BUILDING STRONG GIRLS

GIRLS' FUND 2012-2016

EVALUATION RESULTS:
FINAL REPORT

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CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have come to the end of this last phase of the Girls' Fund. It has been our sincere pleasure to have worked with all of the staff in all of the organizations, and with the Canadian Women's Foundation. We were so fortunate to have visited all of the communities and listened to the girls, mentors, parents and staff. It was a real joy hearing and reading all of your comments and feedback.

Thank you to all of the staff for their perseverance and diligence over the past four years in helping complete the evaluation. We understood that delivering the programs to your girls was your top priority and our seemingly endless requests of you were no doubt exasperating at times! We tried to make this as painless as possible and hope that you felt our support throughout these past years and that it eased the burden as much as possible.

A number of research assistants were involved in the evaluation these past four years. First and foremost, thank you to Kristy McKechnie and Natasha Alcalde Lawton: we would not have been able to complete this evaluation without your help. Over the four years we have had help from many other assistants who helped with data entry, transcription, translation, data coding, and other tasks. Thank you to Karen Flude, Vincent Chouinard, Kendra Flude, Gillian Flude, Kayla Browning: your job was indeed often thankless. For all the work you have put in that have shaped our results – thank you for all of your support. Job well done!

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INTRODUCTION

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report provides an overview of the final evaluation results of the Canadian Women's Foundation Girls' Fund of the 2012-2016 Granting cycle. The report is divided into eight chapters:

Chapter 1: An Introduction

- information about the Canadian Women's Foundation, a history of the Girls' Fund and the grantees involved in this funding cycle, the evaluation methodology, the participation rates in the programs and in the evaluation, and a demographic profile of the girl participants in the programs.

Chapter 2: Outcome Results

- a summary of the outcome results from all four years of the annual surveys, site visits, and other qualitative data collected, highlighting the impact on girls 'protective factors' and overall resilience.

Chapter 3: Critical Program Elements

- a discussion about the relationships between effective practices, relationships, program elements, girls' characteristics, and outcomes.

Chapter 4: Process Results

- a summary of the process results from all four years, of how best practices are being implemented in the programs, what we have learned about how process and structure affect outcomes, and program satisfaction.

Chapter 5: Enhanced Mentoring Component

- a summary of key outcome and process results.

Chapter 6: The Long-Term Impact of Girls Programming

- a summary of results from the survey conducted with alumnae of several Girls' Fund program sites.

Chapter 7: The Broader Picture

- The Importance of Girls Programming – a discussion of what we heard from the girls about why these programs are important, as well as the issues that are facing girls and how those issues are dealt with in the programs.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

- a summary and interpretation of what we learned about girls programs, enhanced mentoring programs, effective practices, and critical program components.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

The Canadian Women's Foundation is a national leader in the movement for gender equality in Canada. Through funding, research, advocacy, and knowledge sharing, the Foundation works to achieve systemic change that includes all women. By supporting community programs, the Foundation empowers women and girls to move themselves out of violence, out of poverty, and into confidence and leadership.

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Launched in 1991 to address a critical need for philanthropy focused on women, the Canadian Women's Foundation is one of the largest women's foundations in the world. With the support of donors, the Foundation has raised more than $90 million and funded over 1,900 programs across the country. These programs focus on addressing the root causes of the most critical issues, and helping women and girls who face the greatest barriers.

HISTORY OF THE GIRLS' FUND

By 2005 there was growing concern about issues facing girls in Canada, and so the Canadian Women's Foundation decided it was time to develop a strategy directed at girls. In preparation for the launch of the Girls' Fund, the Foundation 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 Foundation established the Girls' Fund in 2006. The identified best practices became the criteria for funding and, in the initial pilot phase, the Foundation 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; they varied from science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), sports and physical activity, to leadership and empowerment. Despite the differences in the foci, they all shared a common aim: to build resilience in girls to help them move more successfully from adolescence into adulthood. The grants were awarded for three years during the pilot phase.

Based on the positive results from the pilot phase, the Girls' Fund was able to expand and award 12 program grants and two network grants, for girls aged 9 to 13 for a three year period (2009-1012). The results from the evaluation were again very positive and the Girls' Fund was able to expand once again. In this third funding cycle of the Girls' Fund, the Foundation invested almost $8 million in 32 programs, operating in close to 60 neighbourhoods and communities across Canada. Again, the grantee organizations differ with respect to their foci including: science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); physical activity and nutrition; leadership and empowerment; media; and those that focus on Aboriginal/Inuit culture.

"I have learned to make new friends and the program has helped me with being more open … it's girl time only, and it's fun to be all girls."

THE GRANTEES

In this last cycle of the Girls' Fund (2012-2016), the Foundation is providing program grants to 32 organizations and networks.[1] Of the organizations that received grants, 9 received grants for girls groups, 17 received grants for girls groups and enhanced mentoring, four were funded in Year 4 to provide a mentoring program only, and two received network grants.[2] The grantee organizations were as follows:

PROGRAM GRANTS ONLY (9 PROGRAMS)

Actua National Program – 4 communities
(Destination Exploration, University of Lethbridge, AB; Minds in Motion, University of Calgary, AB; Kid-Netic Energy, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB; and Superior Science, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON)

Kwadacha Education Society
Fort Ware, BC

Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society[3]
Kamloops, BC

YWCA Agvvik
Iqaluit, NU

Action Jeunesse, Mini Kekpart
Longueil, QC

Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/ Kainai First Nation
Lethbridge AB

Ininew Friendship Centre
Cochrane and Kapuskasing, ON

SuperNOVA
Halifax, NS

Northern Committee Against Violence (with Libra House)
St. Anthony and surrounding areas, NL

MENTORING GRANTS ONLY (4 PROGRAMS)

YWCA Lethbridge
Lethbridge, ON

Cornerstone Family and Youth Centre
Carlyle, SK

Sarnia-Lambton Rebound
Sarnia, ON

Community-Action Resource Centre
Toronto, ON

1 The evaluation of the two network grants is not included in this report as their goals and objectives were quite different than the program and mentoring grants.
2 There were originally 27 organizations awarded a program grant, but funding to one organization was discontinued after Year 1.
3 As of Year 3, Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society received only a program grant. In Years 1 and 2 they did receive a mentoring grant as well, but they were unable to sustain their enhanced mentoring program beyond Year 2.

