



BUILDING STRONG GIRLS

GIRLS' FUND 2009-2012

EVALUATION REPORT

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SECTION



INTRODUCTION,
METHODOLOGY,
PARTICIPATION RATES
and
DEMOGRAPHIC
PROFILE

ABOUT THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

The Canadian Women's Foundation is Canada's public foundation for women and girls. The Foundation empowers women and girls in Canada to move out of violence, out of poverty and into confidence. Since 1991, the Foundation has raised money and invested in over 1,300 community programs across Canada, and is now one of the ten largest women's foundations in the world. The Foundation takes a positive approach to address root causes of the most critical issues facing women and girls. They study and share the best ways to create long-term change and bring community organizations together for training and to learn from each other. They carefully select and fund the programs with the strongest outcomes and regularly evaluate their work. They have a special focus on building a community of women helping other women. Helping women creates safer families and communities, and a more prosperous society for all of us. The Foundation invests in the strength of women and the dreams of girls. For more information visit www.canadianwomen.org

HISTORY OF THE GIRLS' FUND

By 2005 there was growing concern about issues facing girls in Canada and the CWF decided it was time to develop a strategy directed at girls. In preparation for the launch of the Girls' Fund, CWF commissioned research on girls in Canada, including an extensive literature review and environmental scan of girls' programming across the country. In that document, best practices for girls' programs were identified. The authors argued that girls' programs should:

- Pay explicit attention to gender equity;
- Be asset-based, with a positive focus and should help to develop skills, particularly critical thinking skills;
- Be girl-directed and/or girl involved;
- Be interactive and fun;
- Provide a safe, friendly space for girls;
- Be accessible and address any possible barriers to participation; and
- Should respect and celebrate the diversity of girls.

Based on this research and the desire to continue to make a difference for girls in Canada, the CWF established the Girls' Fund in 2006. The identified best practices became the criteria for funding and in the initial pilot phase CWF awarded six program grants and two network grants, to develop resiliency among girls aged 9 to 13. The grantee organizations differed with respect to their foci, such as science and technology, sports and physical activity, or leadership and empowerment. Although there were differences in their foci, they all shared a common aim which was to build resilience in these girls to help them move more successfully from adolescence into adulthood. The grants were awarded for three years during the pilot phase.

Based upon the positive results from the pilot phase, the Girls' Fund continued into Phase 2 and was able to expand and award 12 program grants and two network grants, to girls aged 9 to 13. Again, the grantee organizations differed with respect to their foci and included these different approaches: science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), sports/physical activity and nutrition, psychosocial development and empowerment, and, within the psychosocial development and empowerment programs there were a number that focused on Aboriginal culture.



THE GRANTEES

During the three years of Phase 2, the Girls' Fund provided program grants to twelve organizations and network grants to two organizations.

PROGRAM GRANTS (12 PROGRAMS)

Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC
Vancouver, BC

Interior Indian Friendship Society
Kamloops, BC

Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta
Fort McMurray, AB

Inuvik Youth Centre
Inuvik, NT¹

Circle of Life Thunderbird House
Winnipeg, MB

Ka Ni Kanichihk
Winnipeg, MB

Minamodziwin
Cape Croker, ON

Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club
Hamilton, ON

Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office
Toronto, ON

YWCA Toronto
Scarborough, ON

Les Scientifines
Montreal, QC

SuperNOVA
Halifax, NS

NETWORK GRANTS (2 GRANTS)

Actua
Ottawa ON

**Girls Action Foundation (formerly Power
Camp National)**
Montreal QC

EVALUATION

An evaluation of the Girls' Fund was undertaken to assess the impacts of the programs for which program grants were received, as well as the impacts of the network enhancements for the two network organizations that received grant money. This document summarizes the results from Phase 2 of the Girls' Fund evaluation.

¹ Due to internal organizational issues, the program funded at the Inuvik Youth Centre (Delta Girls) only ran for Year 1 of Phase 2.

METHODOLOGY

The design and measures used in the current evaluation were based upon information collected from the grantee organizations, the Girls' Fund Program Logic Model as defined by the CWF (see Appendix A), and the design and measures used in the pilot phase evaluation. The evaluation design in Phase 2 focused largely on collecting information at one point in time through interviews or surveys with girls, parents, and staff.

The interview guides for both the girl participants and parents included questions about program process and program outcomes using both close-ended rating questions as well as open-ended questions. The interview guides included questions that were consistent across all program sites (common questions) and questions that were tailored to collect information specific to each program.

All program sites were asked to conduct interviews with girls towards the end of each program session, and aimed to interview approximately 30% of their girl participants as well as 30% of the parents/guardians. In Years 1 and 2 the interviews with girls were conducted one-on-one; however, in Year 3 the organizations were given the option of conducting small group interviews (i.e., 2 to 3 girls at one time). The girls' completed the rating questions first, and then the interviewer conducted a small facilitated discussion to answer the open-ended questions. In all three years parents were given the option of either completing a survey on-line or by telephone.

In addition to the interviews with girls, the program sites were given options for other methods they could use to collect further qualitative data from the girls. These options included mini recorded interviews (i.e., just one or two questions at a time) with individual girls, or a group project. The options for the group projects included photovoice,² group journals, or group scrapbooks. Program sites selected these "other" measures based upon what best suited their programs—that is, based upon time or curriculum constraints and what the program staff and/or the girls preferred. Guidelines were provided to program staff regarding the type of information that the evaluation team was interested in having collected.

Facilitators of the programs were also asked to complete an online survey. This staff survey included closed-ended rating questions and focused on program processes as well as general outcomes for the girls. In Years 1 and 2, following the completion of the online surveys, staff from each site was also asked to participate in telephone interviews to both clarify any ambiguities from the process survey and obtain feedback from staff on their perception of the program outcomes, critical aspects of the program, and the importance of girl-only programming. In Year 3 the on-line survey was modified to include questions that were, previously, obtained by interview (i.e., program outcomes and critical aspects of the program) and the telephone interviews were not conducted.

In addition, programs that involved mentors or Elders were asked to recruit one to three mentors/Elders to participate either in an interview or to respond in writing to the questions on the interview guide. In Year 3, as well, a small number of key informant telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders (i.e., Advisory Committee members, management from grantee organizations, funders) to solicit their perspective on the Girls' Fund, barriers facing girls today, and policy implications based upon identified barriers.

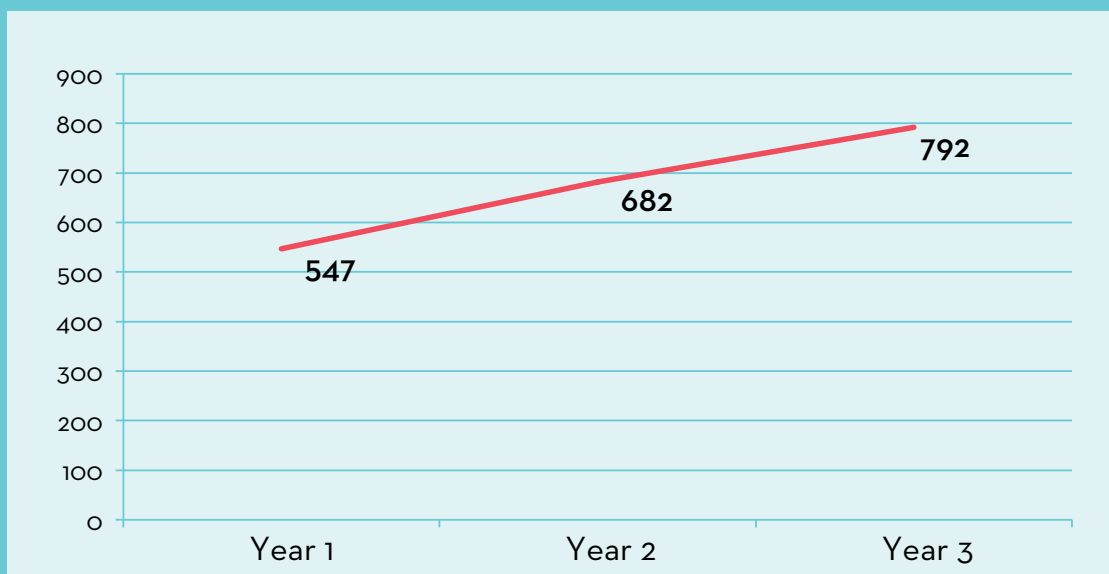
Evaluation data for the two network grants was collected through surveys of the network members and interviews with key informants. The surveys included both qualitative and quantitative measures that consisted of ratings and open-ended items. The key informant interviews were conducted by telephone using a structured interview guide that consisted of open-ended questions.

² Photovoice is a technique where participants are asked to represent their community or point of view by taking photographs, discussing them together and developing narratives to go with their photos. It is intended to give insight into how participants conceptualize their lives, circumstances and communities.

PARTICIPATION RATES

The participation rates for girls in the programs increased year over year:

Figure 1. Program Participation Years 1-3



The proportion of girls new to the programs, and those who were returning to the programs varied from year to year. In Year 1 approximately 72% of the girls were new, in Year 2 approximately 84% were new and in Year 3 approximately 63% were new.

A total of 136 girls participated in evaluation interviews in Year 1 and the same number participated in Year 2; 124 girls participate in the evaluation interviews in Year 3. When girls who attended less than 25% of the sessions are excluded from the participation data analyses, the target of 30% participation in interviews was met for Year 1 (31%; N=437) but not for Year 2 (26%; N=530) or for Year 3 (25%; N=506).³

In Year 1 91 interviews/surveys were conducted with parents; approximately 21% of all parents whose girls participated in the programs. In Year 2 the number conducted was slightly higher at 102, but that represented a smaller proportion of girls in the programs (19%) because there were more girls served. In Year 3 87 parent surveys and interviews were completed; representing approximately 18% of the girls who participated in the programs.⁴ Therefore, the evaluation did not meet the target goal of interviewing or surveying 30% of all parents. Many of the program sites struggled to complete the interviews. Challenges included language and cultural barriers, parents not being available when repeated phone calls were made, and running out of time to get the interviews done because it took longer to reach parents than expected.

The proportion of program sessions attended by girls who participated in evaluation interviews was very consistent across the three years. That is, on average the girls who participated in the evaluation had attended approximately three-quarters of the program sessions offered at their sites (Year 1: 76%; Year 2: 74%; Year 3: 77%); therefore, they were regular attendees.

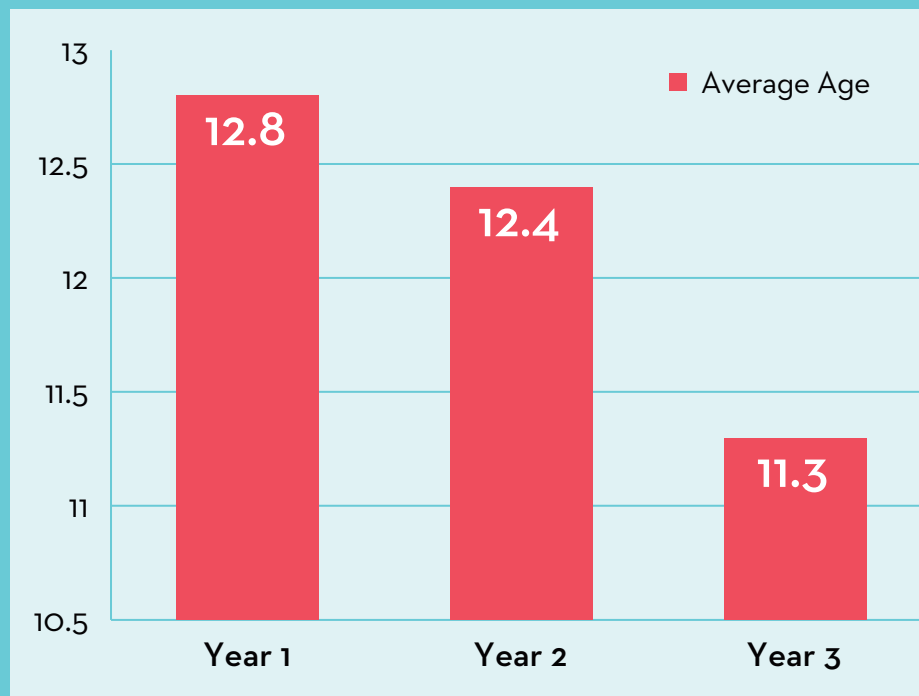
³ Please note: In organizations that ran multiple sessions (e.g., Fall, Winter, Spring) or had multiple sites, we did not include all of these programs in the evaluation for Year 3. To lessen the burden on staff, and the sheer volume of data received, some sessions and sites were excluded from the evaluation. Therefore, the total number of possible girls participating in the evaluation was 506.

⁴ Again, the proportions were based upon the number of girls who attended the program sessions participating in the evaluation and who participated at least 25% of the time.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE GIRLS

In each of the three years of Phase 2, the programs reached their target group of girls aged 9 to 13. See the figure below for average age in Years 1 to 3.

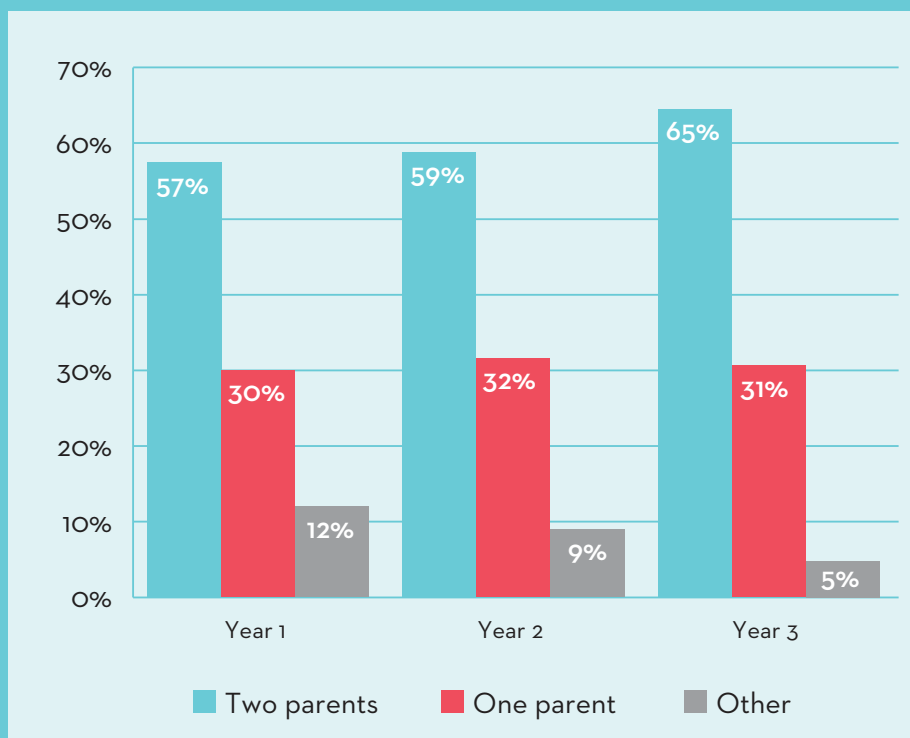
Figure 2. Average Age of Evaluation Participants (Girls)



The average age of the girls in the evaluation decreased from Year 1 to Year 3. In Year 1 about one-third of the girls were less than 12 years old, in Year 2 about 40%, and in Year 3 the proportion of girls under 12 years of age was much larger at approximately 68%.

In Years 1 and 2 the proportions of girls living with one parent or two parents was fairly consistent; however, in Year 3 there was a modest increase in the proportion of girls living in two-parent homes and a decrease in the proportion of girls living in “other” arrangements (e.g., living with grandparents, other extended family members, or in foster care). Please see the figure below.

Figure 3. Family Composition/Living Arrangement (Girls)



In all three years, more than 85% of the girls participating in the evaluation were born in Canada: 86% in Years 1 and 2 and 89% in Year 3. In each of the three years, at least 35% of the mothers and fathers of these girls were born outside of Canada:

- Year 1: 35% of mothers and 35% of fathers
- Year 2: 41% of mothers and 43% of fathers
- Year 3: 40% of mothers and 45% of fathers

The girls were also asked to report on what languages they spoke at home as well as their cultural identity. In each of the three years, more than 85% of the girls reported that they spoke English at home (Years 1 and 2: 88%; Year 3: 86%). In each of the three years approximately 16%-17% of the girls spoke French at home. And, approximately 8%-13% (8% Year 3, 10% Year 2, and 13% Year 1) reported speaking an Aboriginal language at home. There was a fair proportion each year that spoke more than one language at home: 41% in Year 1, 36% in Year 2 and 50% in Year 3.

In Year 1 girls identified their cultural identities in an open-ended question: 26% listed Canadian as part of their identity, 28% identified Aboriginal as part of their identity and about 6% identified French as part of their identity. In Years 2 and 3, girls identified their cultural identity through a close-ended question where they could check off different identities. In Year 2 62% identified Canadian as part of their identity; in Year 3 this proportion was larger at 85%. In Year 2 31% identified as Aboriginal; this proportion was slightly smaller in Year 3 at 28%. In Year 2, 4% identified as French Canadian; the proportion was similar in Year 3 (6%). There were very large proportions in each year that also reported other cultural identities (in addition to Canadian or Aboriginal). For example, in Year 3, 81 of the girls (65%) reported another cultural identity—which ranged considerably (e.g., African, Middle-eastern, European, and Caribbean).

Given the family composition, cultural and language background of the girls participating in the evaluation, the programs do seem to be reaching a diverse group of girls. As well, some of the programs are reaching particularly vulnerable girls where different risk factors may be present. For example, in Years 2 and 3 staff was asked to estimate the proportion of girls who were from low income families. In both years 2 and 3, staff from most of the program sites (approximately two-thirds) estimated that more than one-half of the girls were from low-income families. In Year 3 staff was also asked to estimate the presence of other risk factors. It was reported by some of the staff surveyed (about 25%-30%) that about one-quarter of the girls came from home where drug and/or alcohol addictions may be present. Some of the staff (about one-third) surveyed also reported that more than one-quarter of the girls lived in homes where domestic violence/abuse had occurred.

SECTION



PROGRAM
OUTCOMES

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAM OUTCOME RESULTS

MAIN PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In the program logic model for the Girls' Fund initiative, the Canadian Women's Foundation identified a number of protective factor-based outcomes for the participating girls. Three of these protective factor-based outcomes were considered most critical to the Girls' Fund – confidence, critical thinking skills, and connectedness. Outcome questions, based on these three protective factors, were included in interviews at all of the program sites.

- **Self-confidence:** It seems very clear that these programs have an impact on the girls' self-confidence – by bringing them out of their shell, by making them feel comfortable expressing their opinions, by developing skills, and by being in a supportive environment. Girls, parents, and staff all agreed and reported very positive findings in this area.
- **Connectedness/sense of belonging:** The programs do a good job of bringing girls together and helping them make connections with one another and feel a part of a group. The girls make friends and feel a sense of belonging in these groups. The environment created (i.e., safe, relaxing, fun) is one where the girls feel comfortable expressing themselves and getting closer to one another, and adult role models.
- **Critical thinking skills:** These programs are doing a good job of improving girls' critical thinking skills, particularly perhaps in the area of decision-making. Although girls seem to have some trouble understanding the concept "critical thinking skills", many did report that they are making better decisions, thinking issues through more, and considering consequences.

ADDITIONAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In addition to the three primary protective factors, other protective factor items could be chosen by the grantees to include in their interviews with the girls. Items included in several of the grantees included: focusing more on their strengths and skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, getting along better with others/making friends, feeling better about being a girl, having more adults for help, feeling better about school, and knowing where to go for help or advice, if needed.

- It seems clear that these programs are developing or strengthening some life skills for the girls; girls' self-confidence is boosted by celebrating girlhood, encouraging the girls to focus on their strengths and skills, and by developing communication and problem-solving skills.
- The programs also help the girls work together, develop social skills, and get along better with one another. The girls make friends in the programs. The programs also provide the girls with access to caring and supportive adults, and help girls to identify adults they can go to for advice.
- Through developing confidence and other skills, some of these programs also seem to help girls feel better about school.

In Year 3 several additional questions were added to some of the sites that had similar goals and objectives. Two questions dealt with the girls' capacity to deal with difficult situations they might face – that is, bullying and peer pressure. In addition, two questions were developed for programs that included an Aboriginal focus: did the girls feel that they had learned more about their culture? And, were they feeling greater pride about being Aboriginal?

Among the sites that asked these additional questions:

- Approximately 90% reported some improvement in their capacity to deal with bullying or to stand up for themselves. Over 50% gave the highest rating to this item; only 10% felt that their ability had not changed.
- Approximately 87% reported some improvement in their capacity to deal with peer pressure – with close to 60% providing the highest rating to this item. Only 13% of the girls did not feel that their ability to deal with peer pressure had improved.
- The girls who were asked the questions with an Aboriginal focus gave very positive ratings. All of the girls reported at least some learning with respect to Aboriginal culture and teachings. Further, all but one of the girls reported at least some improvement with respect to feeling more proud about being an Aboriginal girl.

FACTORS AFFECTING OUTCOMES

There is some relationship between dosage (total number of hours in the programs) and the girls' self-reported improvements on several protective factors. In years 1 and 2 there was a general pattern with self-confidence and connectedness where girls who attended more hours in the programs rated themselves as more improved in these areas. In Year 3 no relationship was found between dosage (or "intensity") and ratings on the main protective factors. However, in Year 3 responses were more positive and there was less variability – making it more difficult to detect these relationships. Other protective factors that were found to be related to dosage were communication skills (year 1 only), having more adults to go to for advice (all 3 years), and knowing where to seek help (years 1 and 2 only).

Best practices found to relate to the girls' ratings on the main protective factors included the girls-only nature of the program, creating a happy and positive atmosphere and one where the girls feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, being able to provide input on program activities, having a good range of activities in the program, and having staff that are caring and supportive.

Ratings on the main protective factors did seem to vary by program type. Girls in psychosocial skill development programs with a cultural focus rated greater improvement in critical thinking skills (Years 1 and 2) and on self-confidence (Year 2 only). No differences were found by program type, on the three main protective factors, in Year 3.

The other protective factors were not found to differ by program approach in Years 1 and 2. However, in Year 3, there were differences found on "knowing where to get help" where girls in the psychosocial skill development programs rated this item higher than girls in the physical activity-based programs. Also in that year differences in the rating on "communication skills" approached statistical significance with girls in the psychosocial skill development programs giving a higher rating than those in programs with a physical activity or science approach.

OUTCOMES OF THE MENTORING COMPONENT

Mentors (older girls, Elders, other mentors) were included in several of the programs. The mentors reported that they had personally benefited, or had experienced positive impacts, from mentoring in the programs. They felt good about giving back to the community, felt that their skills and knowledge had been affirmed, and believed that their skills and self-esteem had improved from their involvement. They felt that their presence in the programs also had a positive impact on the girls: giving them someone to talk to, guiding them, and providing positive role models and messages. The girls' reports mirrored those provided by the mentors: they too felt that the mentors had given them someone to talk to, that they had learned a lot from the mentors, and that the mentors were good role models.



“I felt bad about myself...
because people made me feel ugly,
but after coming [to the program]
I stopped believing that.”

(Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 2)

THREE MAIN PROTECTIVE FACTORS: DETAILED SUMMARY OF RESULTS

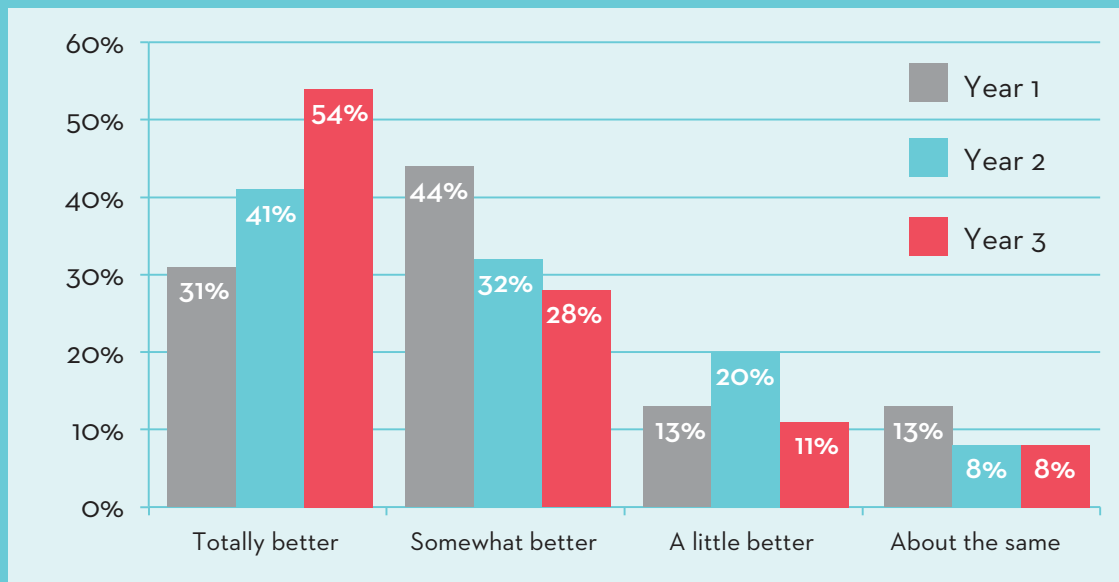
As described previously in the Methodology section, three main protective factors were examined in all programs, and reported on by girls, parents, and staff. The three main protective factors included: self-confidence, connectedness and critical thinking skills. In all three years rating questions, followed by examples, were included in interviews with the girls and parents. As well, the group projects and mini-interviews often included information on these three main factors as well. Finally, staff provided general comments about the main protective factors in the interviews that were conducted in Years 1 and 2 and in the on-line survey completed in Year 3. The results for each of these factors are presented below.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In each of the three years the girls were asked to rate whether they thought they were feeling better about themselves (e.g., more positive about who they are and the things they do) as a result of participating in the program. In all three years the girls' responses were very positive. Please see figure below:

Figure 4 Self-Confidence Ratings as Reported by the Girls



As shown in the chart, most of the girls in all three years reported feeling at least a little better (88% in Year 1 and 93% in Years 2 and 3). Nobody reported feeling worse in any of the three years. Further, there was an increase in the proportion of girls who gave the highest rating on the 5-point scale (“totally better”) from 31% in Year 1 to 41% in Year 2 to 54% in Year 3. There were fewer girls that reported “about the same” in Year 2 (8%) as compared to Year 1 (13%); this pattern continued into Year 3 (8%).

