboriginal women are marginalized, especially if they are young and driven to promote positive social change. The fact that they are female, young and First Nations, puts three strikes against the empowerment and uplifting of Aboriginal girls and their self-esteem. I have struggled and persevered past the obstacles in my path just because of who I am as a young First Nations woman. I can remember all the times when I’ve been discriminated against. I know I can bring a new perspective to the world because it is a perspective that is often ignored or not heard.”

- Danna, Pasqua, SK

WHAT WE’VE LEARNED WHAT WE KNOW

Despite the barriers, girls and young women are leading in their communities. They are an important source of creativity and innovation in realizing long-term social change.

With access to resources and support, girls are connected, empowered, and better positioned to become agents of change in their own lives and communities.

Connecting girls with mentors can be a powerful way to light a spark for social change: positive intergenerational connections have a meaningful impact.

Leadership can be expressed in so many different ways. Supporting future leaders means recognizing critical thinkers, acknowledging girls with new ideas, valuing a diversity of leadership styles and skills, and supporting those who are on the cusp of speaking out.

WE SUPPORT LEADERSHIP THROUGH...

POPULAR EDUCATION: GIRLS EMPOWERING THEMSELVES

Popular education emphasizes that learning is not a top-down process. The popular education approach believes the main goal of learning is to create positive social change based on the needs of those involved in the process. Girls decide what issues are important and determine how to enact change.

Popular Education:

- Recognizes that girls are experts in their own lives
- Validates girls' diverse experiences and knowledge
- Builds opportunities for leadership and action

GIRLS & SOCIAL JUSTICE:

There is more than one experience of girlhood: girls have different levels of access to power and privilege.

Supporting leadership means supporting a diversity of girls and young women and the different ways they engage in their communities, depending on their own unique experiences, contexts, and issues.

Challenging widespread discrimination and inequality requires a range of leaders with broad perspectives.

GIRLS MAKING CHANGE

Long-lasting social change requires engagement on many levels. We support girls and young women in a variety of communities to enact change in their schools, neighbourhoods, governments, and in their own lives. This means that a diversity of girls and young women are acting on a range of issues that affect them and in turn, they are changing society.

When girls and young women are connected across differences and across communities, they learn from each other and discover how their local issues are part of broader issues. Girls and young women can then lead large-scale change, influenced by the interdependence of local issues.

THE POWER OF GIRLS

Girls don't need to be saved. Emphasizing the strengths and capabilities of girls' and young women's own realities and experiences, empowers them in the face of adversity.

With resources, support, encouragement and space, girls and young women can be powerful changemakers.

ALL-GIRL SPACES

Creating spaces for girls to come together can spark meaningful connections. They share experiences and struggles, break isolation, learn from each other and plan together.

When these spaces are well structured, girls can identify with a diversity of positive role models and leadership styles, and then move towards collective action.

“ I would say that the most effective strategies to work with youth are based in popular education and arts-related activities. These kinds of strategies are engaging, empowering, and interesting. Many youth aren't necessarily interested in sitting around talking about things, but if they are given the opportunity to envision different activities, it fosters leadership, while gaining knowledge and awareness of different issues.”

- Anna, Community Organizer, Montreal, QC

HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

Offer all-girl spaces facilitated by a diversity of women.

Create occasions for girls and young women to express themselves.

Offer opportunities for girls to build self-esteem and confidence.

Challenge stereotypes and messages that limit how girls and young women see themselves and their potential.

Encourage girls to develop and practice critical-thinking skills, question and unpack messages, and draw their own conclusions.

See girls and young women as experts in their own lives: let them decide what is important and support them to act on it.

Encourage intergenerational support and connections.

Get to know the resources in your community (libraries, legal clinics, health services, etc.) and share them with your group. Learn what resources the girls and young women need and work with them to find them.

Support girls to see the links between their experiences, their community, and society.

Support girls' and young women's community engagement:

- Put girls in contact with a diversity of community members.
 - Ask different community members to co-animate a workshop or share their stories and experiences with the group.
 - Invite mentors that the girls can identify with.
 - Encourage girls to share their knowledge, talents, and strengths with others. Girls have so much to share: support them to show off their skills and talents!
 - Organize specific workshops around issues that the girls and young women in your community have identified as topics of interest (like consumerism, popular culture, or the environment).
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Validate and celebrate the success and social innovation of girls and young women already engaged in their communities.

Validate diverse forms of leadership by introducing different leaders from a variety of contexts and communities.

Model diversity by taking into account different abilities, ages, cultures, languages, perspectives, religions, and sexualities.

Recognize that there is more than one way to be a leader.

“ We provide actual opportunities to create and enhance leadership. We listen to what the girls want and work together WITH them to figure out the best action plan to achieve their goals while providing support and mentorship.”

- Andrea, Youth Facilitator and Founder of Go Girls, Vancouver, BC



WHERE YOU CAN GO FOR SUPPORT

THE GIRLS ACTION RESOURCE CENTRE

A comprehensive collection of documents, websites, and organizational listings that can help you start and strengthen girls' spaces. It includes information and strategies in popular education, anti-oppression, community engagement, facilitation, program design, and so much more.

AMPLIFY TOOLKIT

Our user-friendly guide to creating and facilitating girls' programs. It includes a "how-to" Manual, Workshop Guide, and even sections on leadership and community engagement.

WHY GIRLS?

Check out our other Why Girls? publications on topics such as Violence Prevention, Sexual Health, and Media & Pop Culture.

GREAT STUFF FOR GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN

START SOMETHING FIERCE: A YOUNG WOMAN'S GUIDE TO GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

A 'zine by young women who have started their own projects! Contains inspirational stories, tips, and resources for girls and young women who want to make a change.

MAKE SOME NOISE: A YOUNG WOMAN'S GUIDE TO MEDIA ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

For girls and young women who want to create media arts projects that will make a difference. This 'zine includes "how-to" tips in photography, cyber-activism, spoken word, Hip-Hop, and more.

STEP IT UP: A YOUNG WOMAN'S GUIDE TO INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY

This is a great introduction to the Canadian policy process with ideas for how to influence public policy at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. Packed with resources and inspiring stories.

DOWNLOAD ALL OUR PUBLICATIONS FOR FREE AT GIRLSACTIONFOUNDATION.CA

KICKACTION.CA is a bilingual online community for girls and young women who think for themselves, take a stand, and act creatively to bring positive change to their communities and across the globe. Kickaction.ca is a Girls Action initiative.

GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION is a national charitable organization. We lead and seed girls' programs across Canada. We build girls' and young women's skills and confidence and inspire action to change the world. Through our innovative programs, research, and support to a network of over 200 partnering organizations and projects, Girls Action reaches over 60,000 girls and young women.



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