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PROGRAM AND MENTORING GRANTS (17 PROGRAMS)

Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC
Vancouver, BC

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
Calgary, AB

Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc.
Winnipeg, MB

Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.
Winnipeg, MB

Boys and Girls Club of London
London, ON

YWCA Toronto
Toronto, ON

North York Community House
Toronto, ON

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
Toronto, ON

Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John Inc.
Saint John, NB

Y des Femmes de Montréal
Montreal, QC

Tsleil Waututh Nation/Musqueam First Nation
Vancouver, BC

Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta
Fort McMurray, AB

YWCA Yellowknife
Yellowknife, NT

Sturgeon Lake Central School (with YWCA Saskatoon)
Sturgeon Lake, SK

Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton
Hamilton, ON

YWCA Muskoka
Bracebridge, ON

YWCA Cambridge
Cambridge, ON

NETWORK GRANTS (2 ORGANIZATIONS)[4]

Actua
Ottawa, ON

Girls Action Foundation
Montreal, QC

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4 As mentioned in previous footnote, the evaluation of the network grants is not included in this report.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the evaluation of the Girls' Fund was to determine the impact of both girls program and mentoring grants. For both types of grants, the evaluation was designed to determine the impact of the programs on girl participants, and to learn from and document how programs were implemented and perceived by participants. The evaluation methods for the program and mentoring grants, including the components involved, are described below.

EVALUATION METHODS FOR THE PROGRAM AND MENTORING GRANTS

The evaluation of these grants included outcome and process components. Both components included an annual 'core' data collection at all of the program sites, as well as 'enhanced' data collection via site visits at select programs each year. The components to the Evaluation Plan are described in the sections that follow.

OUTCOME EVALUATION

Following the Foundation's program logic model, the outcome evaluation included an assessment of the extent to which the programs provided or improved 'protective factors' that help build resilience in the girls as they move into adolescence and adulthood. Protective factors identified by the Foundation include self-confidence, connectedness with others, critical thinking skills, school engagement, and others. Surveys, interviews and other forms of self-expression were used with girls to determine the extent to which the programs promoted these factors and achieved their intended goals and objectives. In addition, data was collected from parents, staff, and mentors to provide further data on program outcomes.

The outcome evaluation includes three main components: the annual core data collection, the enhanced data collection via site visits, and the longer-term impact study. Participation in the evaluation was based upon informed consent. Information letters and consent forms are shown in Appendix A*.

The annual core data collection included:

Girls' Survey:
All surveys included questions assessing self-confidence, critical thinking skills, connectedness, school engagement, the extent to which effective practices were present (e.g., emotional safety, physical safety, positive environment, girl-led or girl-involved activities, supportive staff), the relationship between the girls and staff and mentors, and basic demographic questions. As well, additional protective factor questions, and site-specific questions, were included in the surveys based on each program's logic model and their own individual goals and objectives. The survey was conducted near the end of the program and girls were asked to rate themselves on a 5-point scale for each of the items after they had completed the program, and then to provide a 'retrospective' rating for each item regarding how they were doing when they began the program.

The reasoning for using the retrospective method should be noted. Retrospective ratings were used in Year 1, primarily because of timing— there was a late start and doing pre-test/post-test ratings were not possible at many sites. This was not a limitation in Year 2 and we decided to do the pre-test /post-test ratings at most sites. Some sites found the demand for time too large and requested to continue with the retrospective method, which made sense for those sites. Therefore, in Year 2, we had a mixed sample.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

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Although there is some research to indicate that retrospective surveys may have their limitations, it was interesting to note that there was a pattern, where the girls in that sample in Year 2 had the highest post-test ratings. Perhaps it is only by looking back that girls are able to reflect on the magnitude of the changes that occurred—and there is research to indicate that may be the case. That is, program participants often overestimate their skills at pre-test, when using a pre-test/post-test design, leaving little room for showing improvement. In the current evaluation this was the case. In Year 2 when the pre/post design was used, changes reported by the girls were not as large as when the retrospective post-test was used because the amount of change from pre-test to post-test was smaller, given the higher pre-test ratings, and, therefore, effect sizes were smaller. Retrospective post-tests, however, allow respondents to reflect more on the changes that may have occurred during a program or intervention.[5]

In Year 3 we decided to use both pre-test/post-test ratings, as well as retrospective ratings at post-test, to try to determine which method worked best. Given the anecdotal evidence heard from staff (that retrospective ratings seemed to be the most accurate), as well as evidence from research, it was decided that the focus in Year 3 would be on the retrospective results. Given that the retrospective post-tests worked well in Years 1 and 3, they were again used in Year 4. In Year 4, because no additional qualitative data was collected from the girls (i.e., no site visits, Letters to my Little Sisters), several open-ended items were added to the surveys. These items included:

• In your own words, how do you think being in this program has helped you? Or, what have you learned?

• Please tell us **3** things that are most important to you about this program.

• When you think about your future as a young woman, or an adult woman, what do you hope to be doing? This could be about school, about your career, about your family— anything at all.

• Has being in this program made you think differently at all about your future?

• Is there anything that you think would stop you, or get in your way, of reaching your future goals? Please explain.

Parent survey:
All surveys included questions assessing each of the protective factors, as well as site-specific questions that mirrored the girls' questions. In addition, parents were asked two questions about their connection to the program (a best practice), what they liked about the program, what they disliked, and if there were any changes they would recommend. Parents were given the option of completing the survey online or on paper. In Year 4 we also added in two questions that were similar to two of the questions that were added to the girls' surveys:

• In your own words, what do you think are the top three changes or benefits you have seen in your daughter since starting the program?[6]

• Do you think being in this program has resulted in your daughter thinking any differently about her future? Please explain/describe.

Staff survey:
Staff completed an online survey that included questions about outcomes and benefits for girls, as well as questions on the implementation of the program during each year.

Attendance:
Attendance data was also collected for all girls attending programs.

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5 For example, Pratt, C. C., McGuigan, W. M., & Katzev, A. R. (2000). Measuring program outcomes:
   Using retrospective pretest methodology. American Journal of Evaluation, 21 (3), pp 341-349
6 This was a question asked of parents in all four years.

All measures used in the annual core data collection are included in the Appendices B-E*. The measures used in the evaluation of the enhanced mentoring component are outlined and discussed in Chapter 5.

The enriched data collection component included one site visit to each grantee organization throughout Years 1 to 3. The site visits allowed the evaluation team to collect more in-depth information on the programs. At each site visit, team members conducted a staff focus group, interviews with girls (mostly done in pairs, although in some instances small groups were accommodated), a parent focus group, a mentor focus group (if applicable), Elder interviews (where applicable), and at least one qualitative project with the girls. In some site visits, team members also participated in community celebrations, toured the community, and/or watched the girls' program in progress. A list of the site visits conducted, as well as some of the tools used can be found in Appendix F*.

- The longer-term impact study was conducted in Year 4 of the evaluation. It focused on collecting data to assess how participation in a girls program might continue to have an effect several years after participation. All organizations who received funding from the Girls' Fund in both the previous funding cycle (2009-2012) and the current funding cycle (2012-2016) were asked to contact alumnae, aged 16-22, from previous girls groups. Organizations helped the evaluation team to recruit girls to participate in an online survey that included questions on the impacts of the programs, maintenance of those impacts, and reflections on the importance of girls-only programming, as well as other program elements. Please see Appendix G* for a link to this online survey.[7]

- As well, in Year 4 we conducted telephone focus groups with staff. The purpose of the interviews was to explore issues and barriers that girls in their programs were facing, the policy implications for those issues and barriers, how the grant(s) received from the Foundation may have helped their organizations and community, and what impact they think the grants may have on girls across the country. Please see Appendix H* for a copy of the interview guide.