In each of the three years, the girls were also asked to explain the rating they had provided on self-confidence and/or to provide examples of how they were feeling more self-confident. Examples girls gave included general comments about feeling more self-confident, feeling less shy and/or more outspoken, proud of their achievements or learnings in group, feeling more open with others and/or that they could be themselves, and generally feeling more positive. The comments made year-to-year were quite similar. Illustrative quotes are provided below:

“Definitely. I’m starting to feel more proud of who I am and people out there love me for who I am and that gave me a lot of self-confidence.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; Year 1)

“I can express myself to people that I just met. And it’s helped bring me out of my shell basically.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 1)

“Being with the group has made me feel better around people ... improved my social skills which makes me a more positive person.” (SuperNOVA; Year 2)

“... I felt bad about myself ... because people made me feel ugly, but after coming [to the program] I stopped believing that.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 2)

“Like I feel like I can just be myself now.” (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Norvan site; Year 3)

“I think it kind of helped me to learn how to open up to people and just chat when I needed to and just get things off my chest.... It kind of made me feel more comfortable when I played sports and stuff because I was ... learning ... out of my comfort zone. It was just a lot easier when I got into high school and started playing sports.... It [also] made me feel like I could stay open with everyone.” (Minamodziwin; Year 3)

These same themes were present in the girls' group projects and mini-interviews. In each of the years, the impact of the programs on self-confidence was explored; please see below for some examples of illustrative quotes or excerpts from the group projects.

"By the end of the program I was confident and positive in myself. I no longer feel like I need to hide." (Safe Sisters; photovoice group project; Year 1)

"I learn new things and that helps me in school. I teach my friends new things because they don't have a chance to come to a program like this. This makes me feel better because I teach my friends new things they did not know. That is how it makes me feel better about myself." (Les Scientifines, translated from French; mini-interview; Year 1)

"It has helped me care more about myself and have confidence. It has helped me think more about myself (good things not bad things)." (Interior Indian Friendship Society; group journal; Year 2)

"This program has helped me feel better in a lot of positive ways about myself. This program opened my eyes to see that every girl is unique and beautiful in different kinds of ways. Also it made me feel better about myself because the colour of my skin didn't matter in this program." (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; photo voice group project; Year 2)

Several of the photos in a photovoice project at Media Smarts in Year 1 dealt with the theme of being yourself and confident. For example, one picture of a girl participant making a funny face and holding fingers up in a peace symbol had the following caption:

"There is only one me. I can be as silly as I want and have fun. I have important things to say."

At Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta (in both Media Smarts and Friendly PEERsuasion), the girls participated in a group journal project in Year 3. Presented below are a few excerpts from the group journals the girls completed:

"It helps me feel more confident and better about myself."

"It makes me feel more positive because I learn about cool things that can change my life."

"It makes me feel more confident and I can be myself. It also makes me feel very happy."

"I learned to like myself for who I am."

"I learned how to stand up for myself."

In a group film project completed by The Butterfly Club (Ka Ni Kanichihk) in Year 3, one girl commented:

"This program gave me a lot more confidence. When I meet new people, I get really nervous, but now I can learn that I can just go up and I don't have to be shy anymore. There is nothing to be threatened about."

In a scrapbook completed by the girls in the Rites of Passage program (Interior Indian Friendship Society) in Year 3, excerpts from the girls included:

"It has made me feel more self-confident."

"It has helped me feel a lot better about myself. I used to be insecure and not confident about myself."

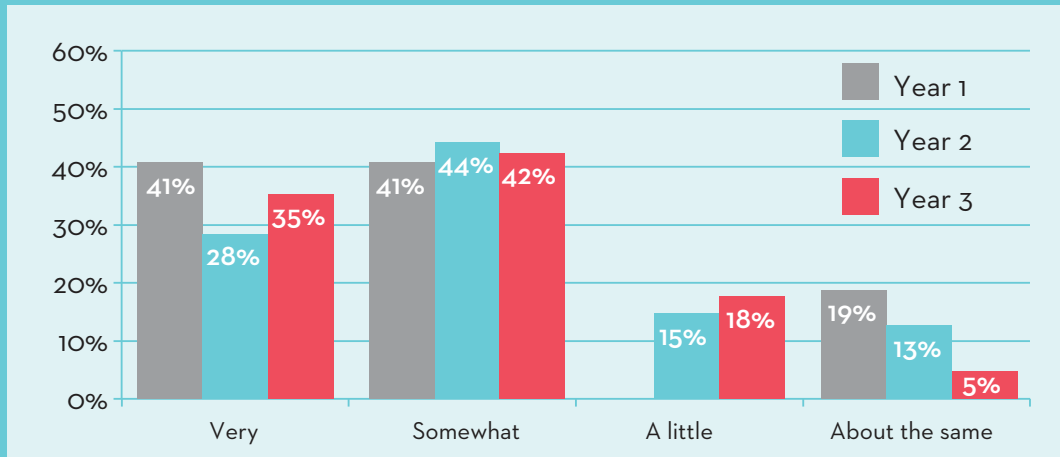
"The group has helped me a lot to stay positive about myself. I feel more open and happy now."

"There's no storm cloud over my head!"

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

In each of the three years the parents were asked to rate whether they thought their daughters' self-confidence had increased as a result of participating in the program. In all three years the parents' responses were very positive. Please see figure below:

Figure 5 Self-Confidence Ratings as Reported by the Parents



There were positive results from the parents in all 3 years. In Year 1, over 80% reported improvements in self-confidence; that is, they strongly agreed or agreed that their daughters' self-confidence had improved. In Years 2 and 3, the scale was changed to bring it more in-line with girls' self-reports. In Year 2, over 85% of parents reported seeing some improvement in their daughter's self-confidence. In Year 3, 95% reported at least "a little" improvement in this area.

In all three years the comments parents provided with respect to improvements in self-confidence were similar. Parents reported that because the programs exposed the girls to different activities, role models, and friendships, the girls developed new skills and self-confidence was improved. Some illustrative quotes are provided below:

"I think the girls group opens up opportunities.... She does not feel alone and has the confidence in making her own choices, especially in relationships and being able to not feel rushed into it and make up their own mind." (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 1)

"[She is] more comfortable in her skin... more confident period.... She has heightened self-awareness." (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 2)

"[She] has trouble socially but has been working on feeling better about herself... [She] focuses more on her strengths." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; Year 2)

"My daughter has become more empowered since participating in this program. She has become aware of society's pressure on girls (body image, etc.). She has gained more self-confidence in her ability to do things. She has also been able to stand up for herself." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Fraserview site; Year 3)

"She's a lot more confident with herself now and more outgoing. She's expressing herself very well now - very clear and direct, and she's speaking up for herself at home more often than before."
(Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

Staff did not report on individual girls, rather on general impacts on the girls in their groups. In all three years, staff who were surveyed and/or interviewed reported positive changes in the participants' level of self-confidence. In Years 1 and 2 this information was solicited from the staff by telephone interviews. In both years all staff interviewed agreed that they had seen positive changes in the girls' self-confidence, for example:

"They were more outgoing, their self-confidence you could see rise... They seemed more sure of themselves ...That was a big thing for me to see them comfortable in their own shoes, to present themselves more ...that and that was a progression that happened throughout the program."
(Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club; Year 1)

"Generally I saw more self confidence in most of the girls. At first they appeared to be shy, keeping to themselves and possibly because it was a new program, because they didn't know any of us unless they came with someone they knew. So a few sessions into the program, they were getting more relaxed and more confident in speaking up It wasn't a huge change, but I did notice that they were feeling better about saying something and not trying to hide." (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; Year 1)

"There's definitely some girls that even told me that they felt more confident doing things. A younger girl was telling me that she used to be shy to go and ask to join a game on her street and because she gained confidence throughout this, she was able to participate in them (games) outside of the group." (SuperNOVA; Year 2)

"We actually had a 5th Annual Celebration for our youth centre and we had two of the girls give speeches at the youth centre celebration in front of about 40-50 people, so it definitely increased communication, confidence as well as self-esteem to stand up in front of everyone and they actually wrote their own speeches." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 2)

In Year 3, in the survey that staff completed on-line, staff were asked to rate the girls' on a number of different elements, including self-confidence. On a 5-point scale from 1=worse to 5=very much improved, the average rating was 4.7 and 69% of the staff surveyed reported that the girls in their programs had "very much" improved. Further, ALL of the staff agreed there had been some improvement.

Staff were asked an open-ended question, in Year 3, about what they believed the top three benefits were for the girls involved in their programs. Many of the staff reported on benefits to the girls' self-confidence, for example:

"Their self-confidence. It's always something that we want to see improving. The girls are more confident in their appearance, their choices, and just themselves in general." (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)

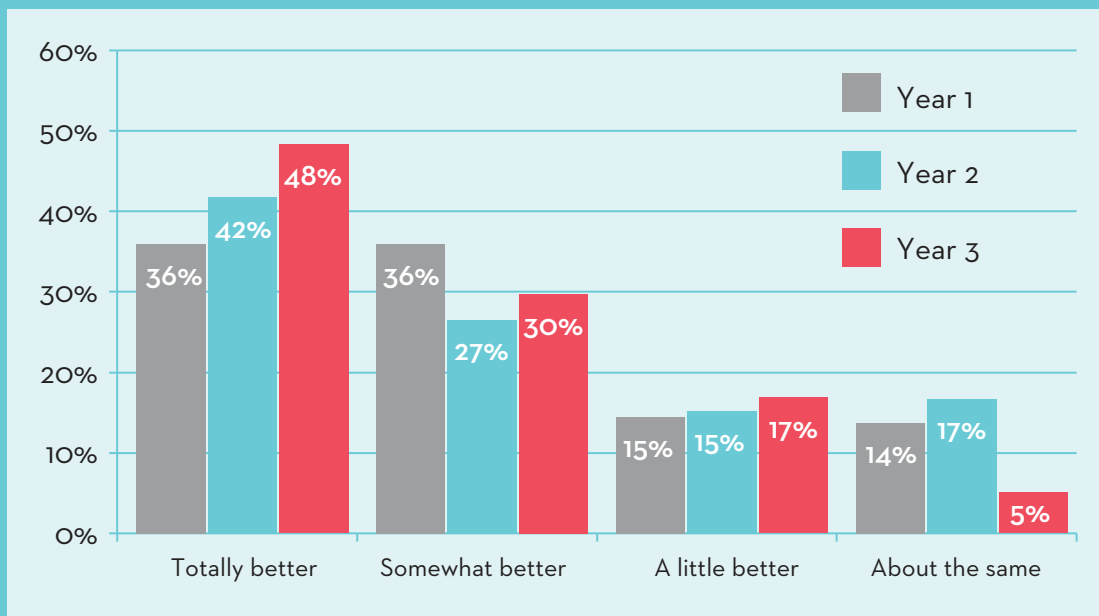
“Acceptance of themselves. I saw certain girls who seemed shy and reserved come out of their shells once they had spoken up at some point and received positive feedback for their input. This positive reinforcement seemed to help instil ... feelings of self-worth. I saw that every girl did have a better feeling about being a young Aboriginal girl and that they felt special realizing this.” (Circle of Life Thunderbird House)

“The girls have increased confidence, self-esteem, and self-awareness.... By partaking in various workshops and activities (dance, media literacy, science activities), the girls were able to explore things they’ve never tried before and discover skills they already had.” (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

CONNECTEDNESS

In each of the three years the girls were asked to rate whether they thought they were feeling more connected to others (e.g., to girls their own age, at school, the community) as a result of participating in the program. In all three years the girls’ responses were very positive. Please see figure below:

Figure 6 Connectedness Ratings as Reported by the Girls



As shown above, the results each year seemed to get more positive, as a larger proportion of girls, each year, answered at the highest end of the scale. In Year 1, 36% of the girls answered at the highest end of the scale (“totally better”). In Year 2 that proportion was higher at 42% and in Year 3 it was higher still at 48%. In all three years more than 80% of the girls reported at least improvement in this area.

In each year the girls were asked to explain the rating they had given for “connectedness” and/or to provide examples of how they were feeling more connected to others. Responses provided over the three years were quite consistent. Examples included making new friends or different types of friends, or that existing friendships were strengthened. As well, some reported that the other girls or the group made them feel accepted, that they felt less shy and therefore were able to talk to other girls and make new friends. Some also reported that the groups had helped them to express themselves (i.e., feelings, opinions) and that helped them feel like they belong. Illustrative quotes are provided below:

“I feel like I belong more with a group of girls my age because I have a lot more friends.... I used to have a group of three friends and now I have a group of six friends.... It's nice because I know I can turn to them ... give me a little guidance and advice.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 1)

“... I'm in a wheelchair ... and at first I didn't think I fit in because I was different. But [the instructor] taught us that people might seem different but they are all really the same.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 1)

“I am free to express myself and I am not excluded.” (Les Scientifines, translated from French; Year 1)

“I think I'm less lonely... because before I was more lonely but now I have a lot of friends.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Kimount site; Year 2)

“I think the girls group helped me because ... they didn't have any expectations, so I didn't need to be pretty or [have] the right clothes.” (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club; Year 2)

“I feel like I fit in more because we're together now.” (Minamodziwin; Year 2)

“It made me feel less lonely because I could be around other girls that really understand how I'm feeling and stuff.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 3)

“Before I was with everybody in my school but didn't know them as well. Now with this [program] I know all my friends and I feel so close to them and I tell them what's going on and stuff like that. Because I made more friends and share ideas.” (YWCA Toronto; Year 3)

In the girls' group projects and mini-interviews, many of these same themes emerged. In each of the years, the impact of the programs on connectedness was explored; below are some examples of illustrative quotes or excerpts.

“I feel like I have a special bond with other girls because we go through the same things.”
(Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club; group journal project; Year 1)

“We are all girls and the people make me feel like I belong and I know that we are all friends now.” (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; group journal project; Year 1)

“I made some friends and got to meet them. It made me feel like I am at home.”

“I have made tons of friends and met lots of people.”

“I have made friends at Girls Night by talking to the people and because people are making me feel like we are a family.”

(Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC; Langley site, group journal excerpts; Year 2)

“Now I feel like I belong to these girls more because Girls Inc. just brought us together.”
“This program has helped me feel more welcome in the group of girls by allowing me to speak up more and feel safe and ‘let loose.’”
“This program has helped me more to feel like I belong with my friends because now I have more confidence in myself and I carry it through when I’m hanging out with my friends.”
 (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; group journal excerpts; Year 2)

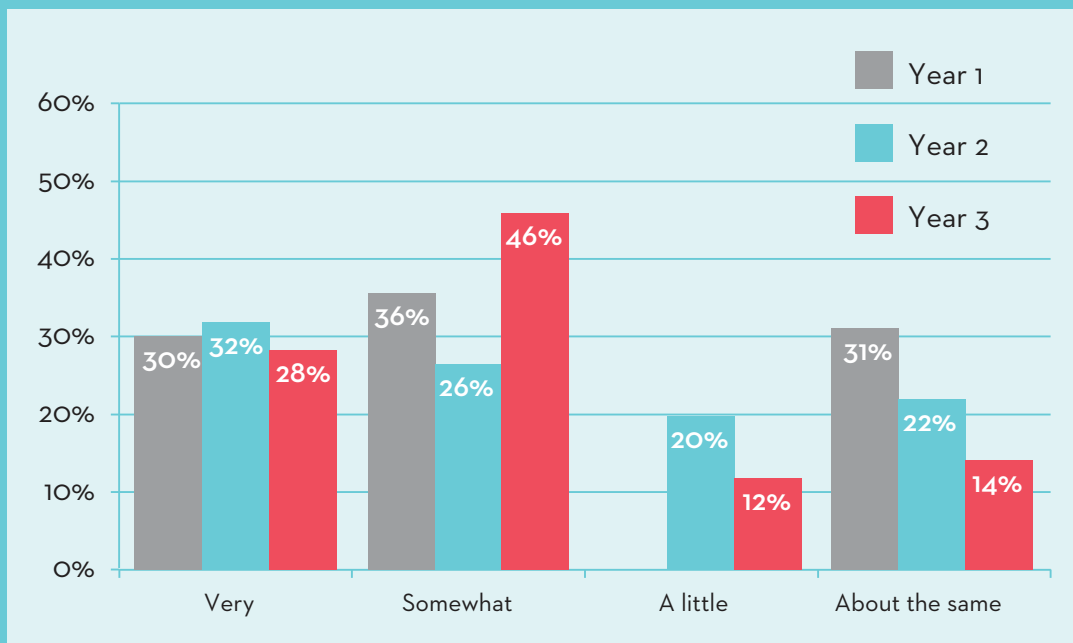
“It makes me feel like I belong because we’re all girls and we can all learn and fit in with each other, just being us. It makes me feel like I belong at school because you make new friends and you can hang out and play with each other. We can all see how amazing everyone is just by being ourselves.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; scrapbook; Year 3)

“It made me more open to other girls, other than keeping things to myself.”
“To be more open with my friends to show that there are others than just boys!”
“It has helped me think about myself, my friends and my family.”
“This group helped me by seeing how much people are my friends.”
“It made me less shy to talk to girls.”
 (Interior Indian Friendship Society; group journal excerpts, Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

In each of the three years the parents were asked to rate whether they thought their daughters’ self-confidence had increased as a result of participating in the program. In all three years the parents’ responses were very positive. See figure below:

Figure 7 Connectedness Ratings as Reported by the Parents



There were positive results from the parents in all three years. In Year 1, approximately two-thirds of the parents reported improvements in connectedness; that is, they strongly agreed or agreed that their daughters' connectedness with others had improved. Yet, it should be noted, that about one-third answered "neither agree or disagree" or "disagree". In Years 2 and 3, the scale was changed to bring it more in-line with the rating scales used in the girls' interviews. In Year 2, over 75% of parents reported that there was at least a little improvement in their daughters' connectedness. In Year 3, 86% of parents reported at least "a little" improvement in their daughters' connectedness.

In all three years the comments parents provided with respect to improvements in connectedness were similar. Parents commented that their daughters had made new friends, had formed strong relationships in the group, and they were getting along better with others. Some illustrative quotes from the parents follow:

"Getting along better with her peers. She has learned that she can't force people to think the way she does.... This is a work in progress but I have seen improvements. She has learned the difference between liking someone and respecting them - this was a huge challenge but she gets it now." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC; Year 1)

"Less bossy. Keeps friends longer. She made new friends with a wider range of interests...." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 1)

"[My daughter] really was lonely the first two months. [The group] really helped her to develop ... friends. She still belonged somewhere. It gave her the opportunity to fit in right away." (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 2)

"She is connecting more with girls her own age, rather than focused on individual play." (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; Year 2)

"Very close to girls in class. They were always friends but much closer now. More understanding/supportive of each other." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; Year 3)

"She's much less lonely now after going to the program. Before she would be like 'Mom, I'm so lonely ...' and would be complaining about not having friends. So it's a lot better now.... She's a sporty girl and a lot of girls her age are interested in talking about boys or whatever, but at the Girls Club she found out that girls can talk about a lot of different things. So I think she feels like she fits in better now." (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In all three years, staff who were surveyed and/or interviewed reported positive changes in the participants' connectedness with one another and the positive relationships that developed amongst the girls in their programs. Staff commented that the girls created a bond in the group, they had made friends, and were supportive of one another. In Years 1 and 2 this information was solicited from the staff by telephone interviews. In Year 1, staff in more than three-quarters of the programs⁵ commented on increased connectedness and improvements in the positive relationships among the girls. In Year 2, staff in 13 of the 15 interviews conducted reported an increased level of connectedness, and improved positive relationships. Some examples follow:

⁵ This finding does not mean that the remaining programs did not see an impact in this area. Rather, in some cases not all questions were answered in the interviews. The question around impact was open-ended and the interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a more conversational style. Sometimes the conversation moved in another direction, or there was not enough time to probe on all questions or items.

"All the girls seemed, as they progressed, they seemed more connected. They were more friendly and more easy-going. There were some conflicts in the beginning, but by the end they were all friends." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC; Year 1)

"They started forming relationships with volunteers, with us, with each other and they also felt more connected to the university, which is another goal of our program. It helped them understand that university is a community unto itself - because there are common areas that they hang out with their friends and there's classes and restaurants and all of these things, so just that understanding of the university brought them closer to post-secondary education." (SuperNOVA; Year 1)

"They have really improved and created a team spirit so they bonded more. This is something we saw throughout the year and they really created a sense of belonging. At first they wouldn't really do that, but as we would leave them to relax while we got a snack, they would talk together and become friends throughout the year. They became closer friends and created bridges, the older ones helped the younger ones." (Les Scientifines; Year 2)

"I see the girls forming positive relationships with each and other girls are sometimes coming from different schools, they are schools that compete with each other and the program helps them come together and form relationships. And you see although there maybe rivalry in schools they come together and that falls to the wayside in a safe environment. And they are learning together and all that other stuff doesn't matter, and it's a real fun environment for them." (YWCA Toronto; Year 2)

In Year 3, the program facilitators were surveyed on-line regarding program outcomes. The ratings were very positive and 83% answered at the highest end of the scale ("very much improved") on this item. Only one staff person answered "about the same". Close to 80% (79%) answered in the same way when asked if the girls had made friends or if they were getting along better with others; all but two staff (7.1%) reported some improvement in this area.

When asked for the top three benefits for girls in their programs, some of the staff commented on the connections the girls made in their groups:

"... participants have made friendships and connection with one another that are positive and strong. I have noticed that this year's group of girls sit on the fringes of social groupings in their school. They have vocalized feeling isolated and victimized by bullying at school. Through their involvement in the program they have established their own social group where they feel celebrated and supported. I have seen their confidence increase and their abilities to interact in social setting have improved." (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 3)

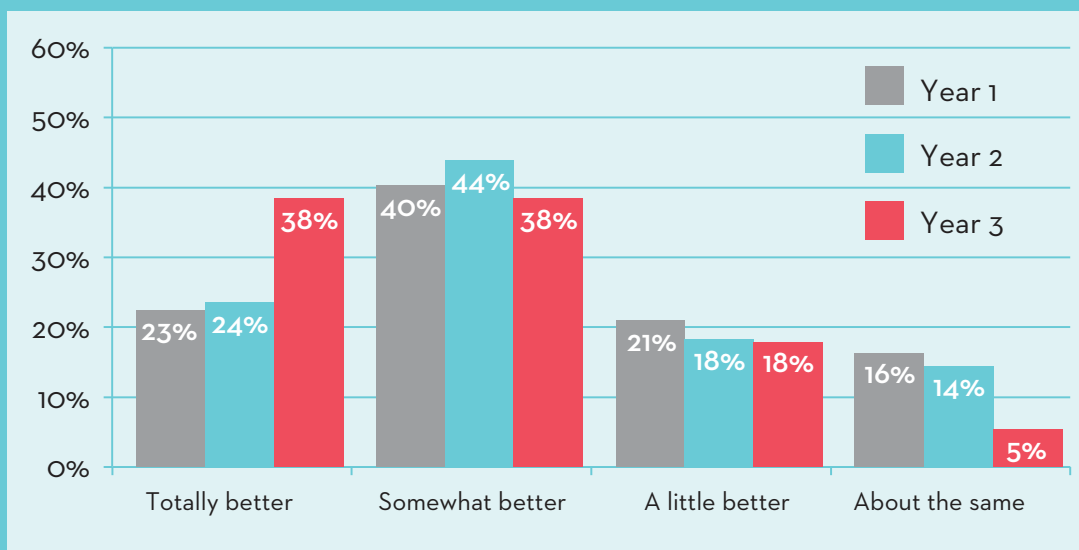
"Stronger friendship ties: When we first started intermediate girls club, our main goal was to address friendship issues which many of our girls were experiencing. M.F. was one of the girls who was having a particularly hard time making and keeping friends. She was anxious about this and often acted out when she was feeling sad about her relationships with others. I have witnessed a positive change in the way she communicates and interacts with the other girls. I see her playing with the other girls in the club and making good, solid friends." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Kimount site; Year 3)

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In each of the three years the girls were asked to rate whether they thought their critical thinking skills had improved from participating in the programs. It should be noted, however, that the way in which the question was asked from year-to-year varied. This was the question with which the girls grappled most to understand and to answer. It is a difficult concept to convey and to grasp and it is not surprising that the girls struggled. Each year the evaluation team solicited ideas from the grantee organizations in an effort to simplify the question and make it easier for the girls to answer. The rating results are in the figure below:

Figure 8 Critical Thinking Skills' Ratings as Reported by the Girls



As shown above, in Years 1 and 2 the ratings were quite similar with 63% in Year 1, and 68% in Year 2, answering either “totally better” or “somewhat better” on the scale. In both years approximately 85% of the girls reported at least a little improvement. In Year 3, however, 76% of the girls reported improvement in this area and 95% reported at least a little improvement.

When asked to explain their response to the rating question, or to provide examples, as noted above, many had difficulty articulating a response. Nonetheless, in each year, there were some girls who provided examples and explanations. They described thinking issues through more, giving more time and thought before making decisions or judgments, considering consequences, and being less rash. “Critical thinking” seemed to be interpreted as making better decisions, and to a lesser extent, problem-solving skills. Specific examples included thinking more critically about images in the media, or about engaging in risky behaviours (e.g., smoking, drinking, and drugs). Illustrative quotes are below:

"... for my thinking I've been reading questions over and looking at them more carefully so I don't get the wrong idea. For my opinions I have really been thinking about them before so I don't get into trouble or get grounded." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 1)

"... yeah it improved because I'm getting more information. I'm having those older people to look up to and have them tell me what they've done and what their experiences are and that if they could re-do it they wouldn't do it so that totally makes me think more, take more time to think about what I'm doing." (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 2)

"I think it has somewhat improved because ... I've had to ... test myself and a lot was ... information. Like 'was it real? Was it not?' and I've noticed that I've had to test myself a fair bit but when I test myself I feel as if I understand it more." (SuperNOVA; Year 2)

"It showed me how not to just think the way I do, [but] think in other people's perspective." (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 3)

"... Getting everyone's ideas and how they see different kinds of things that we're talking about and it all just gave us ideas and stuff. It just gave us a different way to think ... about things." (Minamodziwin; Year 3)

The impact of the programs on critical thinking skills was not explored as much as the other two main protective factors in the group projects and mini-interviews in which the girls participated. Because the inclusion of this question was not mandatory, only a handful of group projects explored this question. Nonetheless, the same themes emerged.

"The group helped me see everything in a different view."

"Being here has opened my eyes to seeing life in a whole new way."

"What I learned ... was a lot of life skills and how to handle certain situations right."

(Interior Indian Friendship Society; excerpts from group journals and scrapbooks; Year 1)

"It makes me think more about other people's lives and gangs. It also makes me think about having balance in my life and incorporating the medicine wheel more because I have learned in girls group that balance is very important. When I make decisions I think of how it will affect the balance in my life." (Interior Indian Friendship Society; group journal; Year 2)

"Well it's helped me in thinking of what I should do before I do something in science ... and safety, because you have to do a lot of stuff so that you don't get hurt." (SuperNOVA; mini-interview; Year 2)

[The facilitators] help me think about my decisions and to form my opinions.

(YWCA Toronto; photovoice project; Year 3)

"Help me make better decisions in the future using the 4 D's. ⁶"

"Thinking about consequences."

"Help make me influence others to make wise decisions."

"It made me think before act and consider to do the right thing and to know the consequences."

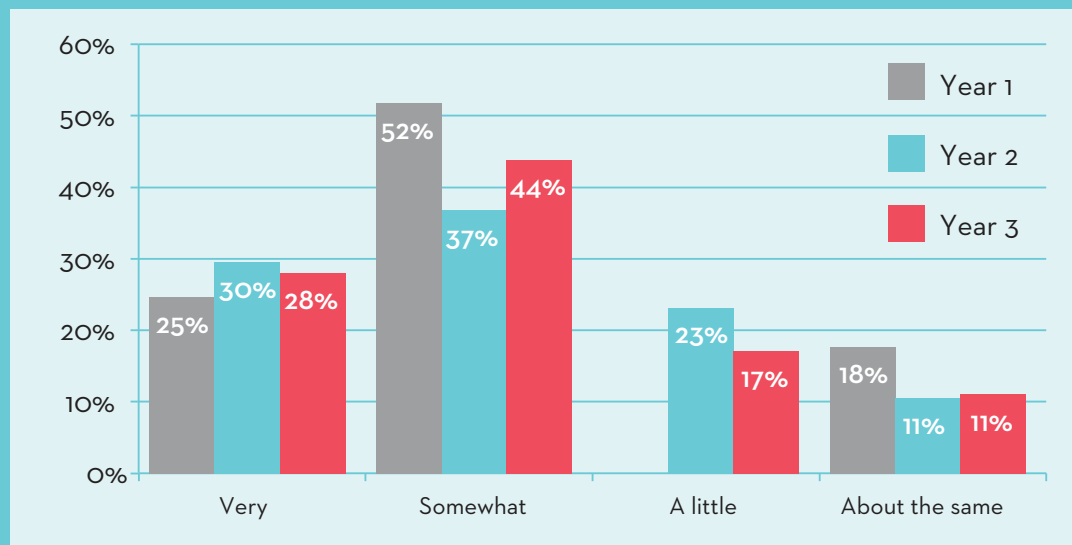
(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion, excerpts from group journal; Year 3)

6 Part of the curriculum which focuses on addressing peer pressure called "Friendly Refusal", which includes the following four D's: determine (the risk), define (the consequences), decide (what you want to do right now), and do (having the courage to do what's best for you).

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

In each of the three years the parents were asked to rate whether they thought their daughters' critical thinking skills had increased a result of participating in the program. The figure below outlines the results:

Figure 9 Critical Thinking Skills Ratings as Reported by the Parents



As shown above, the results were quite positive for all three years - at least two-thirds of the parents agreed that their daughters' critical thinking skills had at least "somewhat improved" since participating in the programs. In Year 1, over 75% of the parents either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that their daughters' critical thinking skills had improved. Nevertheless, about 6% of the parents "disagreed" with the statement. In Year 2, two-thirds of the parents felt that their daughters' critical thinking skills had at least "somewhat improved", while in Year 3 that proportion increased slightly to 72%. In both of these years only 11% of the parents felt that their daughters had remained the same, and none felt their critical thinking skills were worse.

Parents were not asked to comment specifically on critical thinking skills, but on skill development in general. Nonetheless in each year some parents did comment on improvements in critical thinking skills. Some reported that the girls were thinking issues through more, were thinking more carefully, had developed better analytical skills, were generally more aware which affected their thinking, and were now considering consequences. Illustrative comments are provided below:

"The different discussions and topics have helped improve her critical thinking skills. [My daughter] brings up the issues at home and we talk about them. [She] talks more with other people and speaks up more - particularly in class." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC; Year 1)

"[She is] forming a more analytical mind when approaching difficult situations and expanding her creativity and various points of view, instead of thinking that her results are the only ones." (SuperNOVA; Year 2)

"I feel my daughter's critical thinking skills have improved. She learned to think before forming opinions. She goes in depth and analyzes different scenarios I provide her." (YWCA Toronto; Year 2)

“Asking more questions. Asking for advice. Remembering past consequences.”

(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; Year 3)

“Because of the interaction with her friends, she has a wider view of the world.... She hears the other girls' opinions, upbringing, and experiences and this opens up her world view.”

(Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In all three years, staff who were surveyed and/or interviewed reported positive changes in the participants' critical thinking skills. In Year 1, staff in over 50% of the interviews⁷ reported an increase in critical thinking skills amongst their program participants. In Year 2, staff in most of the interviews (13 of 15) reported an increase in critical thinking skills amongst their program participants.

“Yes I do ... they would give different examples of situations that happened in schools with issues like gossiping and bullying and they made their own solution ... this worked, however, I need some more help here, and everyone being able to say okay, let's put our brains together and for them showing and demonstrating in their own voices in areas that they needed to work on.”

(Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 1)

“I think with Media Smarts I just sort of saw them learn to look at things with a critical eye. Kids are very trusting and they take everything that they see or are told as truth. I found that they would know that it was okay to look at something and question it – not always what it seemed to be and it was okay to have those thoughts. That involved listening to their music, the videos, the movies they watch. We talked a lot about the Twilight series.”

(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 2)

“An improvement in critical thinking is a big one. As leaders we put a lot of emphasis on different perspectives like maybe their perspectives and seeing something from another person's point of view, and with pre-teen girls you have a lot of attitude so it's important to them, to not just say ‘that's wrong’, but to take a look at how the others might be feeling, how would you feel if it happened to you. That is another big thing that the girls have realized, stepping back from their own perspective and looking at different views from other girls.”

(Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Langley Site; Year 2)

In Year 3, where the program facilitators were surveyed on-line regarding program outcomes, all of the staff surveyed reported at least “a little” improvement in this area. The majority of respondents (48%) answered “somewhat improved”, with a further 38% answering “very much improved”. Some commented on improvements to critical thinking skills when they were asked to report on what they believed to be the top three benefits to the girls:

“Critical thinking: The topics covered in the program encouraged the girls to think and talk about things in a way different from how they normally [would]. It allowed the girls to reflect on the language and words they use, how they treat others, and how they see themselves.”

(Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)

“Critical thinking skills – many of the girls told throughout the program that they are thinking more before making decisions and how it would affect themselves and others.”

(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion)

⁷ As noted previously, this finding does not mean that the remaining programs did not see an impact in this area. Rather, in some cases not all questions were answered in the interviews. The question around impact was open-ended and the interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a more conversational style. Sometimes the conversation moved in another direction, or there was not enough time to probe on all questions or items.

OTHER PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In addition to the three main protective factors, the grantee organizations were also given a choice of including some, or all, of other protective factor questions in their girls' interviews that were developed by the evaluation team based upon the Girls' Fund program logic model. These included:

- Focusing on strengths and skills;
- Communication skills;
- Problem-solving skills;
- Feelings about being a girl;
- Getting along with others/making new friends;
- Having adults to talk to or go to for advice;
- Feelings about school;
- Knowing where to go for advice or help;
- Knowing when to seek help or advice; and
- Feeling closer to/supported by family.

The last two items on the above list were only asked by a few programs in Year 3; therefore, in the results that follow the ratings provided by girls are for that year only. Ratings and information provided by the parents, and by staff, are also examined and included here.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Several of the protective factors listed above fell into the category of general "skill development" and are, therefore, grouped and reported together below.

The number of organizations including the different skill development questions in the girls' interviews each of the three years was:

- Focusing more on strengths and skills:
 - Six organizations in Years 1 and 2 (59 girls and 55 girls answered respectively)
 - Four organizations in Year 3 (51 girls answered)
- Communication skills:
 - Six organizations in Year 1 (81 girls answered)
 - Five organizations in Year 2 (47 girls answered)
 - Four organizations in Year 3 (66 girls answered)
- Problem-solving skills:
 - Five organizations in Years 1 and 2 (57 and 48 girls answered respectively)
 - Two organizations in Year 3 (23 girls answered)
- Social skills (getting along better with others and making new friends):
 - Six organizations in Year 1 (56 girls answered)
 - Seven organizations in Year 2 (87 girls answered)
 - Four organizations in Year 3 (68 girls answered)

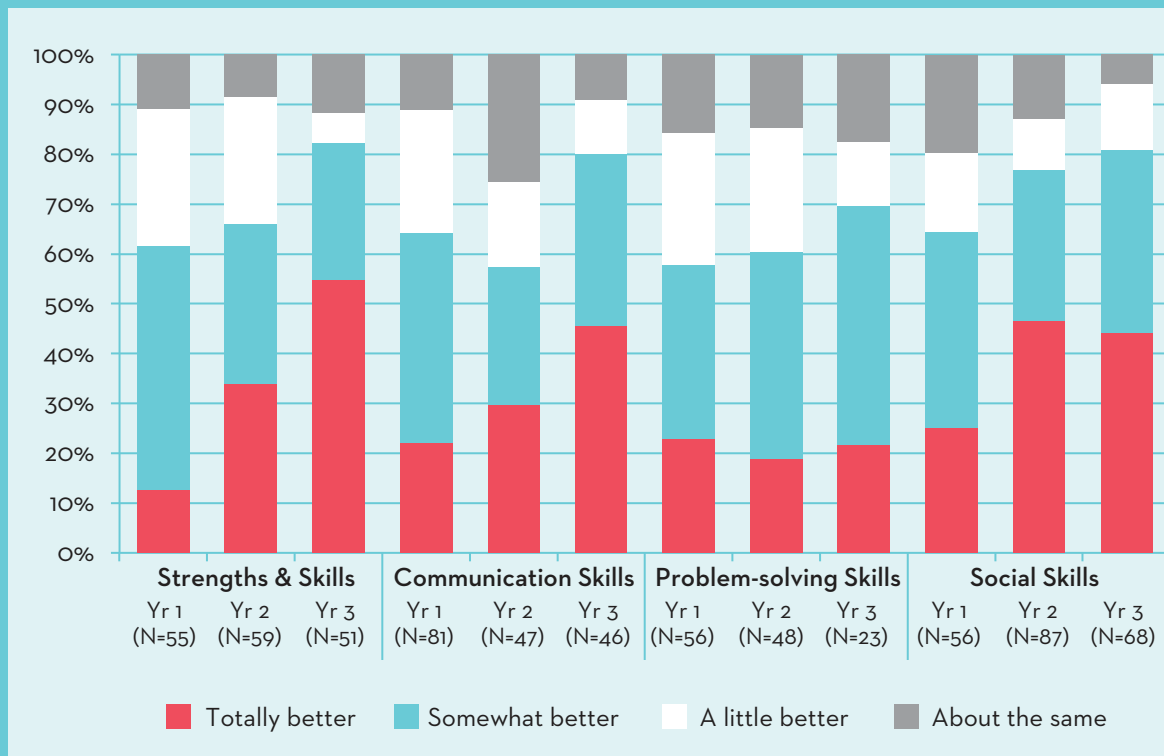
These questions were asked in parent interviews for each site each year.

In Years 1 and 2 staff were asked general questions about skill development in the interviews conducted by telephone. In Year 3 the staff completed an on-line survey which included rating questions for these areas.

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

The results below outline the ratings on each of these items for Years 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 10 Skill Development in Different Areas - as Rated by the Girls



As shown the results across these four areas were quite positive. The proportion of girls answering “about the same” was, generally, less than 20%. There was an increase from Year 1 to Year 2, and then again to Year 3 in the proportion of girls answering at the high end of the scale for “focusing more on strengths and skills” and “communication skills”. And, in general, the results were most positive in Year 3 for each of these four items with approximately 80% of the girls answering at least “somewhat improved” in three of four areas (the proportion for “problem-solving skills” was approximately 70%).

When asked to explain the rating they provided, or to give examples, most of the girls were able to do so. For “focusing more on strengths and skills” examples included feeling stronger, more positive or self-confident, or that they felt more skilled in certain areas – e.g., math skills, physical activity/sports, media literacy skills, communication skills, cooking skills, art skills and performance skills (drama, dance). For “communication skills” girls generally reported feeling more comfortable talking in the group and expressing their opinions.

For “problem-solving skills girls reported that they were able to deal with problems with their friends or peers better now, that they were able to stand up for themselves and address problems, while those in one of the science/technology-oriented programs reported on how they had used problem-solving skills to work out science-related problems. Finally, for “getting along better with others/ making new friends” the girls reported that they had made lots of friends, that existing friendships were strengthened, and they had become more open and less judgemental of others. Illustrative quotes from each of these areas are presented below:

Focusing more on strengths and skills:

“Prior to the program, I didn’t realize that I had an imagination and that I was able to write and be creative. It is because I came here that I was able to realize this about myself.” (Les Scientifines, translated from French; Year 1)

“I can play badminton better. I learned how to serve.” (Minamodziwin; Year 2)

“Yes since the program I am able to see what I’m good at. We did some other activities - the baseball thing, the roller coasters - and we loved making it.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 2)

“It showed me what I’m good at.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 3)

“Because before I didn’t notice what my strength was and I didn’t notice what my writing was.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 3)

Communication skills:

“I feel more comfortable around other people and talking.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC; Year 1)

“I mostly used to listen to other people’s points of view and I agreed with them. I was kind of afraid that they might not like my opinion or idea. But I think with the girls program I have the opportunity to ...speak up and know myself. I can speak up and express myself, my points and my advice.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 1)

“I learned in Scientifines a simple way to express my opinion without hurting others.” (Les Scientifines, translated from the French; Year 2)

“I’m better talking with others because now I don’t say ‘I don’t know’ and ‘I’m not sure’.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta; Year 2)

“Well I never used to talk out in front of groups that often but since being in this program I’ve learned to just express myself.” (Minamodziwin; Year 3)

Improvements in communication skills were also reported in the group projects:

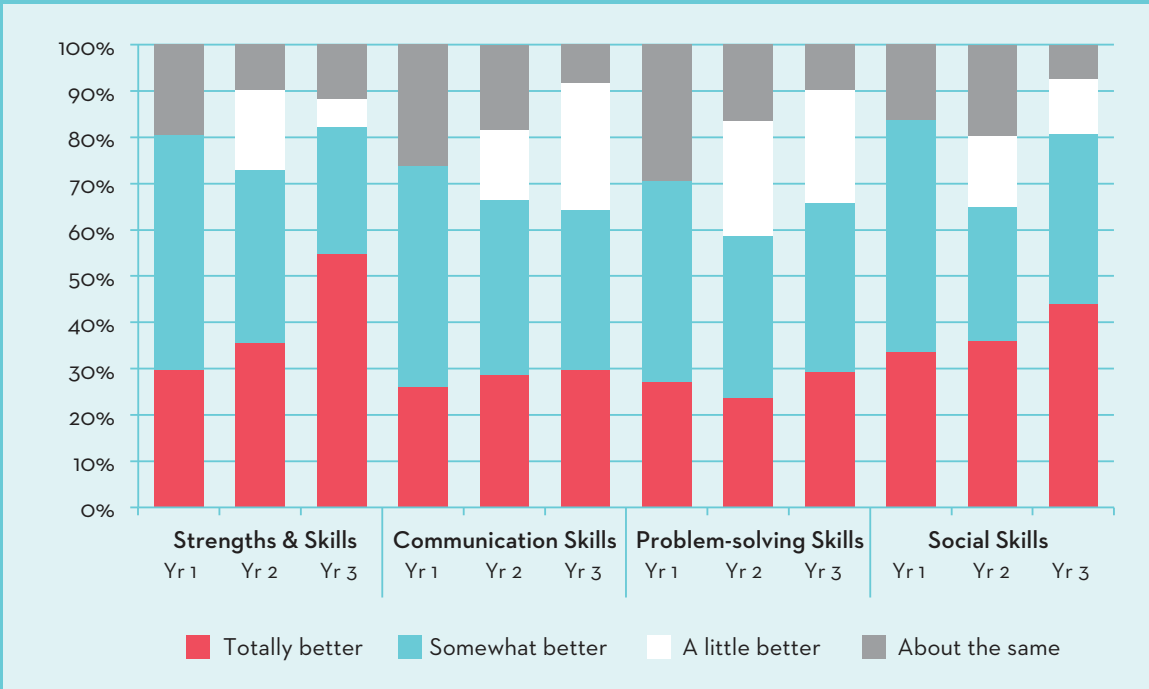
“Communication for me is a big one. I never really talked to a lot of people, but after this program I can have so much communication with friends.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; group journal; Year 2)

“We are better at sharing our opinions and communicating with each other.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Frasersview; Powerpoint presentation excerpt; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

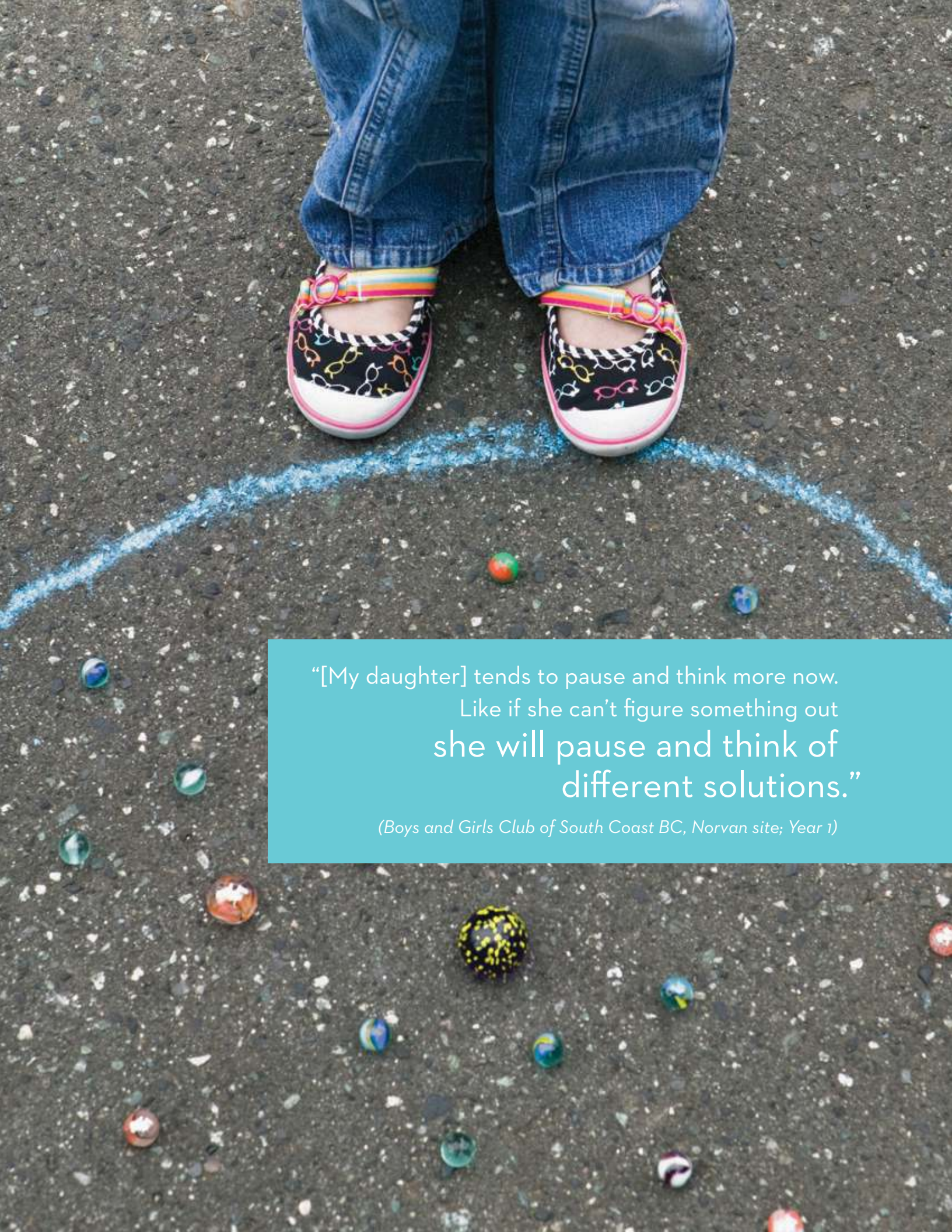
The figure below shows the results for these same skill development areas as reported by the parents in all three years:

Figure 11 Skill Development in Different Areas - as Rated by the Parents



As explained previously, in Year 1 parents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item in the survey. In Years 2 and 3 the rating scale was more in keeping with that used in the girls' survey where parents rated improvement in different areas. As shown above, approximately 60% or more of the parents answered either 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale in each of the three years.⁸ Parent ratings were highest for "focusing more on strengths and skills" where in all three years more than 80% of the parents noted some improvement. Parents were asked to comment on the ratings and many did; although there were few specific comments for "focusing more on strengths and skills" there were many other illustrative comments.

⁸ Since nobody answered 1 or worse the chart only includes four of the ratings.



“[My daughter] tends to pause and think more now.
Like if she can't figure something out
she will pause and think of
different solutions.”

(Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Norvan site; Year 1)

Communication skills:

"Her communication skills have improved. She is more open about discussing her feelings."
(SuperNOVA; Year 1)

"[My daughter] is talking more.... Before ... she wouldn't talk but now she does."
(Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 2)

"She communicates more at home. She expresses her feelings and emotions towards me...."
(Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 3)

"She talks with others better. Feels more comfortable speaking up [and] asking questions."
(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 3)

Problem-solving skills:

"Learns to solve problems effectively in program." (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)

"[My daughter] tends to pause and think more now. Like if she can't figure something out she will pause and think of different solutions." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Norvan site; Year 1)

"[She is] forming a more analytical mind when approaching difficult situations and expanding her creativity and various points of view, instead of thinking that her results are the only ones."
(SuperNOVA; Year 2)

"In terms of problem solving she would take a step back from the problem and look at it and be patient." (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 2)

"She thinks about options now. Thinks things through when she is faced with a problem."
(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 3)

Social skills:

"[She] made a lot of friends in the group and telling me the girls' names. When [she] first started ... she was nervous because she did not know anybody. Since ... attending she was getting more comfortable and made more friends and started to get along with the other girls and she loved the teachers." (YWCA Toronto; Year 1)

"She's learned the art of compromise. Before she had issues with interacting positively and getting along with others and this is a lot better! She knows how to be considerate and knows that she has to think of others as well." (Ka Ni Kanichihki; Year 2)

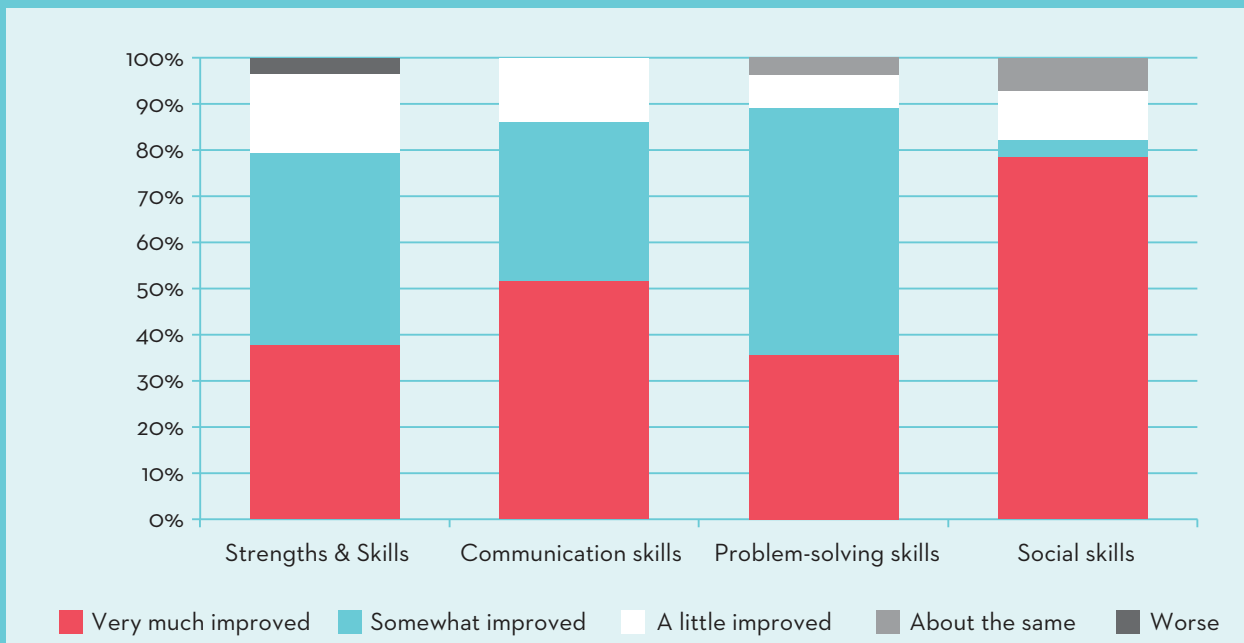
"I notice that it has opened up friendships for her. She has more friends and more friends her age. She is warming up to talking with others more easily." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Fraserview site; Year 3)

"She's definitely made a lot more friends.... Before she'd hang out with one or two people, say hi and bye kind of thing. But after being in the program it's like she has a big group of friends now.... She's not just with one or two people." (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In Years 1 and 2, in the interviews conducted with staff, staff were asked about different skills that the girls had developed. The item “focusing on strengths and skills” was not specifically asked of staff in those years, however, in Year 3, staff were asked to rate the girls in these areas using a five point scale from “worse” (1) to “very much improved” (5). The figure below shows these results:

Figure 12 Skill Development in Different Areas - as Rated by the Staff



As shown above, approximately 80% or more of the staff answered either “very much improved” or “somewhat improved” for each of the items. The most favourable ratings were given to “social skills” where close to 80% of the staff answered at the highest end of the scale “very much improved”. Further, No one answered less than “a little improved” (3 on the 5-point scale) for “communication skills”. One person, however, did answer “worse” for “focusing more on strengths and skills”. There was no explanation provided so it is unclear why s/he answered in this way; it could, possibly, have been an error.