PROCESS EVALUATION

The purpose of the process component was to describe how well the programs were implemented -- the problems, challenges and learnings experienced during program implementation, and how girls and parents felt about the services provided (i.e., the extent to which effective practices were present in groups, what girls and parents liked and did not like, and their recommendations for improvement). The process component was built into the annual core data collection and the enriched data collection through site visits. A process evaluation was useful for monitoring program implementation and may generate information that can be used for program improvement. The process component also helped us interpret the results from the outcome evaluation.

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7 Ideally, we would have liked to have compared a random sample of Girls' Fund alumnae with a comparison group on various outcomes several years after their participation. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the scope and available resources.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

PARTICIPATION RATES

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND ANNUAL SURVEYS

Participation rates in the programs were based upon attendance data received from the programs. Only girls who attended at least 25% of the time were included in the results. The figure below shows the participation rates for each of the four years, as well as the number of girls who completed a survey.

Figure 1: Girls' Participation Rates
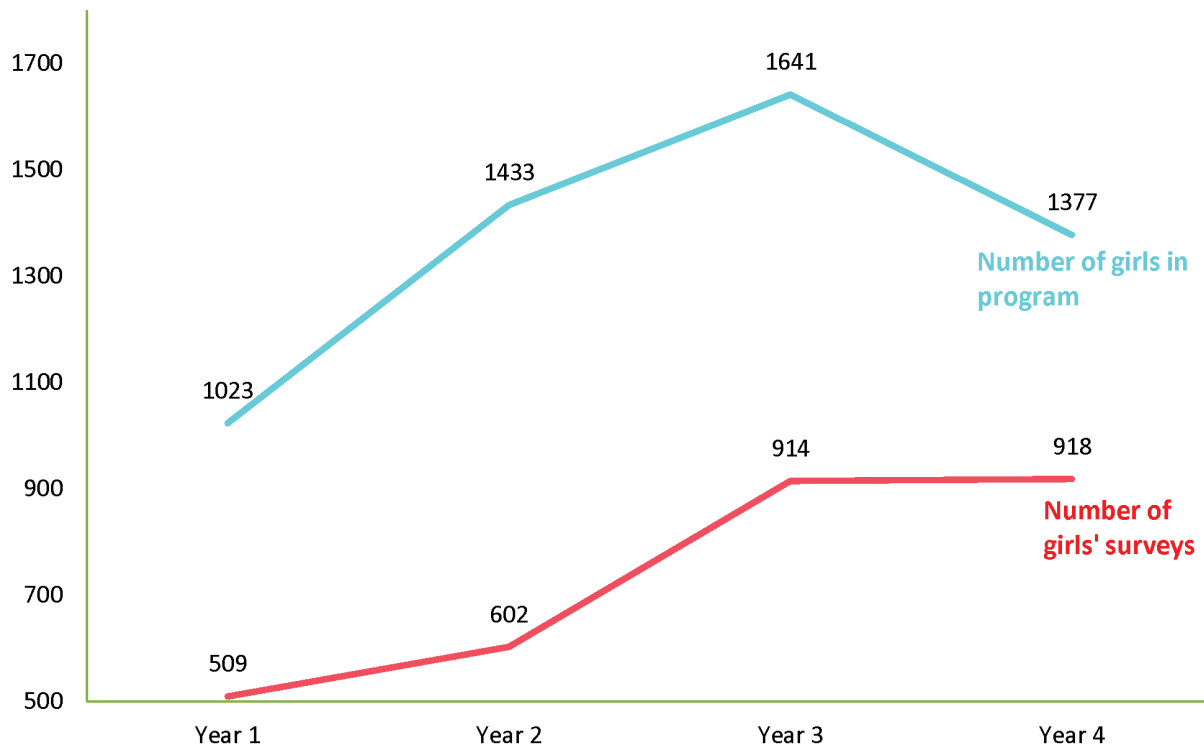
The number of girls participating in the program was highest in Year 3 (N=1641). The figure dropped in Year 4 to be more in line with Year 2 rates. The attendance data was most complete in Year 3; thus, the lower figures for Years 2 and 4 were most likely due to missing information, rather than lower numbers of girls served. In Year 1, because the programs started later, there were fewer girls served. The number of surveys completed by the girls in the past two years remained fairly stable and was up from the first two years.[8] This increase was likely due to greater familiarity with the evaluation and its requirements and procedures. The participation rates in the girls' surveys, year to year are shown below:

- Year 1: 49%
- Year 2: 42%
- Year 3: 56%
- Year 4: 67%

8 In Year 4 the survey was divided into 2 parts because of its length (additional open-ended items were added). A total of 767 girls completed both parts of the survey (84%) and 151 girls (16%) completed only one part. Of the 151 girls who completed only one part, most (128 or 85%) completed part 2 and 15% (23) completed part 1.

The girls' participation rates were quite good; with the exception of Year 2 approximately one-half to two-thirds of the girls participated in the surveys. The parent participation rates were lower and, therefore, less generalizable than the girls. Parent participation rates were:

- Year 1: 26%
- Year 2: 19%
- Year 3: 20%
- Year 4: 21%

Most organizations completed at least one staff survey each year:

- Year 1: 28 of the 29 organizations
- Year 2: 27 of the 29 organizations
- Year 3: 25 of the 29 organizations
- Year 4: 27 of the 33 organizations

However, the exact level of staff participation is unknown because we do not know how many staff were involved in the delivery of the program. The number of surveys completed for girls, parents, and staff is shown in the figure below. As shown, participation in the girls' surveys increased each of the four years. Parent participation rose in the first three years, but dipped a little in Year 4. Staff survey participation grew between Year 1 and Year 4, but did dip in Year 2.