Staff were also asked to comment on these areas in the interviews in Years 1 and 2. As well, when reporting their “top three benefits” in the on-line survey in Year 3, many of the staff mentioned these areas of skill development as well. Please see comments below:

Focusing on strengths and skills:

“Self- confidence in sports skills - they challenged themselves and others - I heard comments from them on how much they could see their own improvements.” (Minamodziwin; Year 3)

*“More focused on strengths and capabilities - the girls always showing their skills through the different activities and their skills show through their success in the program.
(Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC; Year 3)*

Communication skills:

“One thing is that their ability to vocalize and speak up for themselves I think that is really important, lots of times girls are taught or influenced to soften their voice and not be able to speak up when they are faced with a situation, I don't think that would be a problem with any of my girls that's something that we really encourage.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 2)

*“Listening is half of communicating; the other is expressing themselves. They definitely get that.”
(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta; joint interview with facilitators; Year 2)*

“Communications skills - in the beginning the girls did not ask too many questions, or tell me when they got upset over something. Near the end they felt more comfortable to not only talk to me but to some of the other girls and tell them why they felt upset - and they used their words more appropriately.” (Minamodziwin; Year 3 on-line survey)

Problem-solving skills:

*“We touched on problem solving in our activities. I had an awesome mentor come in and teach theatre and she focused on problem solving. For example if you are in a fight with a friend, or you want to do something but your parents won't allow it, stuff that would come up on a daily basis. We had two girls that previous to the program were best friends, [but] during the program [they] had a falling out One girl didn't attend the program for 3 weeks. I talked to the girl who was attending the program and we discussed the things that we had talked about during the program and her mom told me she had used those things [she learned] to repair the relationship and then both girls ended up coming back to the program and attending.”
(Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 1)*

“Definitely problem solving is huge; we've had several stories... 'hey I did this' and usually it's around bullying. This happened at school, and I saw this happened and I went straight to the Principal and told... So it's working through the information we've given [them and] actually using the resources [for example, like] the resources that we had done in the theatre bullying workshop” (YWCA Toronto; Year 1)

“Problem solving skills - With problem solving activities, the girls are able to communicate with one another. For example, they are presented a challenge to make cupcakes from scratch. They have to come up with their own ingredients as a group and work with one another to try and win the activity.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Norvan site; Year 3 on-line survey)

Social skills:

“Some of the girls that were more quiet or a little hesitant to interact with the other girls, but by the end of it they were already friends. They were not separated into smaller groups but were all together, so that was a major thing I noticed.” (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Fraserview site; Year 2)

“Improvement in relationships.... I would even hear them saying to each other I didn't know that such and such was interested in that, and like me I wouldn't have known that if I didn't come to the program, I wouldn't have been thought I could talk to you. I think the group gave them a good opportunity to get to know other people and bring down some of those stereotypes, and give them an opportunity to find out their similarities.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 2)

“The girls in this program have improved in making friends and getting along better with other girls their age. In our Boys and Girls Club we have a lot of diversity. At the beginning of this program the girls were very separated when it came to groups of different races. By incorporating events and activities such as cooking and team building projects we were able to establish a program that ended with a group of girls who were equally comfortable with each other.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Langley site; Year 3)

“Girls who typically had trouble making friends, or girls who were bullied at school, made friends and comfortably socialized with others.” (YWCA Toronto; Year 3)

GREATER LEVELS OF SUPPORT

Several of the protective factors listed previously fell into the category of having “greater levels of support” and are, therefore, grouped and reported together below.

The number of organizations including questions looking at support levels in the girls' interviews each of the three years was:

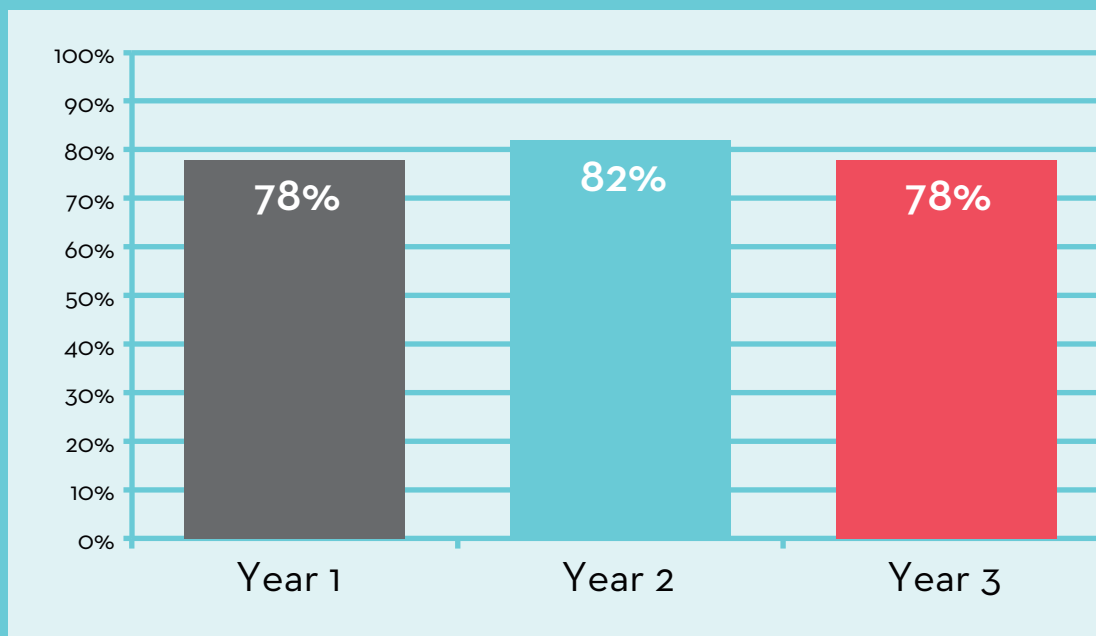
- More adults to talk to or go to for advice:
 - Six organizations in all three years (41, 66, and 74 girls answered respectively for Years 1, 2 and 3)
- Knowing where to go for help or advice:
 - Two organizations in Year 1 (19 girls answered)
 - Two organizations in Year 2 (31 girls answered)
 - Three organizations in Year 3 (51 girls answered)
- Feeling closer to/supported by family:
 - No organizations in Year 1.
 - Two organizations in Year 2 (31 girls answered)
 - Three organizations in Year 3 (45 girls answered)

The first two questions above were asked of all parents in each year. In Years 1 and 2 staff were asked questions about these areas in the interviews conducted by telephone. In Year 3 the staff completed an on-line survey which included rating questions for the first two questions, but did not include a question about feeling closer to or supported by family.

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In each of the three years girls at some of the organizations were asked whether or not they felt that they had more adults to talk to or from whom they could seek advice. In all three years this question was asked at six organizations. The proportion of girls that answered “yes” is shown in figure below:

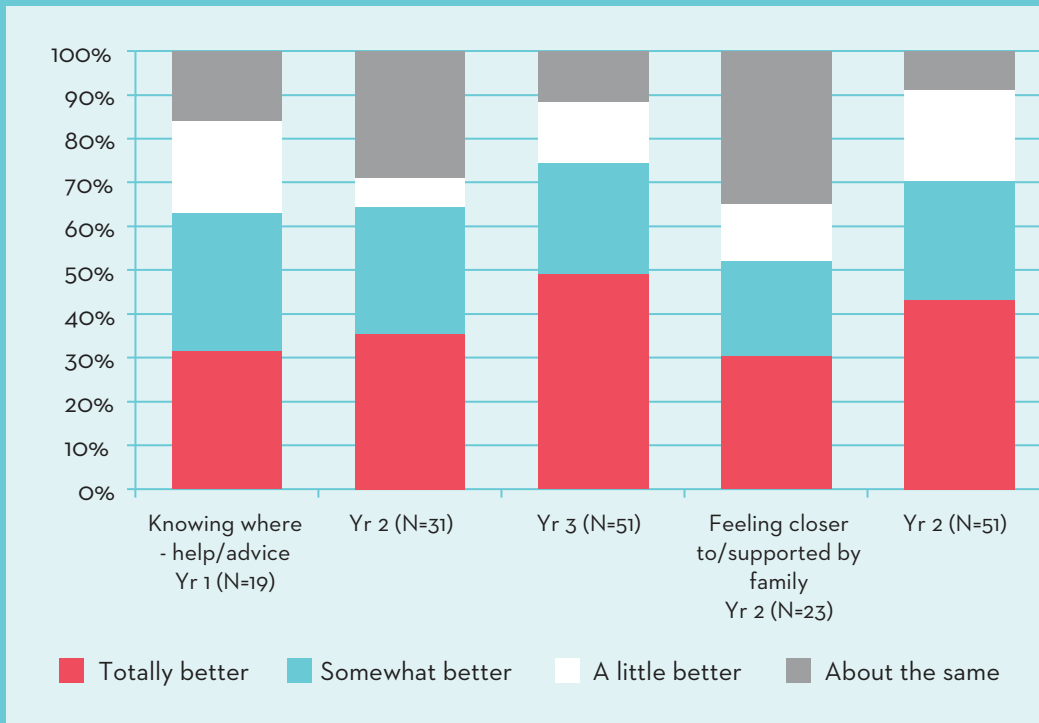
Figure 13 Adults to Talk to/From Whom to Seek Advice - as Rated by the Girls



When asked for examples, the girls reported that they could talk to their parents, teachers, the program staff, or other adults depending on the situation (e.g., the police).

Ratings on the other two items are shown in the figure below.

Figure 14 Greater Levels of Support - as Rated by the Girls



As shown above, at least 60% of the girls in all three years answered either “totally better” or “somewhat better” on the rating scale for knowing where to go for help or advice. For feeling closer to or supported by family, more than 50% of Year 2 respondents, and approximately 70% of Year 3 respondents answered at the higher end of the scale.

Illustrative quotes from each of the three years are below.

Knowing where to go for help/advice:

“They taught me that we don’t have to be shy to talk to other people for help and for advice about doing something and if there was a decision to make you could talk to them about making the right decision. After a few weeks I felt comfortable about talking with [the instructor].” (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 1)

“Yes, they tell me that ... and give me examples of people I can tell if I get really hurt and ... if someone is doing something to me and now I have many people and we made a list.... a family member, the police, a doctor, your friends and neighbours....” (YWCA Toronto; Year 1)

“At the beginning of the year something happened and I couldn’t talk about it with my family. I talked about it with some of the facilitators at [the program] and it helped.” (Les Scientifines, translated from French; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

In Years 2 and 3 parents were also asked if they felt the programs gave their daughters' more access to supportive and caring adults. Over 80% of the parents in Year 3 and 77% of the parents in Year 2 answered "yes". The majority of the other respondents answered "not sure/don't know" rather than "no". Parents also commented on this in the interviews and surveys:

"The adults in the boys and girls club are very caring and supportive and going to this program tells them that they can always go to the leaders if they have any problems." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Fraserview site; Year 2)

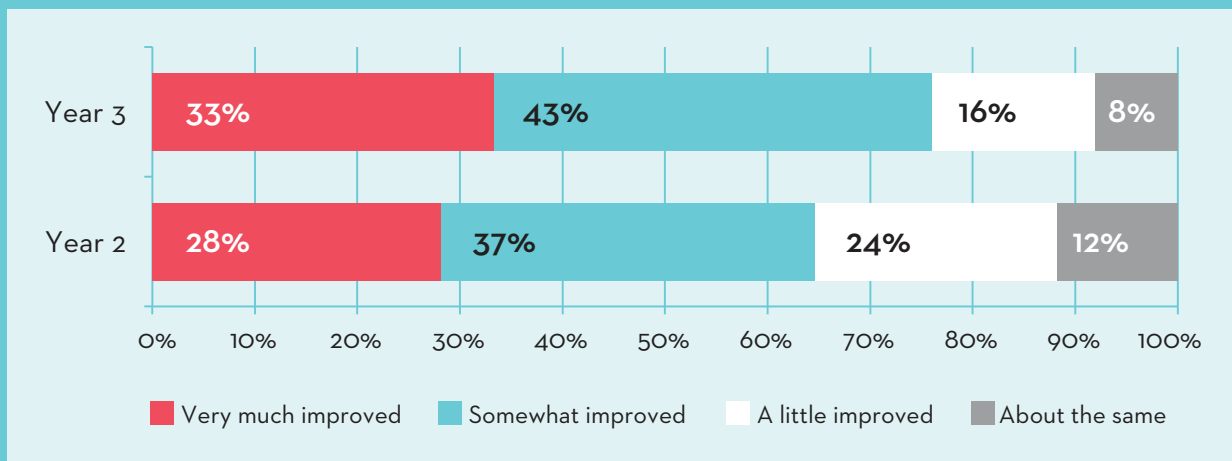
"Absolutely. They definitely look up to their mentors and enjoy having some camaraderie with girls who are older than them but still not 'old' in their eyes." (SuperNOVA; Year 2)

"She knows that she could go to Elders and speak with them [about] anything." (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; Year 3)

"[She] built strong relationships with the instructors. Instructor is excellent role model, friend and example." (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club; Year 3)

In Years 2 and 3 parents were asked if they felt that their daughters were more knowledgeable about when and where to get help or advice, if needed, since participating in the programs. The figure below shows these results:

Figure 15 Knowing Where to Seek Help/Advice - as Rated by the Parents



As shown above, in both years, more than 85% of the parents reported that there was at least "a little" improvement in this area. In Year 3, 76% of the parents answered either "somewhat improved" or "very much improved", compared to 65% in the previous year. Some of the parents reported that the girls felt that they could rely on the program facilitators, or that they had gained knowledge about where to go if they needed help:

"She knows who she can trust and that she can go to staff and people that she is comfortable with." (Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 2)

"Now that she has participated in the program she has relationships with the program coordinators and older girls who volunteered with the program. She can now feel comfortable going to them for help when needed." (Minamodziwin; Year 2)

"She talks to [me] about what the community has for help. She knows where she can go and who can talk to." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta; Year 3)

"She told me a lot and lot was learned from the program. She told me if something bad were to happen she can always call someone she trusts for help. Like me, neighbours, friend's mom, teachers, principal." (YWCA Toronto; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY STAFF

In interviews with staff conducted in Years 1 and 2 staff also reported that their programs had increased participants' access to caring and supportive adults:

"I think it has been increased in some of the girls. I have talked to some and they have disclosed some things to me, over the last 4 or 5 months... they are more comfortable with me knowing I'm there ... and some of the other ladies. I've also talked to them about different places that they can go for help when they do talk to me so they are aware, and a lot of the girls are comfortable talking to me about family stuff, friends stuff, or health problems and that kind of stuff." (Minamodziwin; Year 1)

"Yeah and I know that some of the girls were seeking out other adults in their community or in their school. I think they were getting more ideas that it's not just necessarily with us, but if they could have a trusted adult at school, or with an after school club that there was somebody there that was helpful, or they would be able to seek out, or need help, that they had more ... they realized that they had the access, they just need to ask for it." (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; Year 3)

When asked to provide a rating for this item in Year 3, close to two-thirds of the staff (66%) reported that access to caring and supportive adults had "very much improved" with a further 24% answering "somewhat improved". Less than 5% of the staff answered "about the same"; no one answered "worse". In Year 3, when staff responded to an open-ended question about what they believed the top three benefits were for the girls, some of the staff commented on the relationships the facilitators developed with the girls:

"The girls became close with adult leaders and in situations where they felt like they needed an adult's opinion, support or listening ear, became very comfortable with talking one-on-one with the leader." (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Langley site)

"Access to caring and supportive adults - the volunteers and mentors we bring in help the girls in numerous ways from basic emotional support from coordinators and volunteers to access to information about future careers." (SuperNOVA)

"More access to caring and supportive adults. The girls do seek out the First Nations Worker when experiencing conflict in order to help resolve it." (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

In the interviews conducted with staff in Years 1 and 2 some of the staff did comment that they thought the girls had become more knowledgeable about when and where to seek help or advice, if needed. For example:

"We went over different contacts, for resources You'd have different presenters that would come in and do their little spiel and hand out information that sort of thing." (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 1)

"It was called resource day, anytime we did our girl talk, we talked about different issues ... I would always give them resource packages.... And I would tell them that they could always talk to a teacher, friend, parent, older adult they knew of. We did address that and I do feel that they have additional information and resources. I do feel like they now know what to do...."
(Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club; Year 1)

"We definitely discuss that. We give them options on where to go, if they are being bullied. Sometimes in situations outside of school too if it occurs - like family violence. We do discuss with them. What tools, we have facilitators come in and teach them stuff like self-defence, or we'll do things through theatre where they're acting it out, like what to do, what not to do, it is helpful when they are acting it out, rather than just discussing. It gives them more concrete tool of what to do, I find those techniques really work its more hands on." (YWCA Toronto; Year 2)

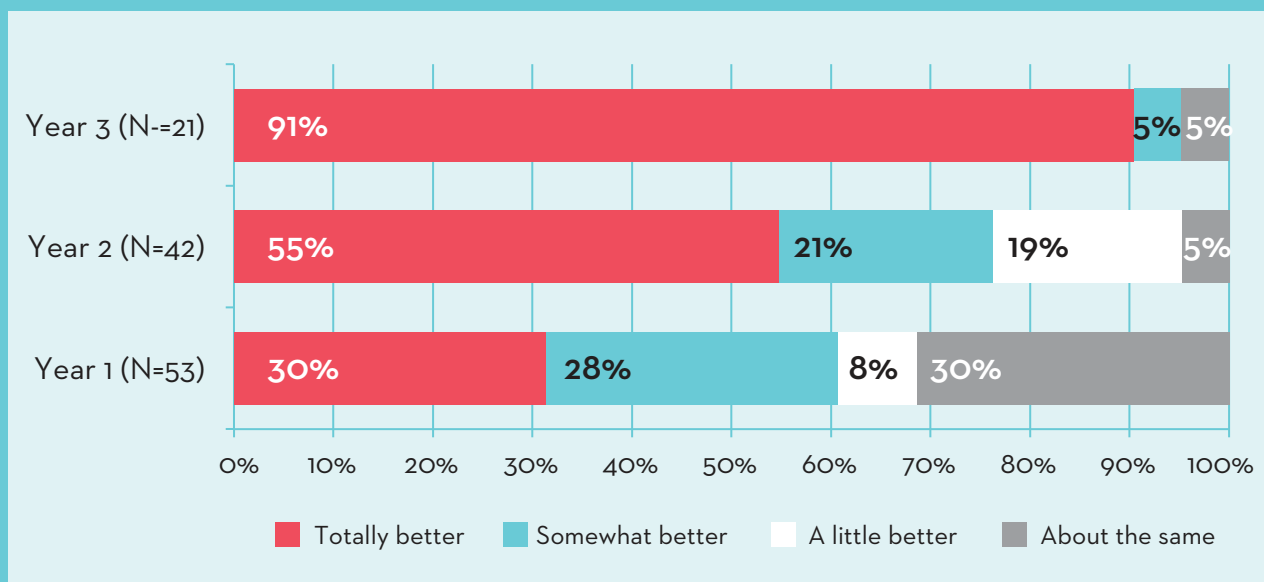
In Year 3, 90% of the staff rated improvement in this area as either "very much" (66%) or "somewhat" (24%). No one answered "about the same" or "worse". None of the staff, however, rated this improved knowledge in their top three benefits for the girls, when asked.

FEELINGS ABOUT BEING A GIRL

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

Girls at five organizations in Year 1, four organizations in Year 2 and two organizations in Year 3 were asked if the program had an impact on how they felt about being a girl. The results are outlined below:

Figure 16 Feelings about Being a Girl - as Rated by the Girls



As shown above, the results varied considerably from year-to-year. In Year 1 about two-thirds of the girls reported at least “a little” improvement in this area. In Year 2 that proportion jumped to 95%. In Year 3, 91% of the girls reported that they felt “totally better” about being a girl – the highest rating. Girls reported that they felt better about being a girl because the programs helped them to develop skills and/or boosted their self-confidence. Some also reported that the programs gave them the opportunity to talk and share with other girls and make friends, which also made them feel better.

“I feel more comfortable ... playing hockey because now that I played it with only girls I don't feel as scared as I did before.” (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC; Year 1)

“People used to say that because I'm skinny I couldn't do stuff ... that a guy could do or anybody else could do. But then I joined the program and I feel that I can do stuff that I couldn't do before.” (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 1)

“Because at first I thought that guys were totally, totally better than girls ... now I know that girls can do anything. We just have to set our minds to it.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 2)

“It's just because being around more girls, it just makes you feel better.” (Minamodziwin; Year 3)

“Because there are other girls around to support us. It made us feel better about ourselves because we knew someone was there to help us” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Kimount site; Year 3)



“Because at first I thought that guys were totally, totally better than girls ... now I know that girls can do anything.

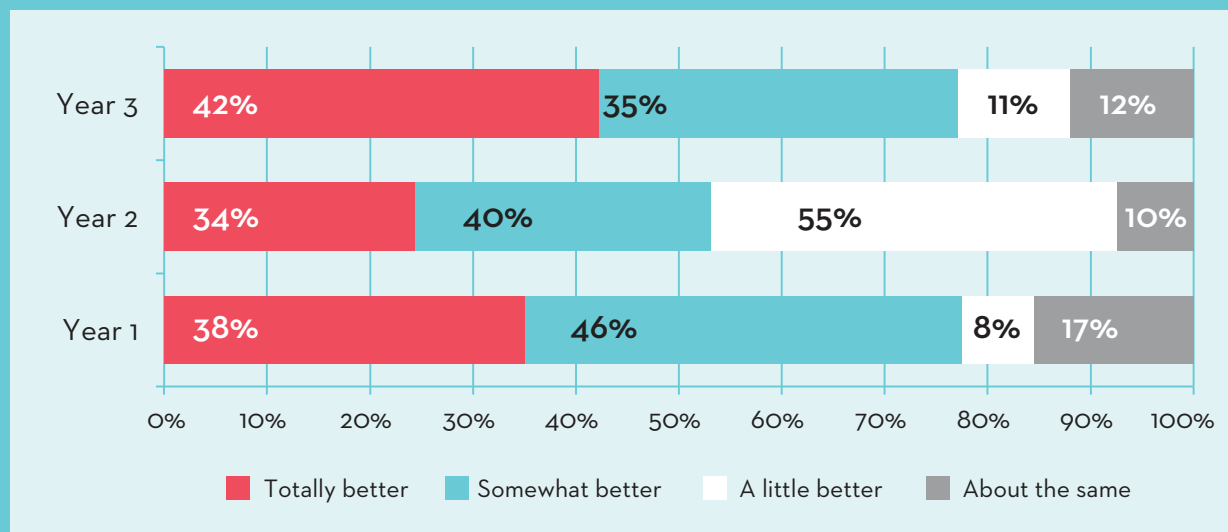
We just have to set our minds to it.”