Figure 2: Survey Participation Rates
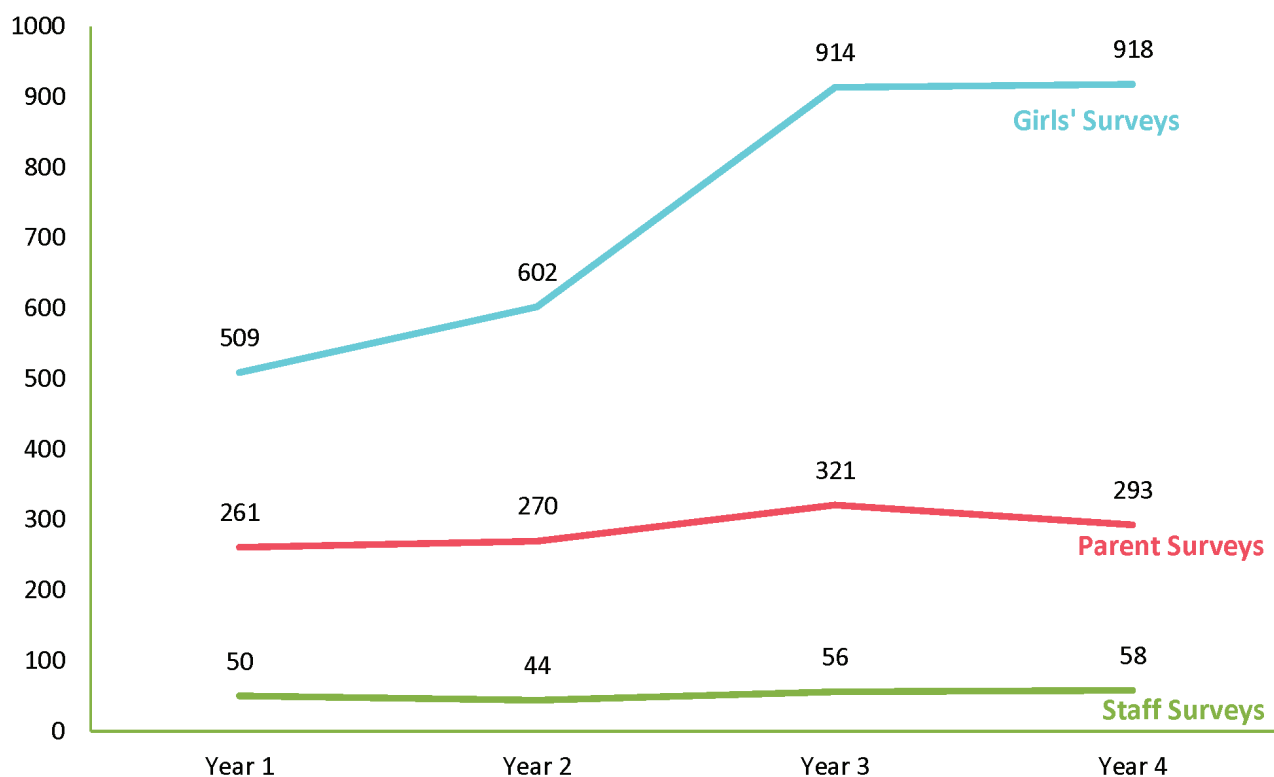
For the telephone focus groups conducted with staff, a total of 28 staff, across 25 organizations, participated.

SITE VISIT AND QUALITATIVE PROJECT PARTICIPATION RATES

Shown below are the participation levels in the site visits conducted for each of the three years.[9]

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Number of site visits	8	8	10	26
Girls' Interviews	65	82	77	224
Girls' Activities	140+	136	132	400+
Girls in Mentee Focus Groups[10]	N/A	63	54	117
Qualitative projects (Year 1 only)[11]	156			156
Letters to My Sister (Year 2 only)		550		550
Letters to My Mentor (Year 3 only)[12]			230	230
Parents' Interviews/Focus Groups	50	56	68	174
Staff Focus Groups	35	37	35	107
Mentors Focus Groups[13]	N/A	36	37	73

As shown above, a considerable amount of data was collected from the program sites during site visits, as well as through additional projects. Over 220 girls, over 170 parents, and over 100 staff were interviewed. As well, an additional 117 girls and 73 mentors participated in interviews or focus groups specifically on the mentoring program.

Most of the above mentioned data was collected through the site visits; however, there was some collected by staff at the program sites outside of the site visits. That is, the qualitative projects completed in Year 1 (i.e., group journals, scrapbooks) were completed by staff during program time. In Year 2, at the sites where visits were held, most of the Letters to My Little Sister were completed during the site visit; where site visits were not held, the letters were completed by the girls during group time, facilitated by staff (with instructions provided by the evaluation team). In Year 3, the Letters to My Mentor were facilitated by staff at some sites, and by the evaluation team members at others (i.e., for those that had a site visit in Year 3). No additional qualitative data was collected in Year 4 using other tools and measures; however, as explained previously in the Methodology, in Year 4 several open-ended items were added to the girls' survey.

9 Site visits were only conducted in the first three years; none were conducted in Year 4.

10 17 programs in total.

11 Year 1, because of a late start for the evaluation, was a challenging year for data collection. In total, 9 of the 20 organizations that should have completed a project did so. Some of those 9 organizations were multi-site programs, or ran multiple session cycles; therefore, a total of 23 projects were submitted. Not all of the projects indicated how many girls participated – but that information was received for 21 of the 23 projects. From those 21 projects, a total of 156 girls participated.

12 15 programs in total.

13 17 programs in total.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF GIRL PARTICIPANTS

The demographic profile of the girls who completed the surveys year to year is shown below.

GIRLS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Age	11.8	12.2	12.1	11.9
Born outside of Canada				
Girl	13%	14%	13%	12%
Parents	32%	25%	33%	31%
Ethnicity [14]				
English Canadian	62%	78%	80%	70%
Indigenous	29%	23%	20%	31%
French	6%	8%	13%	11%
Other common (top 3)	South Asian: 8% Asian: 7% N. African: 7%	Asian: 7% South Asian: 5% Carribean: 4%	South Asian: 10% Asian: 7% African-other: 6%	Asian: 7% South Asian: 5% African-other 4%
Languages spoken at home				
English	88%	89%	89%	88%
An Indigenous language	7%	5%	5%	4%
French	5%	9%	11%	10%
Other	24%	24%	23%	22%
Living arrangements [15]				
Lives with 2 parents	53%	55%	60%	57%
Lives with 1 parent	26%	20%	19%	20%
Splits time between parents	11%	10%	10%	12%
Grandparents/other family	5%	4%	3%	5%
Foster care/group home	2%	5%	3%	3%

14 Totals will not equal 100% for ethnicity nor languages spoken at home because respondents could provide more than one answer.

15 Totals do not equal 100% because there were instances, in each year, where it was difficult to discern the girls' responses; that is, if they answered more than one item (e.g., lived with both parents AND lived with one parent) or the "other" response was illegible.

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Most aspects of the profile of the girls were fairly consistent from year to year and variations that did occur were most likely due to the varying number of surveys received across all organizations. That is, for different reasons, not all organizations, nor all sites/groups, were represented equally year to year. If, for example, one organization did not include all surveys from different sites/groups, this could have an impact on the overall demographic profile if the sites/groups not included were different in some way from those that were included in the evaluation (e.g., ethnicity, languages, living arrangements). The proportion of girls reporting as Indigenous, in the ethnicity question, varied from year to year largely due to the number of surveys completed at the Indigenous program sites.

It should be noted that while the overall profile is helpful, there were considerable variations in populations of girls served at the program sites. For example there were programs in urban centres that served a much larger diverse multicultural community than programs running in more remote and rural areas. Some programs were provided solely to Indigenous girls, and some programs had greater numbers of girls who were living apart from parents.

Although many organizations had girls that were born in other countries, most of the girls were from three organizations consistently: Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, and Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office. Those three organizations were among the top five organizations with the greatest number of girls born outside of Canada in all four years. The Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC and Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta were among the organizations serving the most number of girls born outside of Canada in three of the four years. And, finally, the Actua program at the University of Calgary and Y des Femmes de Montréal were among those organizations in two of the four years.

As with ethnicity, there were many organizations that served girls living apart from parents. The organizations that had a higher number of girls living apart from parents included: Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation, Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, YWCA Yellowknife and Sturgeon Lake.

Although not a lot of demographic information was collected on the girls, what was collected, along with information collected from staff, indicates that the population of girls varied considerably across the grantee organizations. It was clear that some organizations were providing programs to girls who were more 'at-risk' – that is, staff indicated that more than 50% of the girls they served were at risk of engaging in risky behaviours, that they lived in homes where domestic abuse has occurred, and/or where drug or alcohol usage is a problem. These organizations tended to be the ones that were in inner-city neighbourhoods, on reserve, or that served Indigenous girls.

SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

In the Girls' Fund third funding cycle, close to eight million dollars was invested in 30 programs operating in close to 60 neighbourhoods and communities across the country. The evaluation of the Girls' Fund was designed to determine the impact of the programs (both program and mentoring) on girl participants and to learn from and document how programs were implemented and perceived by participants. The outcome evaluation included three main components:

- The annual core data collection (surveys completed by girls, parents, mentors and staff)

- The enriched data collection via site visits

- The longer-term impact study (surveys completed by girls who had participated in the programs when they were younger)

The process evaluation was incorporated into both the annual core data collection and the enhanced data collection. The process evaluation assessed program implementation and satisfaction and helped with interpretation of the outcome findings.

The girls' participation rates in the annual surveys in all four years were quite good: they ranged from 42% (Year 2) to 67% (Year 4).[16] Participation in the staff surveys was also good as the majority of programs had at least one program staff complete a survey each year (at least 80% of programs completed a survey each year). Parent participation in the annual surveys was somewhat lower than the girls and ranged from 19% at the lowest (Year 2) to 26% at the highest (Year 1). The results from the parent surveys, therefore, may not be generalizable as the response rates were lower. In addition to the surveys, a considerable amount of qualitative data was collected from the programs via site visits and other qualitative measures. Over 400 girls participated in girls' research activities, over 500 Letters to My Little Sister were collected in Year 2, over 200 Letters to My Mentor were completed in year 3, and over 200 girls participated in face-to-face interviews. In addition, 174 parents, 73 mentors, 107 staff, and 117 mentees were interviewed. The range and breadth of information collected lends confidence to the evaluation results found.

Demographic data revealed that the average age of the girls was fairly consistent year-to-year: from 11.8 to 12.2. Approximately 12-14% of the girls were born outside of Canada, while about 25-33% of the parents were born outside of Canada. The majority of girls identified as "English Canadian" (62% to 80%), approximately 20-30% identified as Indigenous, and 6-13% identified as French. Other ethnic identities that were most commonly reported included: South Asian, Asian, African and Caribbean. The vast majority (88-89% in each year) reported speaking English at home, approximately 4-7% reported speaking an Indigenous language at home, and about 5-11% reported speaking French. About 22-24% of the girls in each year also reported speaking another language (other than English, French or an Indigenous language). More than one-half of the girls in each of the four years (53% to 60%) reported living with two parents, 19-26% reported living with one parent, and 10-12% split their time between two parents. Approximately 6-9% of the girls did not live with parents: some lived with grandparents or other relatives (3-5% each year) or they were in a foster care/group home (2% to 5% each year). For example, there were programs in urban centres that worked with more diverse multicultural groups of girls than programs running in rural or more remote communities. Some programs focused on Indigenous girls, and some programs served more vulnerable girls living apart from parents. Although not a lot of demographic information was collected on the girls, what was collected, along with information provided by staff, indicates that the population of girls varied considerably across the grantee organizations. It was clear that some organizations were serving girls who were more marginalized or 'at risk'. These organizations tended to be the ones that were located in inner-city neighbourhoods, on reserve, or that served Indigenous girls.

16 For programs that ran multiple sessions throughout a year, or at multiple sites, not all programs/ sites were required to participate in the girls' surveys; rather, we selected a sub-sample of sessions/sites so as to ease the burden of data collection on staff.

"I learned that
it is OKAY to be a girl
and that girls really CAN do
anything boys can do!"

CHAPTER **2**

OUTCOME
RESULTS

OVERVIEW

In this chapter we review all of the outcome results, including the survey results (girls, parents, staff) and the results from the qualitative data collected. As reported in the Methodology section, we collected data on four main protective factors:

- Self-confidence

- Critical thinking skills

- Connectedness

- School engagement

In all programs and in all surveys (girls, parents, staff), items were included to assess each of the four areas above.

There were also other protective factors areas that were of interest to the programs; however, to be mindful of the length of the girls' surveys, only those additional protective factors that were considered the best fit with a program's goals and objectives were included in their girls' surveys.[17] These other areas included:

- Dealing with peer pressure

- Dealing with bullying

- Communication skills

- Problem-solving skills

- Feeling good being a girl

- Pro-social relationships with peers

- Getting along better with others and making friends

- Focusing on strengths and skills

- Feeling supported by/close to family

- Knowing when to seek help or advice from others

- Knowing where to go for help or advice

- Having supportive adults to go to for help or advice

Further, to assess the unique goals and objectives of the individual programs, 'site specific' questions were included in the surveys as well. These questions were not about protective factors but about other program foci. As much as possible, we tried to develop items that could potentially fit a number of programs that had similar goals and objectives. These items roughly translated into the five different approaches into which we categorized programs:[18]

- Leadership and empowerment

- Focus on Aboriginal/Inuit teachings and culture

- Physical activity/sport and nutrition

- Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)

- Media awareness/literacy

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17 It should be noted that all protective factor areas were included in the parent and staff surveys for every program.

18 We say "roughly translated" because some approaches have different foci. For example, "leadership and empowerment" included a range of different programming focused on leadership skills, decision-making skills, healthy relationships, safety and violence prevention, body image. Wherever possible, if programs had similar goals, as outlined in their program logic models, we tried to develop items that could be used across those programs.

These same areas were explored in the qualitative data that we collected from the program sites. In this section we explore the results from the outcome data collected. The Outcomes Diagram in Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the main outcomes, the interconnections between those outcomes, and the program features that facilitate or lead to the outcomes.