(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 2)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

In each of the three years, parents were asked if they felt that their daughters were feeling better about being a girl as a result of participating in the programs:

Figure 17 Feelings about Being a Girl - as Rated by the Parents



As shown above, over 80% of the parents felt there had been at least a little improvement in this area in each of the three years. Because the parent interviews/surveys asked a general question about comments in a number of areas, there were few illustrative quotes with respect to this area:

"My daughter has always liked being a girl but now it is without limitations. I do not hear 'that's for the boys' or 'that's boy stuff' much anymore." (SuperNOVA; Year 2)

"I think she's much more comfortable with herself. After begin in the girls program I think she knows [about] being a woman and what she can do...." (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY STAFF

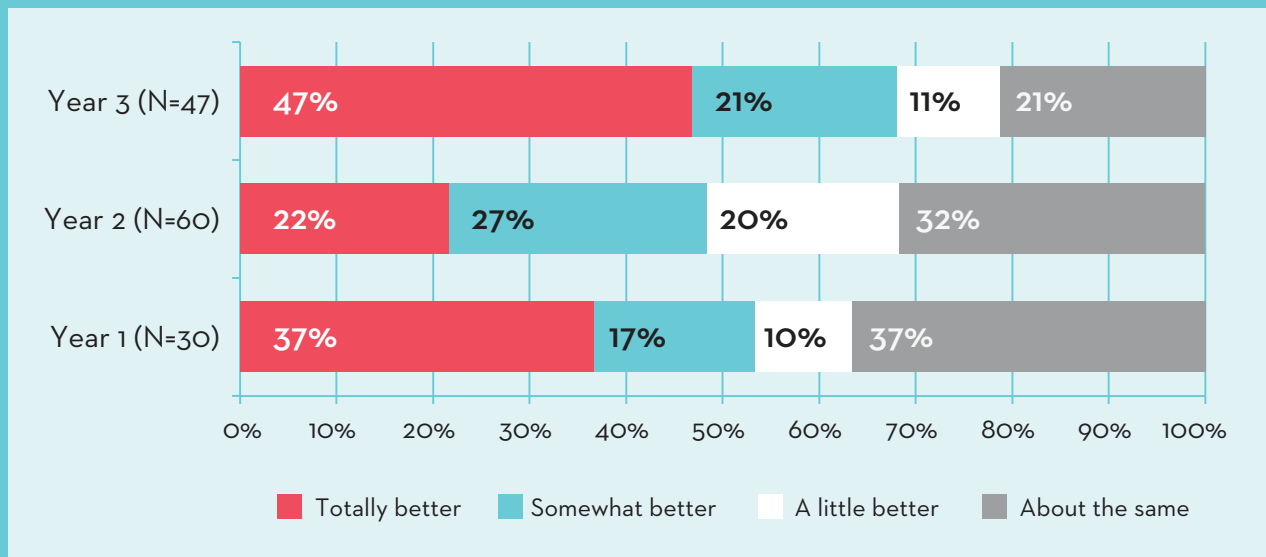
This issue was not explored in the interviews conducted with staff in Years 1 and 2. In Year 3, staff rated this item very highly: over 95% answered either "very much improved" or "somewhat improved". When staff reported on their top three benefits for the girls, several of them discussed issues that were covered earlier – about the girls feeling more self-confident and empowered and more comfortable in their own skin. Only a few provided direct quotes related to "being a girl" specifically.

FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In Year 1, girls from three of organizations reported on the impact of the programs on how they felt about school. In Year 2 this question was included in interviews at four organizations. In Year 3, it was included at three program sites. The figure below shows impact on school:

Figure 18 Feelings about School - as Rated by the Girls



As shown in the figure above, as compared with some of the other areas assessed, this item was not rated as highly by the girls. In Year 1 over one-half of the girls answered that their feelings about school had at least “somewhat improved”; in Year 2 this proportion was a little smaller at 49%. In Year 3, there was an increase in this proportion – approximately two-thirds of girls reported some improvement in this area. When asked for examples of how they were feeling better, responses varied by program type. For example, for girls in programs located in the schools, the girls reported looking forward to school on the days they were in program, they looked forward to being with the girls, and some reported a more positive attitude toward school. For girls in the Science-oriented programs, improvements centred on how the programs had helped with their school work.

“Well I just feel that I can talk more to people and be more social and stuff.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 1)

“Especially in science now - I like it a lot better.... I understand more and if we move into another subject I know it better because of [the program]. And I told the teacher and she said ‘that’s so cool.’” (SuperNOVA; Year 1)

“I’m feeling better knowing that I have people to support me and help me with school work and knowing that I can go to them for help.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society; Year 2)

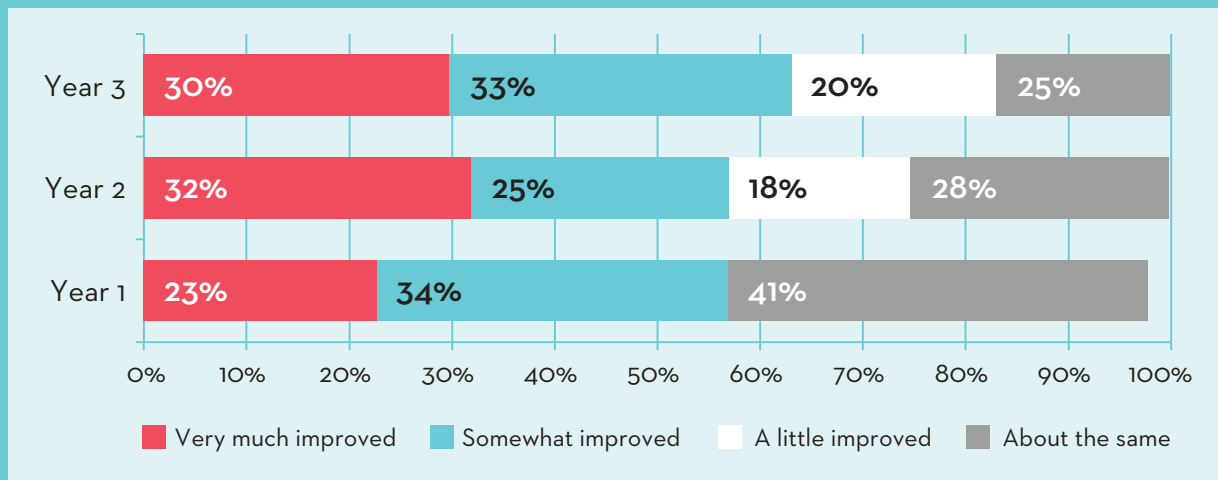
"I felt good about school before, but since [being in the program] I'm getting better grades and I'm looking forward more to actual classes... because I'm not as stressed anymore." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion; Year 2)

"Because I always got Bs in math and science and now I get straight As and I was like 'yes!'. [The program] definitely helped with that...." (SuperNOVA; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY PARENTS

In each of the three years the parents were also asked to rate if their daughters were doing or feeling better about school (e.g., attendance, grades, or attitude). Results outlined in the figure below:

Figure 19 Doing in School/Feelings about School - as Reported by the Parents



The results for the parents were similar to those of the girls; that is, this area was one in which the parents were less likely to report improvement. In Year 1, 57% of the parents either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that their daughters’ were showing school improvements; 41% answered “neither agree nor disagree” and 2% disagreed. In Years 2 and 3 70-75% saw at least “a little” improvement, with the majority answering either “very much improved” or “somewhat improved”. The comments parents did make were powerful:

"She's getting along much better at school this year. Her attendance is the same but just generally things are better. She's trying harder, she's more cooperative and attentive and her teacher has told me this." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC; Year 1)

"Better attitude with teachers. Before she would get hyper and could be rude and disruptive. Now respect for herself and others." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts; Year 1)

"[She is more] calm, attentive, confident in her abilities to get along with others. Teachers have noticed that she is much more calm and able to concentrate better. She was feeling very lost and confused about her identity and who she was as a person but is now more focused and confident and better empathises with others experiencing difficulties." (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; Year 2)

“She actually wants to go to school. She was bullied at school and didn’t want to go to school. The bond that her and [the program facilitator] have together built; that trust was needed. And that built her confidence. I know she learned this from [the facilitator].... It’s because she sees [the facilitator’s] lifestyle and attitude. Before she would have just stayed home in her room.”
(Ka Ni Kanichihk; Year 3)

“Though she would still rather stay home than go to school, she definitely has a greater appreciation for the skills she is developing and tangible evidence of this through activities at the Boys and Girls Club.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Kimount site; Year 3)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In the Year 1 and Year 2 staff interviews conducted, staff from about one-half of the organizations reported improvements in the girls’ attitude toward school, and provided comments that were quite powerful statements:

“A parent talked to [our staff person] and told her that she noticed an improvement in her daughter’s grades and wanting to work at school...and having a better disposition about going to school.” (Circle of Life Thunderbird House; Year 1)

“Absolutely... I think that there was an increase in a positive attitude towards school. Some of the girls said they now enjoyed science, now they’ve seen the fun and interest in science. And the mentors and they got to be introduced to how they did it and why they did it. So that gives them the awareness of university as community and the comfort that they gained from being on campus increases their attitude.” (SuperNova; Year 1)

“I had made a commitment that I would really try to work with a couple of girls and not just get them in the program and get them confident in their ski skills, but to really change their behaviour at school and the school did report that they had improved in their behaviour and in their academic skills as well.” (Minamodziwin; Year 2)

In Year 3, 45% of the staff reported that this area had “very much improved” and a further 28% reported some improvement. Less than 10% of staff (7%) reported that this had “stayed the same”. A handful of staff also reported on school-related positive impacts when they answered the open-ended question about the top 3 benefits to the girls:

“Through this program we have seen a change in the way the girls view themselves in schools and in their neighbourhood. It is clear the girls feel more of a connection to their school and community now that they’ve learned skills in which to express and understand themselves better.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office)

“Feel better about school/improved attitudes towards school- The coordinators and volunteers also give the girls advice when it comes to school re: participation as well as showing the girls that it’s okay to love school and science and not to be ashamed as some girls say they get people saying unkind things to them because of their enthusiasm.” (SuperNOVA)

ADDITIONAL OUTCOME QUESTIONS - YEAR 3

There were a few additional questions that were developed in Year 3 because several of the programs addressed these areas. These included:

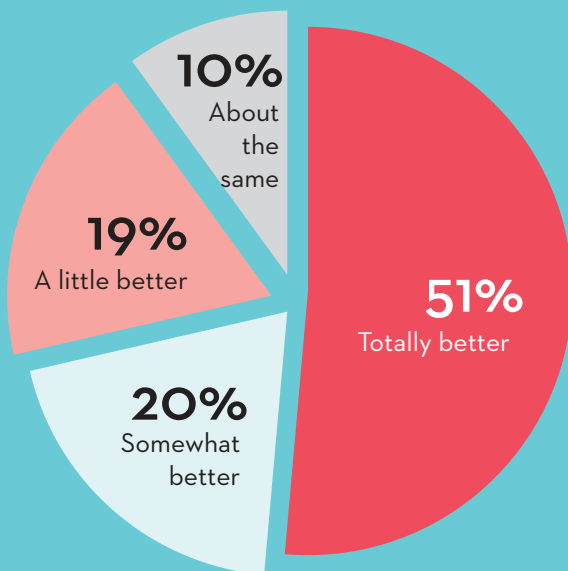
- Capacity to deal with bullying;
- Capacity to deal with peer pressure; and
- Two questions asked at the Aboriginal sites – do the girls feel they have learned more about their Aboriginal culture, and do they feel more proud of being an Aboriginal girl.

CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH BULLYING

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

A question about how well the girls felt about being able to deal with bullying or to stand up for themselves was included in interviews/surveys at six of the organizations (75 girls answered). Please see results below:

Figure 20 Dealing with Bullying -
as Rated by the Girls



As shown, over 50% of the girls gave the highest rating – “totally better”, with a further 20% answering “somewhat better”. Only 10% of the girls answered “about the same”. There were only 5 girls who were not sure and did not answer the question. When asked for examples or to explain how they were better able to deal with bullying as a result of the program, many girls talked about things they had learned in the program or skills they had gained that helped them deal with bullying in a better way than previous to the program. Many of the examples that they discussed related specifically to standing up for themselves and confronting the bully or the situation. Some of the girls gave specific examples of how they used the information they had gained and were successful in dealing with a bullying situation.

"I feel totally better because last year I got bullied by a girl and when I went to the boys and girls club last year I heard about the Girls on the Move and I decided to go in it and they taught me how to stand up for myself and they also said that if a bully comes up to you and says something mean to you, all you have to do is either stand up to them, tell them to stop and if they keep on doing it, tell someone or if you still don't feel comfortable you can tell an adult how you feel. So I went up to the bully cause she was bullying me and I told her to stop and it did work. She finally did stop." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Fraserview Site)

"Our guest instructor came in and helped us...like she explained different ways that we could stand up for ourselves and stop getting bullied." (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs)

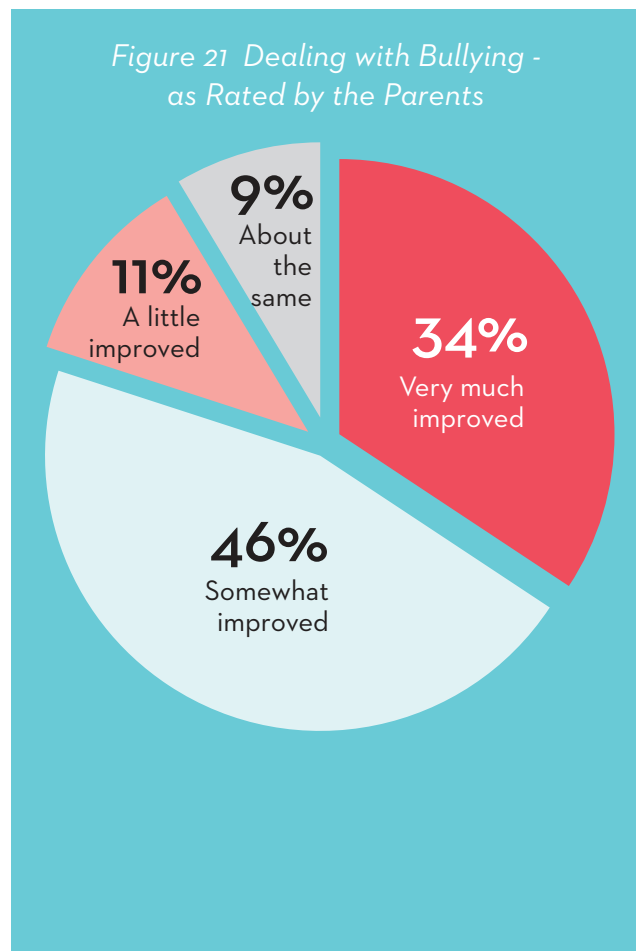
A few girls related their ability to deal with bullying to the confidence they gained through the program.

"Well it's just cause mainly it's just a program geared towards girls that obviously boost confidence which can boost like standing up for yourself and standing up for others which is pretty much so that's a really good important factor." (SuperNOVA)

"I'm probably more stronger now, during the group...Like I never used to say - I'm usually a shy person and I never used to say anything to anyone but now that I feel like I have more self-esteem I can stick up for myself." (Minamodziwin)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

Parents in Year 3 were also asked to rate their daughters' on their ability to deal with bullying since participating in the programs:



The results show that 80% of the parents felt that their daughters had "somewhat improved" or "very much improved" with respect to dealing with bullying and standing up for oneself. Parents reported that their daughters now had the confidence to stand up for themselves and a couple also gave examples of how their daughters had learned strategies through the program and had put these strategies into practice.

“Her and another girl were being bullied at school and she went and spoke to the counselor, she wouldn’t have asked for help before, she would have gone into a corner. She became the bigger person and ended it.” (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Langley site)

“Because she’s more confident in herself now than before, I think she would be able to do it...to deal with bullying.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office)

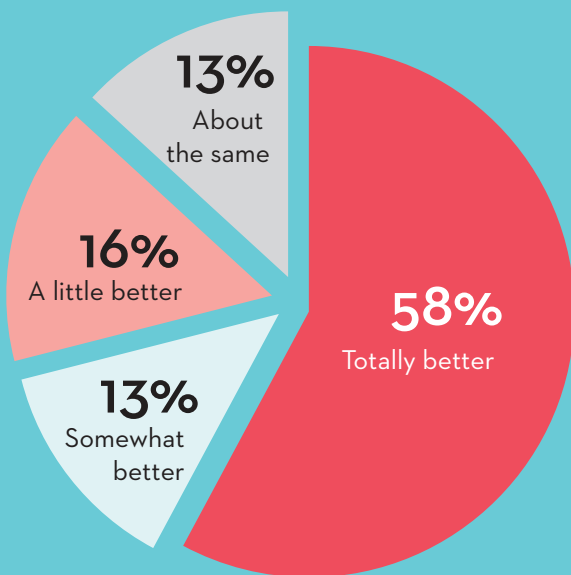
“Speaking out better now, and she also told me about learning self-defense...I think this would help with that, bullying and keeping [herself] safe.” (YWCA Toronto)

CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH PEER PRESSURE

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

A question about how well the girls felt about being able to “say no” to things they did not wish to do, or to handle peer pressure, was included in interviews/surveys in three of the programs (38 girls responded). The results are below:

Figure 22 Dealing with Peer Pressure - as Rated by the Girls



As shown, close to 60% of the girls gave the highest rating, “totally better”, with a further 13% answering “somewhat better”. Only 13% of the girls answered “about the same”. When asked to provide examples or an explanation of how they were better able to deal with peer pressure, the girls’ responses were similar to those that were provided for dealing with bullying. Many girls talked about the information that they had gained through the program and how they now knew how to deal with pressure and more specifically to stand up for themselves.

“There are some people doing all bad stuff and like seeing if people want to do it with them and I know that I could say no to that and not be peer pressured to because I’ve got my own choices and I don’t really need to listen to them.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

The girls also talked about knowledge they had gained through the program about drugs, tobacco or other issues and the consequences of getting involved.

“Because it gives us more information about that thing and because sometimes kids don’t exactly know everything about that one bad thing so people just say good things about it, ‘Oh it is so fun’, so then the kid is like ‘ok I will just try it’ but if you know what’s behind it, the side effects and all the disgusting stuff in it and what happens to you, then you know that you can say no right away...” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

Some girls also talked about how the confidence they gained through the program and the strength to be themselves helped them to stand up to peer pressure.

“It helped me to say no because since I have been in girls club it has given me a chance to be who I am instead of being what my friends are.” (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Kimount site)

“Yeah - makes you feel more confident to say no if they are trying to pressure you more to do it.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

Parents in Year 3 were also asked to rate their daughters’ on their ability to deal with peer pressure since participating in the programs. Of the 12 parents who were asked this question, all felt that their daughters’ ability to withstand peer pressure had improved (58% answered “somewhat” and 42% answered “very much”).

When parents were asked to provide examples or explanations of how their daughters are better able to say “no” and resist pressure, the parents talked about how their daughters were standing up to people. Parents also talked about how their daughters had more awareness of how to deal with peer pressure and more confidence to deal with it. For example:

“I think the workshops have helped with her awareness- don’t feel like there’s enough awareness out there for children and this program has that.” (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)

“Yes, has stuck up for others.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts)

IMPACTS OF ABORIGINAL TEACHINGS

Girls and parents at the program sites that had a focus on Aboriginal teachings and culture (four sites; 24 girls and 12 parents) were asked two questions about the possible impacts of the program: did the girls learn more about Aboriginal culture? And, did they feel more proud to be an Aboriginal girl from participating in the program?

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

All of the girls felt that they had learned more about their culture and traditions: 90% of the girls answered either “a great deal” or “a lot”. The remaining girls answered either “some” or “a little”. When asked if they felt more proud or felt better about being an Aboriginal girl, 86% of the girls answered either “totally better” or “somewhat better”. Only one girl answered “about the same”. When asked to give examples or comment on their response related to feeling better about being an Aboriginal girl, many of the girls talked about how they were now proud to be Aboriginal. Many girls gave specific examples of Aboriginal teachings or skills (e.g., drum-making) they had learned and many attributed the feeling of being proud directly to what they had learned in the program about their culture. Girls described how they felt better about themselves, had realized being Aboriginal was special, or had learned from specific role models. For example:

“I feel better, I feel really a lot better about being one (Aboriginal girl) because they definitely did tell us a lot about being First Nations and stuff and how incredibly amazing it is. And especially that conference did too. Seeing how amazing some of these First Nations women are... and it just made me think I want to be like that when I grow up.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

“I got a lot of pride with being an Aboriginal girl.” (Minamodziwin)

In their group projects, the girls also reported on things that they had learned about their culture – e.g., the Medicine wheel, about “moon time”, the seven teachings. They also reported on the different hands-on or craft activities that they had completed in their programs – for example, making bannock, making drums, beading, dream catchers, and a healing pouch.

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

More than 80% of the parents interviewed reported that their daughters had learned either “a great deal” (50%) or “a lot” (33%) about their Aboriginal culture and teachings. These results are very similar to the girls’ ratings. When asked if their daughters were feeling more pride or feeling better about being Aboriginal, over 80% reported that their daughters had either “very much improved” (58%) or “somewhat improved” (25%) in this area. Only one parent (8%) answered “about the same”.

A few parents provided examples and explanations of how their daughters were feeling better about Aboriginal culture or about being an Aboriginal girl. They talked about their daughters’ pride due to the teachings and traditions they had had learned, how these teachings had helped develop their identity, and how this had helped their daughters feel better about themselves. For example:

“I see her glowing now, like she feels good about herself now and that’s because of her culture.”
(Ka Ni Kanichihk)

“She feels proud, talks about her culture and the stories they heard which got me to tell stories that I knew.” (Minamodziwin)

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In each of the three years, girls were asked questions about outcomes related specifically to their program's content, goals, and objectives. Questions specific to programs included, among others:

- Involvement in sports/physical activity, and nutrition knowledge and healthy eating.
- Science, technology, engineering and math.
- Aboriginal culture and teachings.
- Media literacy.
- Safety awareness.
- Awareness of drug and alcohol issues.

In each year the girls reported on these program-specific outcomes. Listed below are examples of the different program specific skills that the girls reported learning through the interviews, as well as in their group projects and mini-interviews:

- Sportsmanship
- Volleyball, skiing, Tennis, and other sports skills
- Cooking, baking, sewing and crafting skills
- Team work
- Aboriginal culture - e.g., Medicine wheel, 7 Sacred Teachings, songs, stories, making bannock
- Knowledge on staying safe including safe sex
- Learning about bullying and abuse and well as resisting peer pressure
- Healthy eating
- Avoiding drug and alcohol abuse
- Coping with stress skills
- Media literacy: how media works, and the good and bad of media advertising
- Self-acceptance/body image
- Healthy relationships
- Self-defense
- Dancing
- Engineering - building a roller coaster
- Career choices
- Keeping safe at home and on the internet
- Science & jobs that involve science
- Research & writing skills
- Language skills

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

The parents also reported on program-specific benefits, including the following:

- Tangible skills such as sewing, cooking and crafts
- Self-development: social skills, teamwork skills, greater pride in accomplishments, more caring, and taking on more responsibility
- Sense of belonging at new school
- Learned more about Aboriginal culture/embracing Aboriginal culture
- Being able to share with others and not keep issues bottled up inside
- Improved body image
- Better knowledge of community
- Better understanding of messages in media
- Learned more about puberty and sexual issues
- Health and nutrition
- Learned about different cultural and racial backgrounds
- Learned strategies for completing homework
- Improved writing skills
- Self-defense and safety issues
- Learned about what is considered abuse
- Yoga
- Science and math skills
- Greater confidence in communicating in French
- More curious
- More independent
- Exposure to different career options and to the university
- Exposure to positive female role models
- Science/technology skills

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In the interviews conducted in Years 1 and 2 staff also discussed program-specific outcomes or benefits for the participants in their programs. Many of the examples provided by staff were very similar to those provided by the girls and the parents; these included:

- Learning and appreciating Aboriginal culture
- Active listening skills; more courtesy and kindness
- Media literacy
- Less judgmental regarding how others look or dress
- Learning about the dangers of alcohol and drug use
- Health and nutrition: making healthy food choices, setting personal health and nutrition goals
- Greater confidence in participating in sports and physical activities
- Developing leadership skills
- Developing a sense of empowerment
- Keeping safe and learning self-defense
- More interest in science, engineering and technology
- Better able to do research, organization information and write
- Exposure to different role models and career options

In Year 3 when reporting on the top three benefits to the girls, some of the staff also commented on the program-specific outcomes, listed above.

FACTORS AFFECTING OUTCOMES

Several factors were examined to determine what effect they might have had on program outcomes. These included dosage (i.e., number of hours in the program), best practices, and program approach. The results are in the sections that follow.

DOSAGE

The relationship between the girls' ratings on the three main protective factors was examined with respect to the number of hours they spent in the programs – or “dosage”. When this was examined, in Year 1, a statistically significant positive correlation was found for both “self-confidence” and “connectedness/sense of belonging”.⁹ That is, a greater number of hours attending the program was positively related to a more positive rating on both “self-confidence” and “connectedness/sense of belonging”. There was no correlation found between number of hours attending the programs and improved ratings on the critical thinking skills question.

In Year 2, however, there were no positive correlations found between outcomes on the three main protective factors and total number of hours in the programs. The relationship between number of hours in the programs and outcomes was further examined by sorting the number of hours into different categories and seeing then if there was a relationship between the categories of hours and responses to the main protective factor questions. Again, there were no statistically significant differences found but there did seem to be a pattern where girls in programs for 20 or more hours provided more positive responses to the self-confidence and connectedness questions than girls in programs with fewer than 20 hours. Although the differences were not statistically significant, the size of the effects were in the small to moderate range¹⁰

In Year 3, there was no relationship found between number of hours in the program, and outcomes on the three main protective factors. In Year 3, the staff-to-participant ratio, in addition to program frequency and duration were examined along with dosage to see if differences in “intensity” affecting outcomes on the three main protective factors. Again, no differences were found. However, given that there was very little variance in responses on the main protective factors in this year compared to the previous two years, it is not surprising that patterns with respect to dosage and intensity could not be found. That is, in previous years there was more variability in responses to the protective factor questions (i.e., more people answering near the middle of the scale). In Year 3 the responses were all very positive making it difficult to determine what variables may affect these outcomes.

When the other protective factors were examined, a positive correlation was found for “communication skills” in Year 1. That is, a greater number of hours attending the programs was positively related to a more positive rating on “communication skills”¹¹. As well, dosage was related to “adults to go to for help/advice” where girls who attended more hours were more likely to have answered “yes”. In Year 2, a statistically significant positive correlation was found only for “more adults to talk to”. That is, a greater number of hours attending the programs was positively related to a more positive rating on “more adults to talk to”¹². No other statistically significant correlations or relationships were found between dosage and other protective factors in Year 2. No relationship between the other protective factors and dosage or intensity were found in Year 3 with the exception of “more adults to talk to”.¹³

9 The correlations for these items were .23 and .20, respectively ($p < .05$).

10 The size of the effects were .36 and .48, respectively.

11 $r = .26, p = .02$

12 $r = .27, p = .03$

13 $x^2(3, N = 64) = 8.40, p = .04$.

It is difficult to tease out exactly what the relationship is between number of hours in the programs and outcomes. But it does seem evident that number of hours in the programs is not related to outcomes on critical thinking skills; outcomes in that area are probably tied more to program content rather than amount of time spent in the programs. With respect to the other two main protective factors, the relationship between dosage and outcomes is more complicated. Although a correlation between number of hours and outcomes on self-confidence and connectedness was found in Year 1, this was not replicated in Year 2, nor in Year 3. Yet, in Year 2, girls who attended at least 20 hours of programming did appear to answer more positively on self-confidence and connectedness than girls who attended fewer than 20 hours. Although not statistically significant, the effect sizes were small to moderate in size.

In the next phase of the Girls' Fund we will continue to look at the issue of dosage and "intensity" with respect to outcomes; with more grantees involved in the evaluation, we will have a larger sample size of girls and we may be able to shed more light on these relationships.


BEST PRACTICES

Correlations were run to determine if there was a relationship between girls' ratings on the three main protective factors and the best practice items included in the surveys¹⁴. The best practice items included:

- The group was a happy and positive place.
- The group was a place where the girls felt comfortable talking, listening, and sharing their ideas, and where people trusted one another.
- The group was a place where the girls felt safe.
- The girls were able to tell instructors what they wanted to do, or when they didn't like certain things.
- There was a good range of things to do in the program.
- The instructors were caring and supportive.
- Staff focused on their strengths and skills.

As well, in each of the three years, the girls were also asked to indicate how important they thought it was that the programs were for girls-only.

¹⁴ Best practice ratings by the girls were provided in Years 1 and 2 only. In Year 3, several open-ended questions were included in the interviews. The extent to which the best practices were implemented in each of the sites is discussed in the next section on Process Evaluation findings.



“By the end of the program I was
confident and positive in myself.

I no longer feel like
I need to hide.”

(Safe Sisters; photovoice group project; Year 1)

The results revealed the following:

Self-confidence was positively correlated with:

- The group being a happy and positive place (Year 1); ¹⁵
- Girls felt comfortable sharing/trusted one another (Year 2) ¹⁶
- Able to tell instructors what they wanted to do (Year 2) ¹⁷
- Good range of things to do ¹⁸
- Caring and supportive staff (Year 2) ¹⁹
- Importance of the program being girls-only (Years 2 and 3) ²⁰

Connectedness/sense of belonging was positively correlated with:

- Good range of things to do (Year 1) ²¹
- Able to tell instructors what they wanted to do (Years 1 and 2) ²²
- Importance of the program being girls-only (Years 2 and 3) ²³
- Girls felt comfortable sharing/trusted one another (Year 2) ²⁴

Critical thinking skills:

- Importance of program being girls-only (Years 1 and 3) ²⁵
- Girls felt comfortable sharing/trusted one another (Years 1 and 2) ²⁶
- The group being a happy and positive place (Year 2) ²⁷
- Good range of things to do (Year 2) ²⁸
- Staff focused on their strengths and skills (Year 2) ²⁹

Therefore, most of the best practices were positively correlated to the girls' ratings on the three main protective factor items. Creating an environment that was happy and positive, as well as a space that was emotionally safe for the girls, being holistic, girl directed or girl involved, and having staff that were caring and supportive and that focused on the girls' strengths and skills were all positively related to at least one of the main protective factors. There was no variability in the physically safe item – that is, everyone answered positively to that item – correlations could not be computed.

15 $r = .20, p = .02$

16 $r = .31, p = .001$

17 $r = .22, p = .02$

18 $r = .21, p = .02$

19 $r = .21, p = .02$

20 $r = .25, p = .004$ (Year 1); $r = .18, p = .04$ (Year 3)

21 Approached statistical significance: $r = .24, p = .006$

22 Approached statistical significance: $r = .16, p = .07$ (Year 1); $r = .17, p = .06$ (Year 2)

23 $r = .26, p = .004$ (Year 1); $r = .21, p = .02$ (Year 3)

24 Approached statistical significance: $r = .17, p = .06$.

25 $r = .28, p = .001$ (Year 1); $r = .25, p = .009$ (Year 3)

26 $r = .22, p = .01$ (Year 1); $r = .31, p = .001$ (Year 2)

27 $r = .20, p = .03$

28 $r = .26, p = .006$

29 $r = .21, p = .04$

Other protective factors:

In Year 1 no statistically significant relationships were found between the best practices and the common protective factors questions that were included in some of the program sites. In Year 2 analyses revealed that there was a relationship found between some of the best practices and some of the common protective factors.

The best practice of having a group that was emotionally safe was positively correlated to having more adults to talk to or go to for advice.³⁰ As well, this best practice was also related problem-solving skills and getting along better with others; although these relationships only approached statistical significance.³¹

The best practice of being girl-involved or girl-directed was positively correlated to girls' ratings of their communication skills³² as well as having more adults with whom they could talk or seek advice.³³

The best practices of having a good range of things to do and having staff that focused on strengths and skills were positively correlated to getting along better with others³⁴ and having more adults to talk to.³⁵

Finally, the best practice of having caring and supportive staff was related to girls' ratings of their problem-solving skills as well as getting along better with others – although these correlations only approached statistical significance.³⁶

In Year 3, as noted previously, the best practice items were not rated by the girls, however, the importance of the programs being girls-only was still included in the interviews/surveys. The girls' rating of the importance of the program being girls only was found to be positively correlated with their ratings on communication skills³⁷ and knowing where to go for help.³⁸ The correlation between the girls-only rating and ratings for "feeling closer to/supported by family" approached statistical significance.³⁹

30 $r=.26, p=.04$

31 $r=.30, p=.07$ and $r=.21, p=.06$, respectively

32 $r=.36, p=.03$

33 $r=.24, p=.05$

34 $r=.24, p=.03$; $r=.38, p=.001$

35 $r=.39, p=.002$; $r=.47, p=.001$

36 $r=.29, p=.08$; $r=.21, p=.06$

37 $r=.32, p=.009$

38 $r=.31, p=.03$

39 $r=.25, p=.10$

PROGRAM APPROACH OR TYPE

The relationship between the girls' ratings on the three main protective factors was also examined with respect to the type of program in which they were involved. The program types included psychosocial skill development, physical-activity based, and science-related. Within the psychosocial skill development type, one-half of the organizations had an Aboriginal cultural focus as well.

In both Year 1 and Year 2 results revealed that critical thinking scores differed significantly by program type.⁴⁰ Girls in psychosocial skill development programs with an Aboriginal cultural focus reported the highest ratings as compared to the other program types. In Year 2 the differences, by program type, approached statistical significance for ratings on the self-confidence item.⁴¹ Again, girls in the culturally-based programs had a higher mean rating than did those girls in the other program types. No differences, by program approach, were found in Year 3.

The culturally-based programs did seem to emphasize the expression of feelings and self-acceptance, thinking issues through, and trying to get the girls to think critically about the choices they make in life – particularly the Rites of Passage program which had the highest sample size of any of the culturally-focused programs. The high ratings on self-confidence and critical thinking skills for girls in these types of programs reflect that emphasis in programming.

The relationship between the girls' ratings on the other protective factors was also examined with respect to the type of program in which they were involved. In Years 1 and 2, there were no differences found across program type and the other commonly asked protective factor items. However, the item “feeling better about school” did approach statistical significance, in Year 2, with psychosocial development programs with a cultural focus demonstrating the highest mean.⁴² In Year 3, there was a significant difference found on the item “knowing where to get help” with psychosocial development programs demonstrating a higher mean than programs using a physical activity/sport focus.⁴³ In that year also, differences by program approach for the item “communication skills” approached statistical significance with psychosocial development programs demonstrating a higher mean than programs that had a physical activity/sport or science approach.⁴⁴

40 Year 1 - $F = 2.65, p = .052$; Year 2 - $F = 3.28, p = .02$.

41 $(F=2.53, p=.06)$

42 $F(2,59)=2.48, p=.09$

43 $F(1,49)=4.23, p=.05$.

44 $F(2,63)=2.90, p=.06$.

OUTCOMES OF THE MENTORING COMPONENT

In several programs included in Phase 2, mentors were involved in program delivery. Programs that had Elders/mentors involved in their service delivery were asked to identify key mentors or Elders and to ask them to respond to the questions in the interview guide either through a written submission or through participating in an interview. Six mentors participated in Year 1, seven participated in Year 2 and twelve participated in Year 3. The mentors were older girls, athletes, women, or Elders. The mentors had several roles in the programs. Elders and sometimes others had very specific roles as teachers: they taught girls about traditional teachings, rituals and activities (e.g., drumming, dancing). They also taught them about being a woman and how to take care of themselves. Some mentors who were athletes taught specific sports skills. Mentors also helped facilitators lead activities or they connected with the girls by talking with them or helping them with activities.

The mentors reported that their involvement in the programs had a positive impact on their lives as well. They reported the following benefits:

- being able to give back to the community;
- affirmation of the knowledge they have;
- gaining a sense of “hope for future generations”
- staying on track with their own healing and goals;
- increased skills and help in working towards a future career;
- increased their self-esteem;
- helping her to become a part of her community and contributing to her community;
- earning to be more patient with her own daughter; and
- boosting her spirits and making her happy.

Mentors believed that their role was having a positive impact on the girls in the programs. Some of the mentors believed that their involvement in the program had given the girls somebody that they could talk to. Some mentors also reported how the involvement of mentors or Elders had provided good role models for the girls.

“Even though I am there to guide them, I also allow myself to be a friend to them, I know them all quite well. I know some of their families too. I grew up in the same neighbourhood, went to the same school...They see me then as a big sister, a role model that they can be inspired by.” (Les Scientifines, translated from French)

“I would like to think that my presentation on Powwow dancing has encouraged them to dance and motivated them to move towards that lifestyle because to be a dancer you have to be drug and alcohol-free.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

Elders discussed how the cultural teachings and their role in the program would have a positive impact on the girls.

"It's important that the girls know their ancestry and where they come from. The connection to spirit, teachings and respect. Connection to family and the land is also very important. The world is moving at a fast pace, some of the choices that youth are making, would benefit from connection and positive feedback." (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

"It's important for them to learn who they are, where they come from. It will build their confidence and self-esteem as to who they are. It's also nice to have other women there to teach them these ways. They see people practice their culture and this allows them to relate to their people and have a connection. It's also nice for them to have younger mentors available that are younger in age, to demonstrate that you can be young and still live a healthy and fun life." (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

In Year 3, girls in programs with mentors were asked to report on the ways that having the older girls, mentors, Elders or grandmothers help them or other girls in the program. Girls reported that the mentors helped by being role models, being someone they could talk to, and being someone with experience that could share that experience. Some mentors such as Elders or young adult athletes provided additional teachings such as sports or culture. Some girls also talked about how it was helpful that the mentors were older than them, but young enough to understand the girls in the program. Their age helped girls open up to the mentors.

"A lot because elders are wise and they have a lot of knowledge that they can give to us especially if they are grandmothers because they are women and they have lived the life of a woman and now they can pass it down to us so we will know." (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

"They're like role models, someone to look up to." (Minamodziwin)

"They're pretty friendly, so first thing would be we become friends. And then, it'd just kind of fun having them because they're a little bit older so they can give you better advice and they're also a little bit younger so they can still give you give you better advice." (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office)

SECTION



PROCESS
and PROGRAM
IMPLEMENTATION
FINDINGS

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROCESS AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

BEST PRACTICES

- Girls' Fund Grantee organizations are doing a good job of implementing girls programming best practices into their programs.
- In the first two years of the evaluation, when girls were asked about the presence of best practices in their programs, the majority of girls that were interviewed (at least 88% of the girls) agreed that each of the best practices were present in their program.
- In Year 1 over 71% of parents reported that there were enough opportunities for them to participate in the programs. In Year 2, a majority of parents (95% of those who responded to the question) were satisfied with the level of communication with the program and about 51% said that there were enough opportunities for parents to participate in the program. In Year 3, a majority of parents reported being either "very" satisfied (57%) or "somewhat" satisfied (35%) with the level of communication and information from the program. Also in Year 3, a majority of parents reported feeling "very" connected (46%), or "somewhat" connected (39%) to the program.
- Program staff respondents' ratings indicate that most of the best practices were fully implemented at least 75% of the time across the three years. The exceptions were parental support and involvement, girl-directed/girl involved, and a mentorship component that had lower ratings and were more challenging to implement, through there was some improvement over the years in the practice of parental involvement.

IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS-ONLY PROGRAMS

- In all three years, most girls and parents rated the importance of the programs being for girls only quite highly. Parents were more likely than the girls in all three years to give the highest rating to the importance of the programs being girls-only. There was a slight increase from year to year in the proportion of girls and parents that gave the highest rating to the importance of the programs being girls-only.
- Girls, parents, and staff all reported that they believe strongly in the importance of their programs being for girls only. Parents and girls reported several reasons why the program should be girls-only, including the following: girls are more comfortable sharing and opening up in an all-girls environment, boys and girls behave differently and boys' behavior could be disruptive, and boys and girls have different needs and interests at this age.

ADDITIONAL CRITICAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS OR QUALITIES

- Girls linked the program outcomes to the girls-only aspect of the programs, the caring and supportive environment, the caring and supportive staff, the activities where they had fun, learned, and gained skills. Many girls also reported that the social aspect of the program where they met girls and were able to make friends and be with girls, as well as develop a sense of belonging, had led to the positive outcomes they had experienced. Some girls also linked the positive outcomes they had experienced through the program to the cultural teachings and traditions emphasized in some of the programs.
- Parents most often linked their daughters' outcomes to the activities and/or topics covered in the programs. They also linked the outcomes to staff, mentors or other role models in the program, a positive or comfortable environment, the social aspects of the program, the Aboriginal focus of the program, or to the skills their daughters gained.
- In Year 2 staff reported critical aspects of their program (other than the girls-only nature) to be the following: committed, consistent and competent staff (47% of interviews); a consistent and designated space (27% of interviews); a cultural focus (20% of interviews); food/snacks (20% of interviews); and an Elder component (20% of interviews). In the third year of the evaluation, staff linked the positive outcomes experienced by the girls to the activities that took place in the groups, particularly the group discussions and the cultural activities. Many staff also linked the positive outcomes to the supportive and safe environment in the groups where girls could feel safe to communicate and discuss critical issues. The girls' only nature, and the guest speakers or mentors in the programs were also mentioned numerous times.

PARENT AND GIRLS' FEEDBACK ON PROGRAMS

- The main program aspects that girls reported liking were the activities (including special field trips), the First Nations or Aboriginal content, what they learned in the program or learning new things, having fun, the girls-only aspect, the confidential and sharing nature of the program, as well as the relationships or social aspects of the program.
- Parents reported what they liked best about the programs to be the benefits or outcomes of the program for their daughters. Other aspects of the program that they reported liking often included the girls-only aspect of the program, the program activities and range of program activities, the cultural component (for those programs that had one) as well as the social aspect (being with friends, building relationships).
- Both parents and girls appear to be quite happy with the programs and reported few dislikes or recommendations. When they did report something they did not like or made a recommendation for improvement, the most common response for girls was related to specific activities that they did not like or wanting more of an activity (example more field trips) or different activities, more program time, and expansion of the program (more hours or days). A few parents reported not liking the timing of the groups, lack of communication between staff and parents, transportation issues, timing or length of the programs were all issues mentioned by a few parents. Some parents also made suggestions for additional topics or activities that the program could cover.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURE

- Results indicated that for the most part activities and structure were being implemented as planned in most programs.
- There were some ongoing challenges experienced throughout the three years by a few programs, including program scheduling issues, inconsistent attendance, issues between the girls, group dynamics or behavioural issues, transportation issues for the girls, challenges securing a private and girls-only space, as well as scheduling difficulties for mentors or guest speakers.
- When staff discussed their challenges their comments reflected flexibility in the way the challenges were dealt with. Programs were adapted to meet the needs of the girls and the different issues that had arisen and were generally pleased with the way the year had gone and reported learning much from implementing the program.
- Most staff reported experiencing no challenges in recruiting girls from their target populations for the programs.

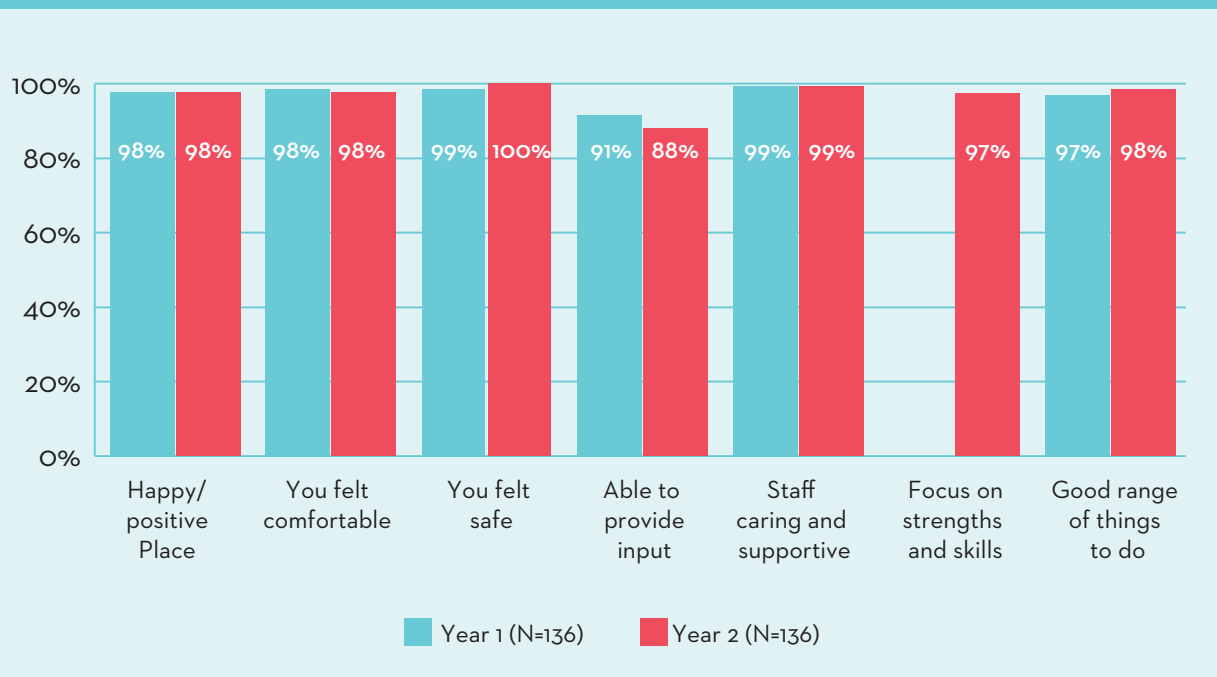
BEST PRACTICES: DETAILED RESULTS

In Section 2 we discussed the relationship between best practices and outcomes, from the girls' perspective. In this section we discuss, in more detail, the extent to which best practices were implemented in the programs and provide some examples of how best practices are implemented. Information was collected primarily from the girls and from the staff, although parents were asked about one best practice item (i.e., parent support/involvement) and in Year 3 they were asked about the importance of the program being offered at no cost.

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In Years 1 and 2 girls were asked whether or not each of the best practices was present in their programs.⁴⁵ As seen in the figure below the results are very positive, indicating that across programs for both of the years between 88% to over 99% of the girls reported each best practice to be present in their program. As shown, according to the girls, the best practice that was implemented to a lesser extent than other best practices was that the activities were girl-directed or girl-involved. In Year 1, 9% of the girls did not feel that this best practice was present in the programs; in Year 2, 12% of the girls reported that this best practice was not present in their programs.

Figure 23 Girls' Reports of Best Practices Present in their Program



45 Since the girls' ratings of best practices varied little between Year 1 and 2, these rating questions were not asked in Year 3 in order to make room in the interviews for additional questions that were asked in Year 3.

In all three years of the evaluation, the girls were asked to give examples of the best practices within their programs. Results were similar in all three years.

Group a Happy and Positive Place and Feeling Comfortable in the Group

In all three years, girls provided examples about what created feelings of comfort in the group. Girls said that the group was happy and comfortable because of the people (both girls and staff), because they were having fun and a good time, because of the supportive environment in the group, because they felt included and like they belonged, and because the group was for girls only.

“Everybody I met so far, almost everybody whenever you went in they didn’t ignore you and they supported you if you needed help and there was group activities and they gave everybody equal opportunities.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office)

Providing Input into the Group and Instructors’ Qualities

In Year 1, girls provided examples of how the instructors were caring and supportive. They reported how instructors were pleasant, encouraging, were concerned with their wellbeing and safety, and were good listeners. They also helped the girls deal with problems like bullying or conflicts with friends. The girls also provided descriptions of how the instructors encouraged their input into the group. They often reported that the instructors were open to suggestions and very flexible, allowing the girls to opt out of activities if they weren’t comfortable. Many girls also reported that they voted on activities or had a say in what the group activities would be.

“Yeah... they were very open to us and really wanted to listen to hear what we thought and they wanted to know what they were doing wrong or if they did it right and they’d ask us after every session, after we scrap booked and skied... they’d ask us if they should change anything and we’d give them ideas and they would listen to us and even if they didn’t they would just listen and approve. So they really listened I thought it was great.” (Minamodziwin)

In Year 2 the girls’ most common response about the instructors’ qualities was that the instructors were nice or kind. Similar to the descriptions in Year 1, girls also reported frequently that the instructors were fun, positive, had a good sense of humour, that they were supportive and caring, helpful, easy to talk to, and that they listened well. Other qualities that were reported numerous times included being flexible and providing options and choices, being encouraging, facilitating getting things done, and helping the girls feel comfortable.

“They really like, like if you needed someone to listen to you they would take the time and listen to you and like if you needed to they would sit with you like to the side and just sit and talk with you or they would just make sure that you were as comfortable as you could be.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

In Year 3, girls were asked to comment on what ways the instructors encouraged or helped the girls provide input and organized activities within the group. While many of the general type of activities were pre-planned in the groups, most girls seemed to think that they had enough opportunities to provide direction and their input was taken seriously. Sometimes girls described voting on activities. In other groups the girls ideas were taken away by the facilitators and then the facilitators would plan the sessions. A few girls described how some of the activities they suggested had not been implemented. A few girls also described how they had the opportunity to take the lead on activities, for example in producing a play or leading a cooking or craft activity.

“Yeah we actually got to teach the group. We taught the group how to make dream catchers.”
(Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Media Smarts)

“Everyone had their say. We decided together about where we would go and everything. The facilitators encourage every girl to speak up.” (Les Scientifines, translated from French)

Good Range of Things to Do

In Years 1 and 3 participants provided examples of a variety of activities they had participated in during the group sessions, including : sports; games; crafts; check-ins; cooking; snacks; field trips; and information sessions on drugs, STIs, relationships, thinking critically about media^a, and Aboriginal teachings and traditions. Girls described a variety of things that they did in the groups even when it was a group focused on a specific area like science or sport. Many girls also described how the activities were balanced with social time and time for discussions or talking.

“Yeah, it was really like, creative but it all related to girls which was great and then every week there was something different so it wasn't like the one week you learn about something and then the next week you're still learning about the same thing. It would change and they would let you talk and when there's game or we're going around the circle talking about each other so there was a lot of time to talk and socialize as well.”(YWCA Toronto)

The Group was a Safe Place

In Year 1, the girls provided examples of why the group was a safe place. Many girls talked about how the adults involved protected the girls and created a safe environment, and dealt with anything that was threatening. The physical location of the group also helped the girls to feel safe. Some girls discussed how they felt comfortable and confident with the people involved in the program and this helped them to feel safe in the group. Many girls also talked about how the group was a safe place because there was nobody threatening in the group.

“I feel protected by the Elders.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

“Well you just come in here and you see everybody and they all say hi to you, makes you have that respect that nothing will happen to you around everybody else.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

Parental Involvement in the Program

In Year 3, the girls were asked to comment on how their parents or guardians were involved in the program. Most girls said that they talked to their parents about the program. Others said that their parents asked about the program. Many comments reflected that the parents cared about what their daughters were doing in the programs and would sometimes talk to the facilitators to get more detail. A few girls talked about how their parents' involvement was the right amount, but a few also said that it would be nice if their parents were a little more involved by helping out. A few girls did report that their mothers helped out at the program at times.

"And I would tell her a lot about the program and what I did and she would really be like happy to hear that I had fun." (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

Parents were asked about the best practice of parental involvement in different ways in all three years.⁴⁶ In Year 1 over 71% of parents reported that there were enough opportunities for them to participate in the programs and approximately 13% did not feel that there were enough opportunities. In Year 2 two questions were asked of parents – whether they felt that the communication between parents and the program was satisfactory and whether they had enough opportunities to participate in programs. Almost 95% of the parents were satisfied with the level of communication. Just over 51% of parents said there were enough opportunities for them to participate in programs. In year 3, parents were also asked two questions - how satisfied they were with the level of communication and information provided by the program; and how connected they were to the program. The second questions was changed to clarify that the best practice of parental involvement and support does not mean the parents direct involvement in the program but rather how connected they were to the program. A majority of parents reported being either “very” satisfied (57%) or “somewhat” satisfied (35%). Only a handful of parents were only “a little” satisfied (7%) or “not at all” satisfied (3%). When asked about how connected they were to the program, 46% of parents reported feeling “very” connected and 39% felt “somewhat” connected. A small number parents felt only “a little” connected (13%) or “not at all” connected (3%).

Parents made a few suggestions in all three years on how to improve on parental involvement. These included inviting parents to come to an information session, receiving a newsletter, providing parents with regular schedules of activities, holding a special event for parents/mothers and their daughters, and inviting parents to volunteer to speak at a meeting.

To get some input into the best practice of accessible programs, in the third year of the evaluation, parents were asked to what extent they believe it is important that the program is free. A majority of parents (62%) responded that it was “very important”, 28% respondent that it was “somewhat important”, 9% that it was “a little important” and 1% that it was “not at all” important. When asked why it was or was not important, many parents said that if it was not free, they would not have been able to afford to send their daughter.

"I might not be able to pay for the program if there was a cost." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Langley site)

"I'm a single working mom and have no extra money, so this has helped me out a lot. It's nice to let her get out of the house and participate in something." (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

⁴⁶ The questions were changed each year based on feedback from staff in the programs in an effort to better capture the essence of the practice of parental involvement and support.