Figure 3: Girls' Program Outcomes and Contributors
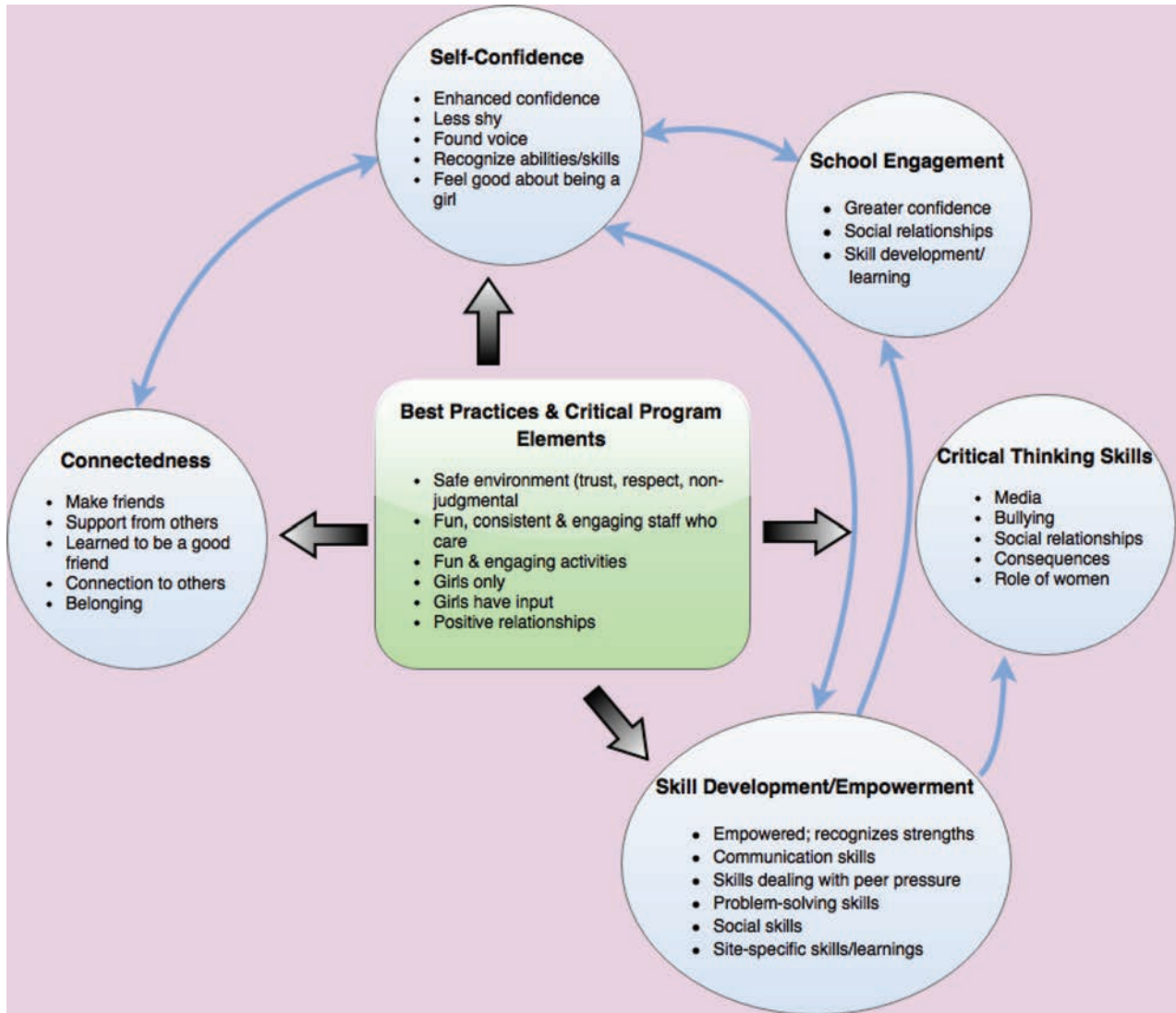
SELF-CONFIDENCE

Improved self-confidence was a goal and objective for all of the programs and was one of the key protective factors included in the Foundation's program logic model. In all four years of the evaluation, self-confidence was the outcome area in which the evaluation found the greatest impact. Survey results from girls, parents, and staff, as well as the qualitative data collected, demonstrated that the programs had the largest impact on the girls' self-confidence.

THE IMPACTS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE: THE SURVEYS

Self-confidence was assessed in surveys with the girls, parents and staff. For the girls' and parent surveys, this included four items rated on a 5-point scale. For the staff, we simply asked them to rate improvement in the girls' 'self-confidence' for the group as a whole. All results shown below have been averaged on the 5-point scale.

Figure 4: Girls' Ratings of Self-Confidence
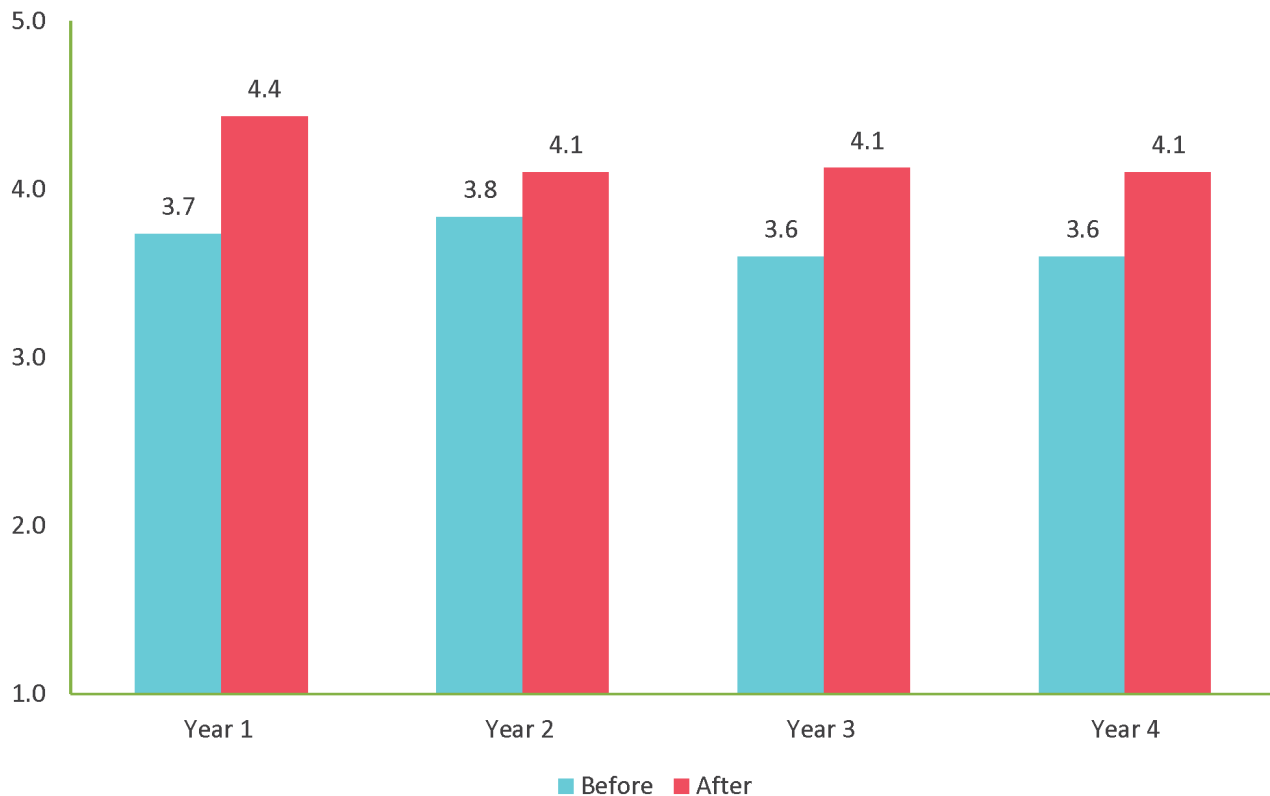
In all four years there was a statistically significant increase in the girls' ratings about how they felt from before the program to how they felt after the program. Whereas a statistical test of significance can tell you if there is a difference between two means (i.e., average scores), an effect size tells you the magnitude of that difference or effect. It has been suggested than an effect size of .80 is large, .50 is medium, and .20 is small.[19][20] For self-confidence, the effect size was largest in Year 1 (.88) but still large in both Years 3 and 4 (.60 and .61, respectively). In all three of these years the 'retrospective' method for testing the difference in outcomes between before and after the program was used. [Please refer back to the Methodology section for more information on this method.] In Year 2 the effect size was small at .29 – when most of the program sites used a pre-test/post-test methodology. [21]