Some parents, however, expressed that since the program was so beneficial to their daughter that if there was a fee, they would find a way to pay it:

"I couldn't afford it. It was very helpful. But also, the other thing is that if there was a cost I would have found a way to pay because that's how much I believe that my daughters should be in the program." (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

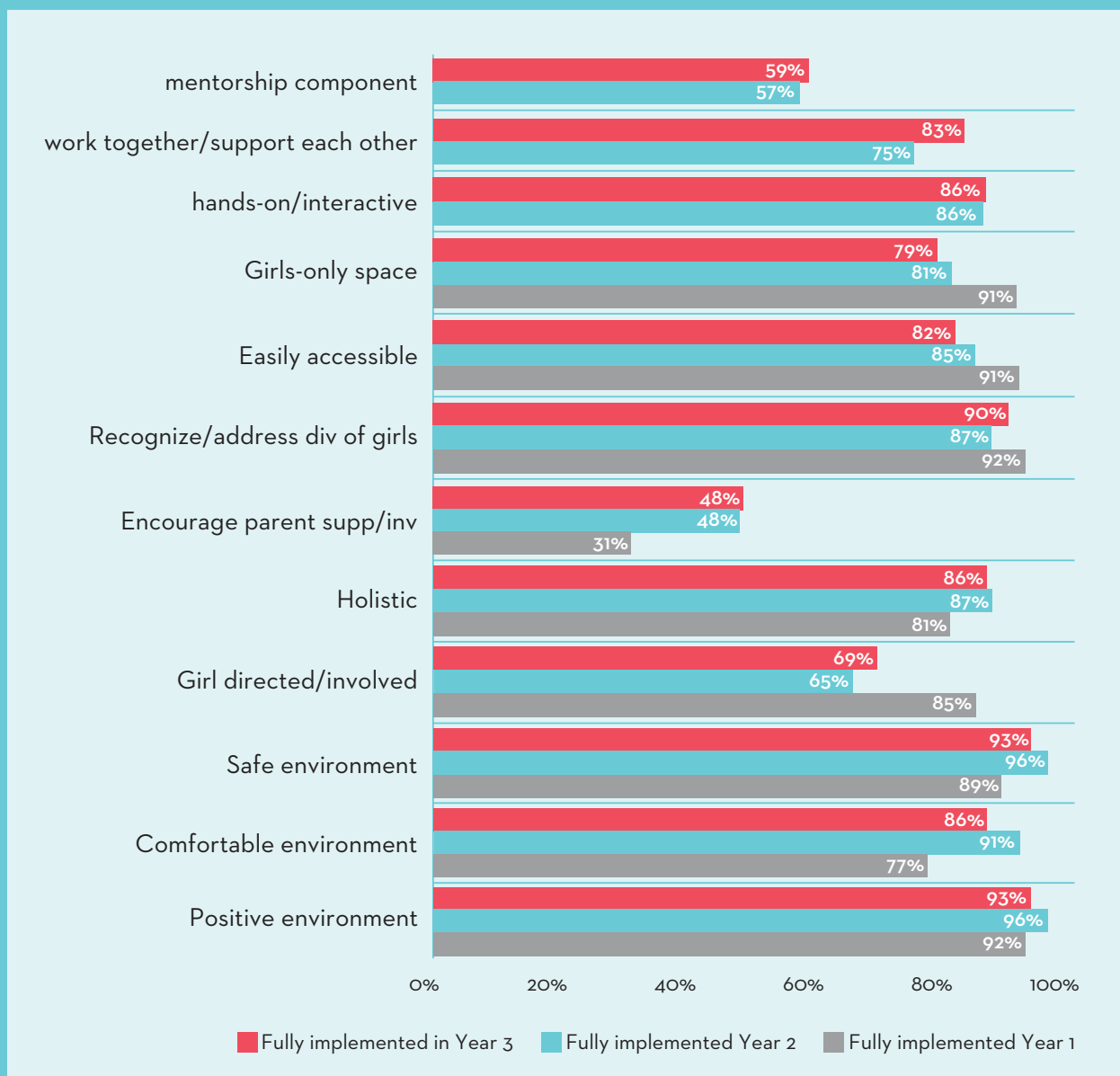
AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In all three years staff were asked to rate to what extent each of the best practices were implemented in their programs. As seen in the figure below, of the best practices most were fully implemented at least 75% of the time across the three years.⁴⁷ The three exceptions were parental support and involvement, girl-directed/ girl involved, and a mentorship component. The implementation of parental support and involvement best practice has been challenging for many sites. Part of the reason might be that there was some confusion about exactly what 'parental involvement' meant, and some programs took it to mean parental participation. Implementation of this best practice improved by Year 2 according to staff reports, however, it was still only fully implemented in less than one-half of the programs in both years 2 and 3. Girl-directed or girl-involved programming seemed to become more challenging in Year 2 and then slightly improved in Year 3 to just under 70% of the programs rating it as fully implemented. A mentorship component is fully implemented in less than 70% of the programs.

Staff also provided ratings on their challenges in implementing best practices. In Year 1, for most of the best practices, at least 50% of staff respondents reported that it was "not at all" a challenge to reported that it was "somewhat" or "very challenging" to implement most best practices. The one notable exception implement most of the identified best practices and very few programs is the encouragement of parental support/involvement where the largest proportion of program staff (27%) reported that it was "very challenging" to implement. In Year 2, again staff experienced the most challenges implementing the best practices of parental support and involvement (almost 96% experienced some challenges) and including a mentorship component (almost 74% experienced some challenges). In Year 3, parental support and involvement was also the most challenging, though less so than in Year 2 - about 79% experienced some challenges.

⁴⁷ Several best practices were only asked about in Years 2 and 3.

Figure 24 Staff Perspectives on Implementation of Best Practices



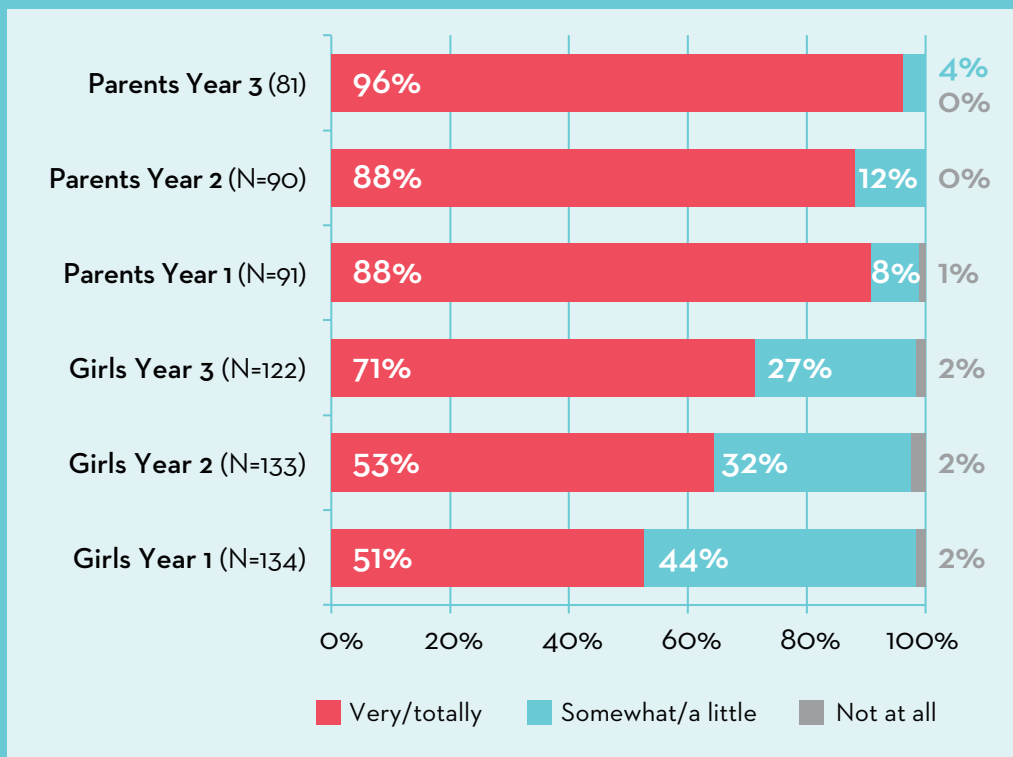
THE IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS ONLY PROGRAMMING

All programs that are supported through a Girls' Fund grant must be for girls only. Questions in the parent, girl and staff interviews explored participants' perspectives on the importance of their program being girls-only. The "other" qualitative data through group projects and mini recordings also included a component about the importance of girls-only programming.

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS AND PARENTS

In all three years, girls and their parents/guardians were asked to rate the importance of the programs being for girls only. The figure below outlines the results of the ratings. Girls' responses are shown in the bottom three bars of the chart below, and parent responses are shown in the top three bars.

Figure 25 Ratings for Importance of "Girls-only" - Girls and Parents



As shown above, most girls and parents rate the importance of the programs being for girls only quite highly. Parents were more likely than the girls in all three years to give the highest rating to the importance of the programs being girls-only. There was about a 10% increase from year-to-year in the proportion of girls giving the highest rating. For the parents, the proportion remained about the same from Year 1 to Year 2 and then increased modestly in Year 3.

Both in the interviews with girls and parents, as well as the group projects, girls and parents were asked to comment on why they believed it was important that the program was girls-only. Girls in year 3 were also asked to talk about what it is like to be in a girl's only program. Several common themes emerged for both parents and girls. Many parents and girls reported that it was important that the program was only for girls because girls are more comfortable without boys. Some parents said that if it was a co-ed program their daughter would not have participated. Numerous parents and girls talked about how the increased comfort from having only girls in the program allowed girls to open up and to discuss issues that they might not have discussed if boys were included.

"I think it's pretty important like cause if you were to stick guys in there with us it would be so much more awkward to talk about all these things that girls need to talk about with girls. Like all their boy problems or like anything else that goes on is just girl to girl stuff that you need to talk about having girls that you know you can talk to it just makes it so much easier without having to worry about guys over hearing or just that whatever." (Interior Indian Friendship Society, participant)

"There needs to be a safe place to explore, discuss and engage in girl-specific issues." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Norvan, participant)

Many of the parents and girls reported that it was important for girls to have their own program because boys and girls behave differently and/or have different needs. Parents discussed how girls need to connect with each other to identify as females and see things from a female perspective. They also mentioned that in an all-girl program girls can learn about topics that are relevant to them.

"It is important to see science from a female perspective in an area that is very male oriented. As well, female bonding without the distraction of males is a positive thing. It also allows young women to focus on their strengths as women in a healthy and effective way." (SuperNOVA, parent)

It is easier to tailor the content to needs specific to girls when boys were not involved in the program.

"Because many of the topics discussed can only be related to the girls; with boys it would get diluted." (YWCA Toronto, parent)

Both girls and parents talked about how it was important to have a girls-only program because girls get distracted or behave differently when boys are around. Girls are more likely to be themselves when they are in a group with only girls:

"Because when girls are around guys they act different and when they're around girls, they can be their selves." (Rites of Passage; girl participant)

"We aren't as self-conscious; girls relate better to each other; we have more fun together." (Boys & Girls Clubs of South Coast BC; Fraserview site group project)

Some girls and parents reported that it was good for girls to be with other girls and away from boys because being only with girls helps girls feel strong, special, and shows them that they can be smart and powerful.

"It's more like that comfortable powerful feeling, when you're around other women." (Interior Indian Friendship Society, participant)

"I think it's just special because not a lot of places have girls- only clubs so I am happy that we have them." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Kimount, participant)

Girls talked about how they thought it was good that the program was for girls only because it was more positive and fun and less disrupted by boys' aggressive behaviour.

“Because when it’s guys they just take over the program. They just come in and then... they don’t even give the girls a chance and they just push the girls aside and they just sit there doing nothing and then it’s no fun being in the program.” (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

Several girls and parents stated that boys need groups as well. Some parents and girls discussed how their group should be for girls only and boys should have their own groups or programs, but a few parents and girls did report that boys should be included in the current program:

“Boys need a program like this too at the Boys and Girls Club. Boys also need support and guidance with communication and confidence building.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC; parent)

“I think it is important for boys to also have a group but not a co-ed group.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society, parent)

Most of the group projects that were completed by girls in the programs included reflections on why it was important that their program was only for girls. The comments that were made were varied and similar in content to those made by the girls in the interviews. The comments focused on the difference in behaviour between boys and girls, how it is easier to open up without boys, how boys tease and bother girls when they are together, how girls have more in common with other girls than with boys, and how girls' behaviour changes when they are with boys:

“It is important to me that there are no boys in this program because I can express my feelings to girls that understand me.” (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

“This was important that it was girls only because if there were boys there, the girls may not have been as confident to participate in the activities and the boys may have made fun and laughed at what the girls did or said during the program.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion)

“I think it’s kind of important because girls don’t think they can exceed in science things. It’s more boys, so this is giving them more opportunities and stuff.” (SuperNOVA)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In Year 3 staff were asked rate the importance of their programs being for girls only using a four point scale, from “not at all” (1) to “very” (4). All 28 respondents to the survey rated the importance as “very”. In an open-ended question, in all three years, staff that were interviewed or completed surveys discussed how it was very important that the programs be for girls only. Staff’s comments mirrored those of the girls and their parents, reporting that girls are more open, share better, and worry less about their appearance and what others think about them, when they are just with girls.

“I believe that it is extremely important that this program is for girls because it both places the girls at ease and allows them to discuss certain issues that they may be uncomfortable discussing in front of boys. The girls in the program are at an age where, generally, they are very self-conscious around boys. I believe that, had boys been present in the program, the girls would not have felt the same freedom in expressing their ideas, thoughts, worries and emotions.”
(Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs)

“In working with the girls, and in observing both their individual growth and their growth as a group, I can see how far they have come over the course of the program. I believe that having a girl’s only culturally appropriate program has provided them with the space and resources to have a positive sense of self, explore their thoughts/feelings/experiences in a supportive environment and have access to positive female role models that are reflective of their identities.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

“For this age group, when they wonder what boys might think or what they say, they worry less about the others and are more confident to speak up for what they think and not worry so much what the others think. Often what we hear is that boys are wasting their time.” (Les Scientifines)

ADDITIONAL CRITICAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The girls-only nature is a critical component of the programs that are supported by the Girls’ Fund. The girls, parents and staff see that as one of the critical aspects of the program that lead to positive outcomes and benefits. Interviews with staff, parents and girls explored other critical components or qualities of the programs as well. Girls, parents and staff were asked to describe what aspects of the program are critical to the outcomes, that is, what it is about the programs that lead to the outcomes girls’ experience.

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

In all three years, girls were asked to state what it is about the programs that helped them experience positive outcomes. Girls linked the program outcomes to the girls-only aspect of the programs as well as other best practices, such as a caring and supportive environment where they felt safe. They also linked the confidence and other outcomes they had gained through the program to the caring and supportive staff. Girls also linked the program outcomes to the activities where they had fun, learned things, and gained skills. Many girls also reported that the social aspect of the program where they met girls and were able to make friends and be with girls, as well as develop a sense of belonging, had led to the positive outcomes they had experienced. Some girls also linked the positive outcomes they had experienced through the program to the cultural teachings and traditions emphasized in some of the programs.

“Well it is because it is my nature. It is First Nations so it is like my culture so it makes me know that I am not the only one and there is other people who feel just like me. You think that you are the only one and then you see that there is more people and you learn things about your culture that you didn't know and then you can teach people in your group what you know about it and then other people know.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

“I think it was the fact that everyone listened and took their turn. They listened to each other and understood what was going on.” (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, Friendly PEERsuasion)

“There's a lot of different people that I can socialize with and the instructors are really nice so they boost your self-esteem every time you talk to them and you feel like they fit in more because everyone is different....So if everyone is different and so are you, you feel like you are in the right spot.” (SuperNOVA)

“I guess because nobody in the program gave me that rude attitude that you get at school Everybody in the program listens to you and respects you and you respect ... and listen to them.” (Minamodziwin)

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

Parents linked the benefits and outcomes that their daughters had experienced in the program to the activities and content of the programs, the positive and comfortable environment, the staff and other role models that worked with the girls, the girls-only aspect of the program, and the social aspect of the program (meeting friends, being with girls).

“The variety of activities you do. She is proud of what she does at Les Scientifines and she talks about it.” (Les Scientifines)

“It allows girls to see that there are women who have been successful with their education, which has enabled them to have interesting jobs that allow them to be independent.” (SuperNOVA)

“These girls all come from the same place, whether that's because they're alone or can relate to one another, all these little girls have a common place, and it is the cultural component.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

AS REPORTED BY THE STAFF

In Year 2, when asked about critical components of their program (that is aspects of their programs that they believe are linked directly to outcomes), the most prominent responses included: committed, consistent and competent staff (47% of interviews); a consistent and designated space (27% of interviews); as well as a cultural focus; food/snacks; and an Elder component (each in 20% of interviews).

“One thing that helps a lot, I don’t know if everyone will agree with me, but the same team and the same facilitators being there throughout the year add to the feeling of belonging to the group, and belonging to the organization and everything. They feel they want to come back because they have a great relationship with the facilitators and the other girls of course. They want to be involved because they want to be around all these people I think”. (Les Scientifines)

“I think staffing and consistent staffing is critical especially with this age group they want to know who they are confiding in. With the turnover it makes it really difficult to get everything going to get those consistent numbers and to have the thread going along through all the sessions.” (Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office)

“That it is culturally-based and that is centered in an organization that comes from the same view point that they’ve bought into the importance of having a culturally important environment. That its staff people have cultural awareness and are really committed to be here for the girls.” (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

In the third year of the evaluation, staff were asked to report on the elements of their program that had led to the positive changes they had seen in the girls in their program. The staff’s reports were varied. Many people linked the positive outcomes experienced by the girls to the activities that took place in the groups. Numerous people in particular talked about the group discussions and the cultural activities. Many people also linked the positive outcomes to the supportive and safe environment in the groups where girls could feel safe to communicate and discuss critical issues. The girls’ only nature was also mentioned numerous times. Finally, many staff also linked the positive outcomes to the guest speakers or mentors in the programs that were inspiring and provided good role models for the girls. *“The key elements that I believe lead to the positive changes in the girl’s program are the workshops, guest speakers, mentors and inspiring individuals that come to work with the girls every week.” (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)*

“A big factor that makes this program a success is the girl’s only space. Many girls feel like this is the only time they are able to ‘be themselves’ and try new activities without being judged. Furthermore, many girls feel comfortable discussing topics they may not be able to with their parents or teachers. There are also good role models in the program for the girls. The facilitators of this program either grew up in the neighbourhood or a neighbourhood similar to Thornccliffe Park.” (Thornccliffe Park Neighbourhood Office)

“Actually taking part in a ceremony such as water blessing and sweat lodge etc, learning the traditional songs from our Grandmothers, and basically just having the hands on experience with our culture. Having the sessions in a traditional Aboriginal community space maintained the tie to the culture”. (Circle of Life Thunderbird House)

PROGRAM SATISFACTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Several questions asked in both the parents and the girls' interviews over the three years show quite strongly that both the girls and parents are in general happy with the programs and have few recommendations to make for improving the programs. In Years 1 and 2 the girls were asked to report on their favourite aspects of the program. In year 3, information on program satisfaction was collected by asking the girls to talk freely about the program, to describe why they chose the program and what they would tell their friends about the program. In all three years, girls and their parents or guardians were also asked to report on what they did not like about the program and to recommend changes for improvement.

AS REPORTED BY THE GIRLS

The main program aspects that girls reported liking in Years 1 and 2 were the activities (including special field trips), the First Nations or Aboriginal content, what they learned in the program or learning new things, having fun, the girls-only aspect, the confidential and sharing nature of the program, as well as the relationships or social aspects of the program.

In Year 3 girls were first asked to speak generally about their time in the program. The girls' responses focused on the fun they had in the program, the relationships they had made or social aspects of the program, the activities, and the girls-only aspects of the program. Numerous responses also focused on how they felt connected or felt like they were with others like themselves and on the learning that they had acquired through the program.

"This is my first time in girls group and I thought it was interesting because I thought that I was the only First Nations girl in my school and then I found out that I had two cousins and then I went to this girls group and I didn't know that I was in the girls group and then I found out that there were three other girls and I just thought that it was interesting to see that other girls I never would have thought who are just like me there." (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

"Well it was really fun and I learned a lot of stuff here. That really helped me a lot." (YWCA Toronto)

Another question in Year 3 asked girls why they chose the program. One of the most prominent responses was that the program was for girls only. Girls also reported that they joined because their friends had joined, because it was fun, because of the focus (e.g. sports or science) and because of the potential outcomes (e.g. learning to speak up). Girls in programs that were geared to Indigenous girls often said that they chose it because of the focus on culture or because it was specifically for Indigenous girls.

"Well when I heard about it I thought that it would be just a whole bunch of girls that they randomly picked, but when I found out that it is just for Aboriginal girls, when my mom told me that it was for Aboriginal girls, I said that is really special, they are probably going to tell me that it's special to be me and that it's special to be Aboriginal." (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

The girls were also asked in Year 3 if they would recommend the program to friends and if they would, what they would tell them. Most of the girls said that they would recommend the program to their friends. When they described what they would tell their friends about the program, the results were similar to those reported above. That is, most of the girls focused on the fun experiences they had in the programs. They also focused on the social aspect – on how they were with friends and how they met new people

through the program. Many girls talked about the activities, including the variety as well as the learning they experienced through the program. Many girls said they would tell their friends that the program was safe and that you could talk openly about anything, including problems. Many also focused on the girl-s only aspect of the program. Some girls talked about how the program helped girls with issues they might be experiencing or helped them prevent issues (e.g. drugs). Other comments cited by numerous girls each related to the good instructors, the Aboriginal focus, the food and snacks, and that it was girl-directed.

“Yes I think it is fun and really good to do. I really enjoy it. I would tell them that if you have some problem or something it is a good way to talk about it. We do a lot of games and stuff if you do like that. We do cooking if you like that kind of stuff and if you just want to hang out with your friends, it’s a good way to do it.” (Boys and Girls Club of South Coast BC, Kimount)

“That we get to do a lot of new things and experience stuff that most people don’t.” (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)

“I would tell them that they help you with your problems because I know some of my friends they have like some issues with the men in their life so I think that it would help especially some of my friends they have a lot of family problems and they talk a lot about family problems so I think they would really like it and one of my friends actually is joining for the summer one so yeah. That’s pretty cool.” (YWCA Toronto)

“It’s a good program for girls and they have lots of activities and you can learn a lot about science and other things too. Before, I hated science, but now I know you can have a lot of fun learning it.” (Les Scientifines, translated from French)

In all three years, the majority of girls did not report anything that they did not like about the program and they did not have many recommendations. The most common responses on dislikes or suggestions for improvements across the three years included more activities or more of an activity (example more field trips) or different activities, more program time, and expansion of the program (more hours or days).

AS REPORTED BY THE PARENTS

Parents were asked in all three years to report on what they liked best about the programs. In all three years, parents most frequently reported liking the benefits or outcomes of the program for their daughters. Other aspects of the program that they reported liking often included the girls-only aspect of the program, the program activities and range of program activities, the cultural component (for those programs that had one) as well as the social aspect (being with friends, building relationships).

"It makes me happy for her future. She now has more tools in her tool kit than me and what I had at that age. She knows to live good and be a good person in this world, and that she is to be prepared because this world is a hard place but can make it beautiful by being a good person."

(Ka Ni Kanichihk)

"I like that there's a lot of activities...like the cooking, and the yoga, and the drama. In other programs they just do one thing, like sports...but I like that my daughter can do a lot of different things in this program." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood House)

Parents were also asked why they chose the program in each of the three years. Many parents reported choosing the program because of the perceived benefits to their daughter. Parents believed that the program would help their daughter with issues, could build confidence, or that their daughter would learn things through the program. Parents also chose the program because its reputation - they had heard good things about the program or they knew that other programs offered by the agency were good. They also chose programs because they were recommended to them. Parents also chose the program because of the social aspect, because it was close to home or at a convenient location, because it was for girls only, or because of the focus (e.g. cultural component).

"I feel this program could benefit our daughter about learning about her culture and herself."

(Circle of Life Thunderbird House)

"I briefly heard the Safe Sisters program mainly teaches girls about prevention. I think anything that has to do with my daughter's safety is worth learning. The neighbourhood loves the program. They say they do activities that help girls role play and educates them on how to deal with strangers." (YWCA Toronto)

"I thought she needed it-she was very shy and quiet-introvert. I wanted her to have more exposure to students so she could get good friends in her home setting." (Interior Indian

Friendship Society)

As with the girls, the parents or guardians most often did not report anything that they did not like and in each year, no significant themes emerged from their responses. The timing of the groups, lack of communication between staff and parents, transportation issues, timing or length of the programs were all issues mentioned by a few parents. Some parents also made suggestions for additional topics or activities that the program could cover.



“It’s a good program for girls and they have lots of activities and you can learn a lot about science and other things too. Before, I hated science, but now I know you can have a lot of fun learning it.”

(Les Scientifines, translated from French)

STAFF FEEDBACK ON PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The staff survey as well as interviews in Years 1 and 2 explored the process of program implementation. Staff was asked about key activities – to what extent they were able to implementation in the programs and the challenges they experienced in implementing them. They were also asked about the recruitment process as well as key highlights and successes.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Over the three years, most staff generally reported that their programs had been generally implemented as intended. There were, however, some ongoing challenges experienced throughout the three years. A few programs reported scheduling issues, either because the girls in the program had other commitments or because numerous holidays fell on their scheduled days. This often caused a change in scheduled activities or having to re-organize activities.

Similarly inconsistent attendance in some years by some programs forced changes in a few activities or a re-organization of activities. Issues between the girls, group dynamics or behavioural issues were reported as challenges over the three years. These issues meant that staff had to spend time on conflict resolution, team building, and dealing directly with issues, which made some activities more challenging to implement and left less time for other activities. Other challenges cited several times included transportation issues for the girls, problems securing a private and girls-only space, as well as scheduling difficulties for mentors or guest speakers.