19 Thalheimer. W. & Cook, S. (2002, August). How to calculate effect sizes from published research articles: A simplified methodology. Retrieved September 16, 2004 from http://work-learning.com/effective_sizes.htm, p. 2.

20 Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. Psychological Bulletin, 112, 155-159.

21 As discussed in the Methodology section, it was suspected that girls were over-inflating their ratings at pre-test, as other research had also shown, leaving less room for improvement at post-test – and, therefore, smaller effect sizes.

Figure 5: Parent Ratings of Girls' Self-Confidence
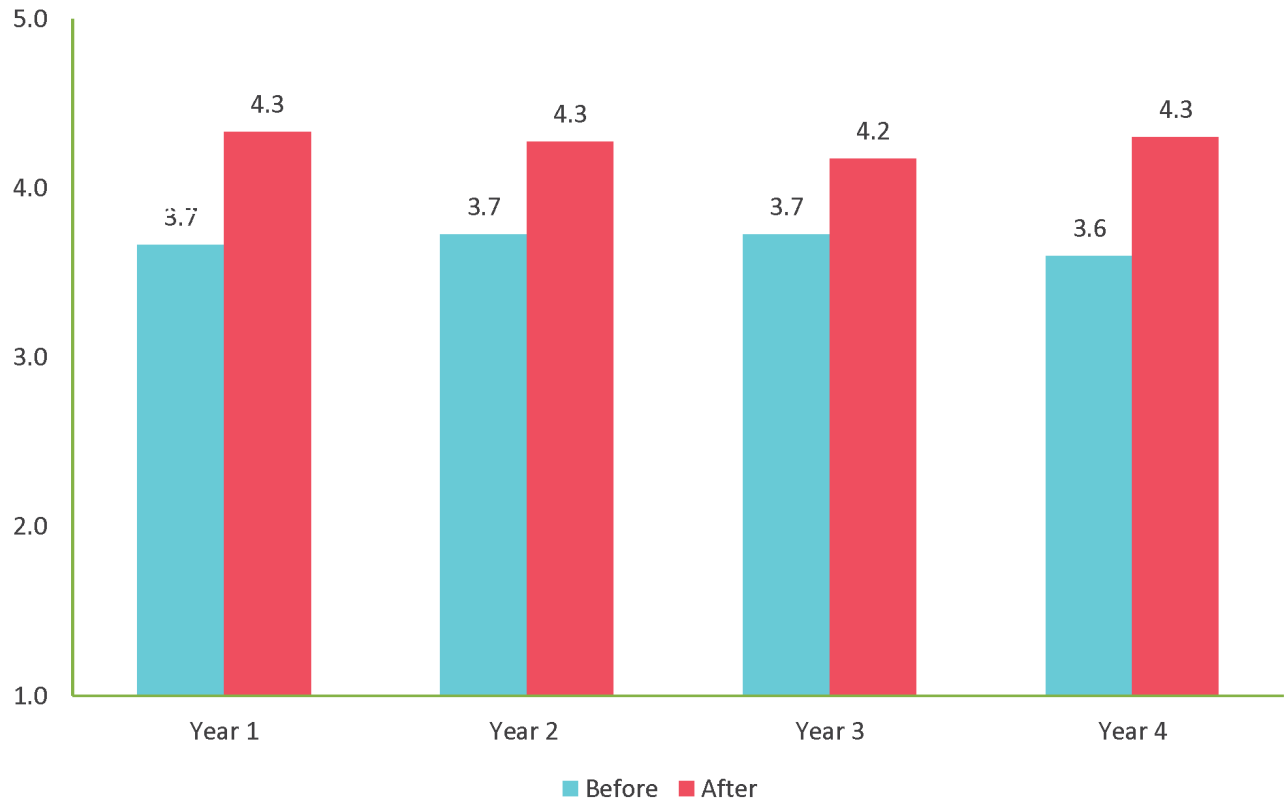
As shown in the figure above, **the parent ratings on self-confidence were very consistent across all years – in each year, parents reported a significant increase from before to after the program.** Parent ratings were also fairly similar to the girls' own ratings.