When staff discussed their challenges over the previous year, their comments reflected flexibility in the way the challenges were dealt with. Programs were adapted to meet the needs of the girls and the different issues that had arisen and were generally pleased with the way the year had gone and reported learning much from implementing the program.

“Generally everything went as planned. Some activities had to be altered to better suit the needs of the actual group.”(Ka Ni Kanichihk)

“I learned by implementing the program, that it’s better to have a plan B and be flexible and adjust to change because things don’t usually go as specifically as planned. Things usually work out if you have a plan B.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

“I have learned to be flexible; things don’t always go as planned. You have to be able to adapt or modify what you have planned based on the girls’ mood and reactions. I also learned to be patient with the girls; sometimes it is necessary to explain the rules and expectations more than once.” (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, Langley)

Program staff were asked what they believed their greatest successes had been in each year of the program. Many staff mentioned individual impacts of the girls as their greatest success. Staff reported that their greatest success had been the connections the girls had made with other girls, the positive relationships they had formed, the confidence they had gained, the skills they gained in building relationships as well as other individual outcomes:

“Trust and communication that I have established with girls and that the girls have established with one another. Respect is the biggest challenge (i.e. listening ears during talking circle). By the mid- year, girls seemed excited to listen to one another, whereas in the beginning, they wanted to share but did not seem interested in listening to other girls’ stories.” (Interior Indian Friendship Society)

“This past session, the successes of which I am most proud of is the strong sense of respect and confidence which was instilled within each session of the program. Each girl showed respect and understanding for the other, and in this way, the program was extremely successful. This was a success because it allowed the girls to feel comfortable and increase their self-confidence. As a result, the girls participated fully, making the program a great success.” (Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club)

“Both the ‘bullies’ and bullied showed up at the girls centre well after the program ended looking for things to do, they even begged to attend the following Safe Sisters session again.”(YWCA Toronto)

Staff also reported other successes, including the following:

- Increased demand for the program;
- Increased numbers;
- Good attendance;
- Creating a safe, girls-only space;
- Providing a consistent program for the girls;
- Great atmosphere in the groups; and
- Group cohesiveness.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

While many of the programs offer universal access to girls in their age range, some of the programs also have an emphasis on trying to reach more marginalized girls or girls from specific groups (e.g. Aboriginal, African Canadian, low income). The staff process survey asked a series of questions on participant recruitment and targeting. The survey asked respondents to what extent the program had reached its target population as previously defined by staff or in the funding proposal.

Program staff was asked to indicate what proportion of their girls were from their primary target group (as described in their proposal) as well as the proportion of girls who were from single parent families, low-income families, families where addictions were present, families where domestic violence was present, and who might be engaging in “high risk” behaviours (e.g., smoking, drinking, sexual activity). When asked about their primary target group, there was a range of responses. Most staff (69%) did feel that at least one-half of the girls were from their primary target population. Nonetheless, there were many of the staff who answered “do not know/not sure” when asked about their target population. Perhaps the organizations need to either revisit their target population, or pay closer attention to the population of girls they are attracting.”

While it was difficult to assess some of the demographics of the girls in the programs, the Year 2 and Year 3 surveys asked staff to estimate the proportion of girls from some higher risk groups. Some staff did not know, but for those that did estimate, results indicated the following:

- Many of the staff (approximately 60-70% of those who responded) estimated that more than one-half of the girls in their program came from low-income families;
- Some staff (about 25-30% of those who responded) estimated that more than one-quarter of the girls in their program came from homes where drug or alcohol addictions are present; and
- Some staff (about 30-35% of those who responded) estimated that more than one-quarter of the girls in their program come from families where domestic violence/abuse has occurred.

Programs used a variety of methods for recruiting girls to their program, including flyers, word of mouth, referrals, and working with agencies, community centres or schools. Some program are run within larger clubs centres, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and recruit members from other programs in the centre or clubs. Some programs are held in schools or built-in to the curriculum.

Most programs reported no or few challenges in recruiting girls from their target populations. The challenges that were reported included not having the contacts at referral organizations, attracting girls to the program is difficult because they want to go where their friends go, and time conflicts because of other events and activities in their community (e.g., religious classes for girls). In Year 2 of the program almost 20% of program sites (5 programs) reported making changes to their age target based on community needs and are now including either younger or older girls in the program in addition to the target group. One additional program started a group for younger girls.

SECTION



BEYOND
THE PROGRAMS
– STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
ON THE GIRLS' FUND

BEYOND THE PROGRAMS - STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE GIRLS' FUND

In the third year of the evaluation, telephone interviews were conducted with 11 stakeholders. Seven of the stakeholders were representatives (usually managers or Executive Directors) of programs funded through the Girls' Fund. The other four were Canadian Women's Foundation committee members or donors associated with the Girls' Fund. The interviews explored the impact of the fund beyond the individual impacts for girls, the uniqueness of the grant, as well as additional barriers faced by girls that might not be addressed through the programs and the policy implications of those barriers.

UNIQUENESS OF THE GIRLS' FUND

In general stakeholders believe that the Girls' Fund is unique in two ways. The first way is that it focuses specifically on young girls. Stakeholders reported that there are no other grants with that specific focus. This specific focus helps organizations because there is a thorough understanding of the issues that young girls face and a flexibility for how programs address those issues. The targeted focus also draws attention to the issues nationally.

The second way the grant is unique is that it provides built-in supports for the organizations. One grantee described it as a "relationship model". The grant process connects grantees to staff at the Canadian Women's Foundation as well as to other organizations doing similar work across the country. The supports that are built in, including the grantee meetings, the webinars and the evaluation process helps build feedback for the programs and build knowledge on best practices around girls-only programming.

One grantee also spoke about the focus on Indigenous girls and how the Canadian Women's Foundation has expanded that focus which is very helpful to not only the organizations doing the work, but again in helping to build knowledge, good practice and a focus on the issues faced by the girls.

"I feel like it is almost a relational model for granting, which is fabulous... Like the fact that [Foundation staff] has come out both times when we've been up and we have been able to go out and have a meal and girls came out this time. You really feel that this is an organization that cares. Having got to go to Winnipeg and Toronto before, meeting donors and grantees you get to feel that this is also an organization that values those relationships. It's not just give us your money and forget about it. It's very ethical, engaged, and open to learning and change too. Through some of our sharing around what might need to be different for Indigenous girl's groups or agencies the Foundation has been able to expand and is funding in areas that maybe they haven't before. The Canadian Women's Foundation is breaking ground there, in ways that lots of other organizations could learn. The commitment to evaluation processes like this, they are time consuming, but we get to learn about why we do it and it makes us more sustainable."
(Grantee)

"There aren't any other grants, regardless of their area of focus, that are doing the types of evaluation and facilitation of networking between grantees. The level of communication overall is much more significant than any other grant that we have been involved with." (Grantee)

IMPACT OF THE GIRLS' FUND ON ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Several questions in the interviews with stakeholders explored the impact of the grant on the programs and the grantee organizations. The results indicate that the Girls' Fund program grants are having a positive impact on the organizations that receive funding.⁴⁸ The stakeholders from the grantee organizations reported that without the grant they would not have been able to deliver programming specifically for girls in the way they were able to do in the last three years (six for those who received funds in the pilot phase). They reported how before receiving the Girls' Fund grants their girls program was not as focused, less structured, smaller, and more fragile. The Girls' Fund has allowed the organizations to make their girls program more sustainable, reach more girls, run programs more often, and improve the quality of the programs. In one case, the organization did not have a program for girls before they received funding through the Foundation.

Stakeholders also reported on how the grants have an impact on not just the individual programs, but the whole organization. Stakeholders from the grantee organizations reported how the grants had made girls programs more central and prominent in their organization. They also reported how the training and ongoing communication through the Canadian Women's Foundation has developed skills in girls programming. It has also resulted in best practices from the girls programs being put into place in other programs run by the organization. It has increased services to youth and helped determine the way some organizations work with youth. The multi-year funding also benefits organizations by helping with sustainability.

Committee members and donors who have been a part of the Girls' Fund process for numerous years have observed that the Girls' Fund grant helps with organizational capacity building, specifically through the grantee meeting and the webinars. They also believe it adds to the growth of organizations and allows organizations to focus on groups they normally would not focus on. Organizations that are not traditionally women-centered, through their development of girls programs and the successes of these programs start to see the benefits of girls only programming.

"It became a part of what we do vs. something that we do." (Grantee)

"Because once there's funding available then think 'well what could we use this money for', and then it forces them to look at that group of older kids and then say 'what would've helped these kids earlier on? How can we get them so that they're not struggling so much when they're 12 or 13 years old?' I think for the organizations, it's really important. It's created a whole new category of programming that often was not there because there was no access for funding." (Donor/Committee Member)

According to stakeholders from grantee organizations, the grants are also having an effect on the broader community. One grantee talked about how having a pre-teen girls program in their organization has raised awareness of issues for girls, which in turn has strengthened how they are able to help girls in the community. Another mentioned that because of the multi-year funding they are able to hold community events and provide overall better quality programming. Through the programs that emphasize cultural awareness and teachings, girls become proud of their heritage and this affects their family and the broader community. They also become better integrated in their community as they gain self-confidence. One grantee reported that girls take what they have learned in the program and use it outside of the group to help others.

“We’ve had quite a few incidents of where we hear girls that have come to the program have come back and said we’ve helped people stop bullies in their school. I remember one conversation from a girl - I think there was a girl out on the street being harassed by some boys and she actually went back into the school and got her some help which she said she probably would not have done without the program.” (Grantee)

The grantee meetings were reported to be helpful by stakeholders from grantee organizations. Stakeholders reported that they gained knowledge through the meeting, made useful connections to others working in similar programs and that the meetings energized or motivated them. One stakeholder said that it was useful that management could attend the meetings along with staff. Another program reported that the collaborative nature of the meeting and the opportunity to provide feedback and to be listened to was a positive feature of the meeting. Finally one person said that while their organization was a little different because they were science focused, attending the meetings had broadened their understanding and provided opportunities for new collaboration and partnerships.

“So it’s that information sharing of people all on the same page, it’s a little bit different from say, going to a forum in Vancouver where it’s about girls issues and I think those things are useful and such but whenever everyone’s on the same page, doing the same kind of program, with the same funder, it really does create a much different dynamic. We try to send our staff to the local events whenever we hear about it but it is just not quite the same because they have to make a connection from what they’re hearing to the program whereas there’s an automatic connection as soon as you walk into a grantee meeting. It’s just been incredibly useful for our folks to chat with other people from across Canada who are doing these programs to get a different perspective and really have it as a catalyst of their thoughts and where they want to go next.” (Grantee)

THE BARRIERS GIRLS FACE

Stakeholders were asked to comment on what barriers they feel girls face and how the funded programs address those barriers. Stakeholders reported on numerous barriers including: poverty, low parental engagement, violence, racism, transportation, and the negative messages through the media. Several stakeholders talked about the home environment and expressed a concern about whether the home or community environment supported what girls were gaining through the program.

“And it is difficult for any program when you have a kid who comes in, they receive their support, there’s a safe space and understanding there, and then they go off and then they don’t have the same space at school, at home, in their family communities, extended friends, that kind of thing.” (Grantee)

“One of the barriers also is the family units aren’t always there to either have the knowledge or even physically aren’t present to reinforce what they’re learning in girls’ programming because the girl’s programming can work at one level but it’s not their whole life, so it’s not just peer pressure, it’s also the social factors that reinforce the messages that they got before coming into the program rather than reinforcing the messages they’re getting while they’re in the program and after.” (Committee Member)

Stakeholders talked about the things that are in place or planned by organization to help address barriers that might not be addressed fully through the programs. One organization mentioned that they need to increase advocacy and support the advocacy work of the Canadian Women’s Foundation. Another organization said that they are trying to address transportation issues for lower income girls who might not be accessing their program. One stakeholder talked about how their organization is advocating at a municipal level to address access to family-friendly programs and how they were trying to provide a continuum of care by coordinating other community supports. Another talked about how they do try to build in broader advocacy and support for the girls and their mothers into their organizational work.

Several stakeholders acknowledged that the programs do not address all the barriers because they see the girls in a limited capacity for a short period of time. Committee members or donors, however, expressed that the new mentoring component and the longer-term funding through the third phase of funding would help in addressing barriers by being able to work with girls more intensely and over a longer period of time, especially if girls can come back and volunteer as mentors in some of the programs.

“I don’t think that the program address the barriers. I think the only barrier the programs do address is access to educational opportunities and enrichment and confidence-building experiences, which I think is one of the most critical things for them to have access to but we are certainly not addressing their economic or other social barriers.” (Grantee)

“The aspect that has become stronger over the years that I’ve been involved in is the mentoring component. It’s just so critical because if the girls who have come through the program can continue to be involved as mentors even though they’re no longer eligible for the program, if they become involved in the program, it gives more credibility to the issues that are being debated for the younger girls because they admire the older girls and look up to being them at some point in life. They value their message more than they value an adult message.” (Committee member)

Committee members and donors talked about the approach of the Canadian Women’s Foundation to reach as many girls as possible and to fund a range of programs. Stakeholders from grantee organizations, however, believe that there are many girls that could benefit from their programs that they are not reaching. Mostly, they discussed how they are not reaching girls that are not in close proximity to their organization.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Stakeholders were asked about the policy implications of the barriers that girls face. Two stakeholders from Grantee organizations said that they believe there are policy implications for the educational system. The educational system needs to acknowledge the broader needs of girls (e.g. health and emotional) and build those into the support and education that they provide. Stakeholders also discussed how we need more effective policies on poverty and violence. One stakeholder suggested that an Aboriginal school system would help in addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal girls. Another stakeholder discussed how systems do not always work together and cause further damage, such as labelling and medicating girls. One stakeholder believes that there needs to be more of an early focus on the engagement of girls in education and technology and emphasized the importance of investing at a young age. Another stakeholder also emphasized the importance of investing at an early age, stating that what is really needed from a policy perspective is more of a focus on early prevention. Committee members emphasized the importance of continuing to advocate for changes in advertising and continued work in addressing sexual exploitation, specifically prostitution and sexual trafficking.

“I think that there’s pieces in terms of the education system- I think that we’ve mentioned this many times before but the social justice pieces around health should be (as much as possible) covered within the school, there should be school resources, trained counsellors in these areas and such to work with these girls outside of the community organizations. ...So both in terms of the service in school but also in terms of the educational piece in the classroom.” (Grantee)

“In terms of policy, I see that some of the violence that is done to girls is the result of the intersection of policy in their life. Whether it’s the Ministry for Children and Families and the fact that there’s not a safe house in their small community, many policies don’t work together, there’s not collaboration across policy sectors that affect girls, child abuse and mental health is still very much labelling, medicating girls. What we saw in adult women in terms of depression happens with girls, that they get labelled in the DSM and that it’s not a strength-based, gender, and culturally safe model. We need to do work to advocate and change policy because we can only do so much to undo that harm that girls encounter. They might encounter our groups as safe but if they refer them to a counselling system that’s funded in a white western euro-centric way they’re still going to encounter that system and the policies are often the biggest barriers.” (Grantee)

SECTION



DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

THE CONTEXT

In 2006, Canadian Women's Foundation launched the Girls' Fund after commissioning research that documented issues facing girls in Canada and identified promising approaches and best practices in girls' programs. The resulting report, *Girls in Canada 2005*, identified a number of best practices for girls programs and highlighted the middle years (ages 9 to 13) as being particularly important in the healthy development of girls.

Based on the positive evaluation of a pilot phase that provided funds to six programs and two networks, in April 2009 the Canadian Women's Foundation Board approved program funding to 12 organizations working in 22 communities in Canada and two networks for a three-year period (2009-2012). The programs were selected based on best practice criteria developed from the original research and the ongoing evaluation of the pilot phase of grants.

This document reported on the findings from evaluation of all three years of the 2009-2012 phase of the Girls' Fund grants.

WHAT WAS LEARNED

The three-year evaluation of the second phase of funding for the Girls' Fund (2009-2012) aimed to determine the extent to which best practices are present in programs, the impact of programs on girls and developing networks, and to examine the relationship between best practices and outcomes. The results of the three years of the evaluation are quite positive and describe funded programs that are useful, effective, and play an important role in the lives of girls aged 9 to 13 in Canada.

The impacts of the program grants, determined through self-ratings and open-ended qualitative descriptions from the girls show that for a majority of girls, the programs are resulting in clear outcomes, specifically improvement in areas that research has demonstrated to be key protective factors. These results from the girls were triangulated (tested against others) with results from the parents through self-ratings and open-ended questions and through open-ended responses and ratings from staff.

Three quite notable outcomes seen in program participants across programs are an increase or improvements in self-confidence, a sense of belonging or connectedness, and critical thinking skills. Questions about these three protective factors were asked in all programs because these protective factors have been identified by the Canadian Women's Foundation as most important in building resilience in girls.

The ratings for the protective factors were highest in year 3. It's difficult to determine, exactly, why this was the case. There are several possibilities. First, the girls were somewhat younger in Year 3 than the previous two years. Perhaps because of their age the impact was higher or maybe younger girls answer more favourably. A second possibility is that by the third year the programs were more consistent and had worked out some of the issues they may have had in previous years. As well, given the focus of the evaluation, perhaps the programs were more cognizant of outcomes and "stepped up" their programming. A final possibility is that perhaps because there were more girls in Year 3 who were not new to the programs, we are seeing a cumulative positive effect of the programs. That is, perhaps the outcomes are felt to a greater extent the longer they are in the program. Interestingly, though, the parents' ratings were not higher in Year 3. We did not ask staff for rating in Years 1 and 2, but their ratings of outcomes in Year 3 also point to very positive outcomes for the girls.

Perhaps, as well, the improvements shown in critical thinking skills in Year 3 may have to do with the way the question was worded in that year. Each year an attempt was made to make the question clearer and easier to understand. By Year 3, with the help of program staff, we believe we had a question that most girls understood.

There is some relationship between the number of hours the girls spend in programs (“dosage”) and the girls’ self-reported improvements on several protective factors. In years 1 and 2 there was a general pattern with self-confidence and connectedness where girls who attended more hours in the programs rated themselves as more improved in these areas. In Year 3 no relationship was found between dosage (or “intensity”) and ratings on the main protective factors. However, in Year 3 responses were more positive and there was less variability – making it more difficult to detect these relationships. Other protective factors that were found to be related to dosage were communication skills (year 1 only), having more adults to go to for advice (all 3 years), and knowing where to seek help (years 1 and 2 only). In the next funding phase we will continue to tease out some of these relationships – and, with more grantees included in the evaluation, this might be easier to do. We will explore the issue of “intensity” in more detail and also include a rating of intensity as related to some of the key best practices (i.e., the extent to which these are present and how that relates to outcomes).

With respect to the process evaluation, the results are also quite positive. The evaluation examined the extent to which the grantee organizations were implementing their programs in a way that was consistent with best practices that are identified in Girls’ Fund Program Logic Model. An analysis of the relationship between best practices and program outcomes points to the relevance and importance of best practices in creating positive outcomes for girls in the programs. In all three years ratings on a sense of connectedness were positively correlated with ratings on the importance of program beings for girls only. Girls’ open-ended comments shed more light on this finding: the girls reported feeling comfortable sharing with other girls and say they would not do this if boys were in the group. When they are able to share and be open with others, they no doubt feel like they belong and feel more connected. Being in a girls-only environment also helps them to identify what they have in common with other girls and that they share many of the same issues or challenges.

In fact, in all three years, the girls, parents, and staff all felt strongly in the importance of the program being girls-only. All believed in the value of girls-only programming. Girls feel comfortable sharing and being with other girls. They are better able to share and be themselves than they would be in mixed-gender groups, allowing them to more fully express themselves and develop. They reported on the power and strength they felt when they were with only girls. The topics that programs are able to cover such as sexuality, eating disorders, and self-image, are topics that most girls do not want to discuss with boys in the room. These results show clearly the value of these girls-only programs.

Overall, the results of the evaluation demonstrate that these programs are meeting a need in the community and parents and girls are quite positive about their involvement and the resulting impacts. Both parents and their daughters are very happy with the programs and very appreciative of what they offer. In fact, one of the most common recommendations was that the programs be expanded – by increasing the number of groups so that more girls can become involved, or by increasing the number of hours or length of the program.

The results also show that staff members and instructors/facilitators across programs are committed to their programs. Staff may not have always been successful in fully implementing all program components, but they adapted and were able to deal with issues that relate specifically to the girls in their group. This flexibility and adaptability appears to be very important to meet the diverse needs of the participants. Within these girls-only, more relaxed settings the facilitators are able to deal with conflicts or issues that arise, help girls resolve conflicts, and help girls feel good about themselves.

The network grant findings were similarly positive. The results from the evaluation of both network grantee organizations demonstrated that the Girls' Fund grants helped enhance their networks and provide valuable and enriching services to girl-serving organizations. Having access to network resources and support, networking with others, sharing ideas and expertise, were all benefits that helped girl-serving organizations and individuals to enhance the work they do.

The results from the stakeholder interviews reinforce the strength of the funded programs and of the Girls' Fund. They also point out the uniqueness of this fund in its ability to connect programs doing similar work across Canada and to build understanding about the issues girls face and build capacity to respond to those issues and provide programming that is effective in addressing those issues. The Girls' Fund builds on best practices and points to the strengths and potential weaknesses of programs. Bringing grantees together allows time to work on weaknesses and to continue to develop strong programs (e.g., parental involvement where staff brainstormed ways in which this could be improved).

The stakeholder interviews do, however, point out that there is work to be done beyond the program if all girls are to have a fair chance at positive development. Stakeholders pointed out barriers that girls face (poverty, sexual violence). Grantees reported, as well, that their programs do not reach everybody they would like to reach. Stakeholders argued that while the programs enhance protective factors, girls often go back into homes and communities that might not sustain those outcomes. Much work remains to be done on the policy front and the enhancement of support services for communities. One way to do this, perhaps, is to continue to work on the best practice of parental involvement (e.g., workshops for parents).

Given the longer-term funding in the next phase (four rather than three years), as well as the inclusion of the mentoring component, girls will have the opportunity for more involvement in these programs and their communities. Also, there is the potential, in some programs, for girls who graduate from the programs to become involved as mentors – further strengthening, and hopefully sustaining, the positive impacts of the programs.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE EVALUATION

Overall, the evaluation process went quite well throughout the funding period 2009-2012. In each of the three years, however, challenges were faced. Every year these challenges were discussed with grantees both individually and as a group at the annual Grantee meeting. Changes were made each year to improve on the process and the data collection methods. While by the third year of the evaluation some of these challenges had been reduced, there continues to be room for improvement in how data are collected while being cognizant of the diverse nature of the programs and the unique needs of girls in this age range. Some challenges that we continue to face include:

- The quality of data collected varied from program to program as well as from girl to girl. Some interviewers were more skilled than others in conducting the interviews and probing for information so that we received the rich data that we sought. Some group projects were better done than others where it was clear that the directions were followed and some time was spent on them; in other cases they seemed to be done hurriedly and did not answer the questions posed. Some girls were able to clearly understand the questions and were able to articulate answers while others struggled. To some extent this was due to the age of the girls with the younger girls having more difficulty; but this was not always the case.
- Parents are difficult to reach and phone interviews are extremely difficult to schedule. After repeated attempts, few parents returned messages. Interviewers had the difficult task of being persistent while not becoming a nuisance. Yet, the feedback from staff was that when the interviews were conducted the parents had much feedback to provide and gave them a valuable perspective that they would not otherwise have.
- The data collection process is cumbersome and difficult for some organizations. Some organizations have limited resources and the tasks associated with the evaluation were sometimes overwhelming.

Although there were challenges, feedback from the organizations, as well as from the stakeholder interviews, does indicate that the organizations appreciate the evaluation process and think that it is important. The evaluation provides useful information that allows for programs to continue working on best practices. It also builds knowledge on the importance of girl programming and the details around it.

The relationship between the evaluators and the grantee organizations was critical in helping bridge some of the challenges that were faced. This allowed us to be flexible and to make ongoing changes that met the needs of each organization. It facilitated capacity building at both ends. The grantees gained skills in research and helped identify what worked or did not work for the girls and parents in their organizations. The evaluators learned about how to make evaluation more focused on the individual needs of communities and continued to explore and learn about different methods of collecting data creatively.

Although much was learned in this phase of funding about the impacts of these programs, there were questions that were unanswered or were not answered clearly or fully. We are hoping that these will be addressed in the next phase of funding. These include:

- **Dosage/intensity:** While the results indicate that there is some relationship between the number of hours spent in the programs, and outcomes, the relationship is still not clear. The issue of intensity needs to be explored and examined in more detail. More attention to collecting “intensity” data will be paid in the next phase of funding. As well, with a greater number of grantees, it is hoped that more detailed analyses of the relationship between intensity and outcomes can be conducted.
- **Sustaining outcomes:** Several people in the stakeholder interviews pointed out that perhaps the programs are not having a lasting effect. What happens when girls go back to their homes or their communities or when the program ends? To address this issue, a longitudinal component will be included in this next phase.
- **Program approach:** The results pointed out that while all programs, respective of type of program are beneficial, some programs (in particular psychosocial) have stronger effects in the areas that are most relevant to this evaluation. We will continue to explore this going forward.
- **Aboriginal focus:** The evaluation has pointed to some very strong results for psychosocial programs with a focus on Aboriginal culture. We will continue to explore these effects in more detail in next phase, particularly because of the large number of programs that have this focus.
- **Other factors associated with outcomes:** Given the larger number of organizations involved in the next phase of funding we are hoping that we can explore, in more detail, how different factors are associated with outcomes. Are there particular types of girls for whom these programs work best? What other factors are associated with stronger results (e.g., intensity, program approach, presence of mentors). These are important questions that, if answered, can help develop programming that is effective for all girls.



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