Figure 6: Staff Ratings of Girls' Self-Confidence
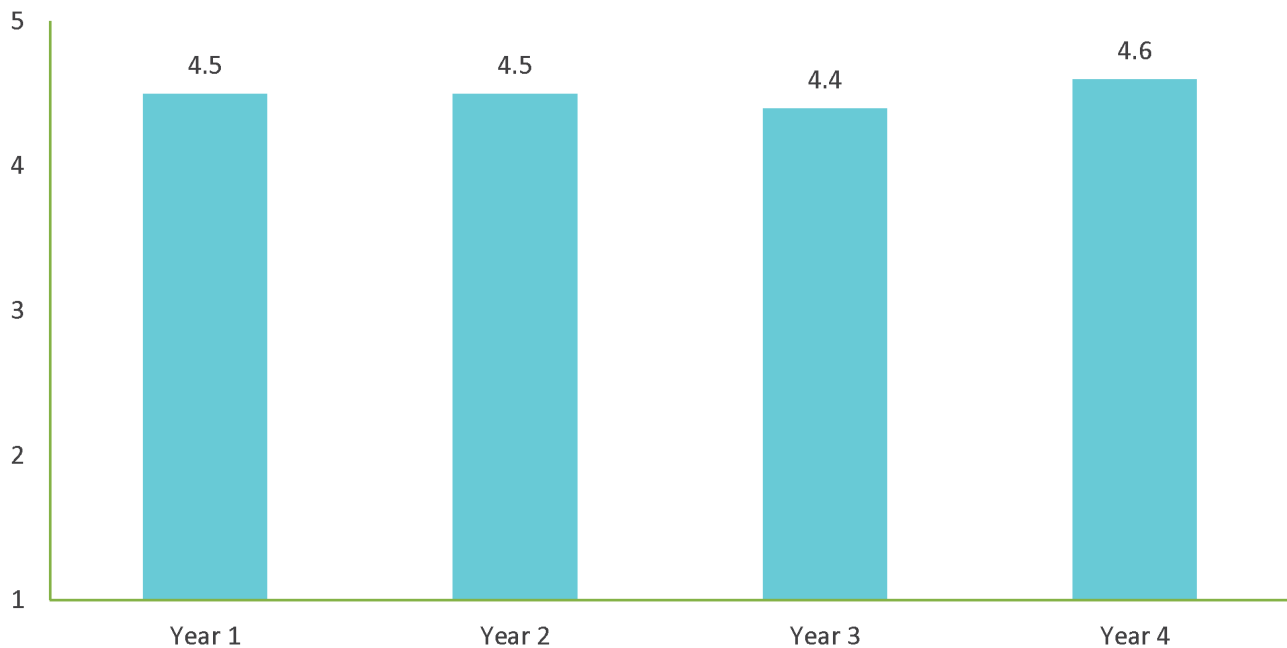
Staff rated improvements in self-confidence very highly in all four years – slightly higher than the "after" ratings of the girls and parents. The staff survey also included a question asking the staff to indicate, in their own words, what they considered to be the top three positive outcomes or benefits for girls in their programs. **In all four years, staff most frequently cited improvements in self-confidence in the top three benefits.** Staff commented, in general, on improvements in confidence and self-esteem, and also more specifically about the girls feeling more pride in themselves and their abilities, having more confidence to speak up and express themselves, an improved self-identity, and that the girls had found their voice.

THE IMPACTS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE: THE QUALITATIVE DATA

A gain in self-confidence was the program outcome that was most discussed across the different qualitative research components used in the first three years of the evaluation. Girls reported in face-to-face interviews, in the Letters to My Little Sister activity, and in other research activities, how they were feeling better about themselves since they had started the program. They described confidence in many ways, including the following:

- Feeling important
- Feeling stronger, a sense of power or strength
- Feeling more brave and able to stand up to things
- Feeling more beautiful
- Feeling smarter
- Coming out of her shell
- Less shy
- Speaking up more
- More accepting of self
- Confident in her body
- Had learned she has inner beauty
- Thinks more positively about self
- Feels more confident about choices she'll make when she grows up

Many girls described how the enhancement of other protective factors such as communication skills, improved relationships, and an increased sense of connectedness, as well as program specific outcomes such as Aboriginal cultural teachings or STEM outcomes, were directly linked to their increase in self-confidence. The program practices, such as a supportive environment, listening to the girls, and a safe place where they can share openly also contribute to girls feeling better about themselves.

When we asked parents open-ended questions about the changes they had seen in their daughters since they started the program, one of the most prominent themes was that their daughters had gained confidence. The parents provided concrete examples of gains in confidence, such as their daughter trying out for the first time for a school play, being proud of the arts and crafts they were producing, speaking up more openly, having a more positive outlook on life, having a sense of "girl power", and being more accepting of themselves.

Staff from across programs also provided examples of how the girls in their program had gained confidence. In many cases this confidence was evidenced by the fact that when girls started the program they were very quiet and by the end of the program, they had gained the confidence to speak up, give their opinion, and more openly participated in all group activities.

Self-confidence: Selected Quotations from Girls and Parents (Years 1-3)

"It makes me stronger because in girls group we talk about all the good things, all the things that girls can do and that makes you stronger inside." (Girls' Interview; Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"My daughter was super shy. This program has helped her to come out of her shell. She has made a couple friends. She has been able to do things she may not have been able to before, such as trips, meet female athletes, etc." (Parent Focus Group; Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

"This program had most definitely greatly boosted my daughter's confidence, that she has a voice and to use it to stand up to other children that are teasing or bullying her and advise them that they are wrong." (Parent Survey; YWCA Muskoka)

In Year 4 of the evaluation the girls' survey (part 2) included an open-ended question asking the girls, in their own words, how they think the programs might have helped or what they had learned. The vast majority of the girls (90% of the girls — 712 of 790 girls who completed part 2 of the survey) provided a response to this question. That figure represents more than one-half of all of the girls who attended the programs in Year 4 (52%). **Approximately one-quarter of those 712 girls (25%) – voluntarily reported that they were feeling more confident, less shy, were feeling better about self, and/or that they were speaking up more.**

Self-Confidence: Girls' Quotes Year 4

"I've learned that you should always be yourself and do what you want and be your own person, not what people want you to be." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

"This program has helped me learn that it's okay to be who you are …." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)

"I think this program has helped me because being with other girls in science helps build my confidence." (SuperNOVA)

As well, girls were asked what they felt were the three most important things about the group. Most responses would fall into 'process' related elements: the activities, the staff, the other girls – and these will be discussed in a later chapter. Some girls, however, wrote about outcomes when asked what was most important to them about the groups. Approximately 6% of the girls reported learning to feel better about themselves, being who they want to be, and feeling more confident.

Parent surveys in Year 4 also included a new open-ended question: what did they consider to be the top three benefits for their daughters. Most parents (86%) did provide at least one answer to this question. **The most common response provided by parents about the top three benefits was improved self-confidence or self-esteem: 43% of the parents reported this as one of the benefits of the programs.**

Self-Confidence: Parent Quotes Year 4

"My daughter's self-esteem has soared since starting Girl2Girl…." (YWCA Lethbridge)

"Her confidence in herself, ability to speak out when she is hurt by someone, just being herself." (YWCA Cambridge)

"She has started mentioning things about herself that she likes." (YWCA Muskoka)

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Critical thinking skills was one of the key protective factors in the Foundation's program logic model and was one outcome area that the Foundation wished to explore in the evaluation; however, it was not a direct outcome included in many of the grantee programs' own goals and objectives. Many had related program goals – for example, improved decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, or coping skills – but few explicitly stated increased critical thinking skills as a goal. Further, it has been an outcome area that has been difficult to assess with only a few items (in the surveys), or in the qualitative data collected. Nonetheless, given these limitations or challenges, we have found positive results in this area. Described below are the quantitative and qualitative results found in the last four years.

IMPACTS OF CRITICAL THINKING: THE SURVEYS

Shown in the figure below are the results from the girls' survey for the impacts on critical thinking.

Figure 7: Girls' Ratings of Critical Thinking Skills
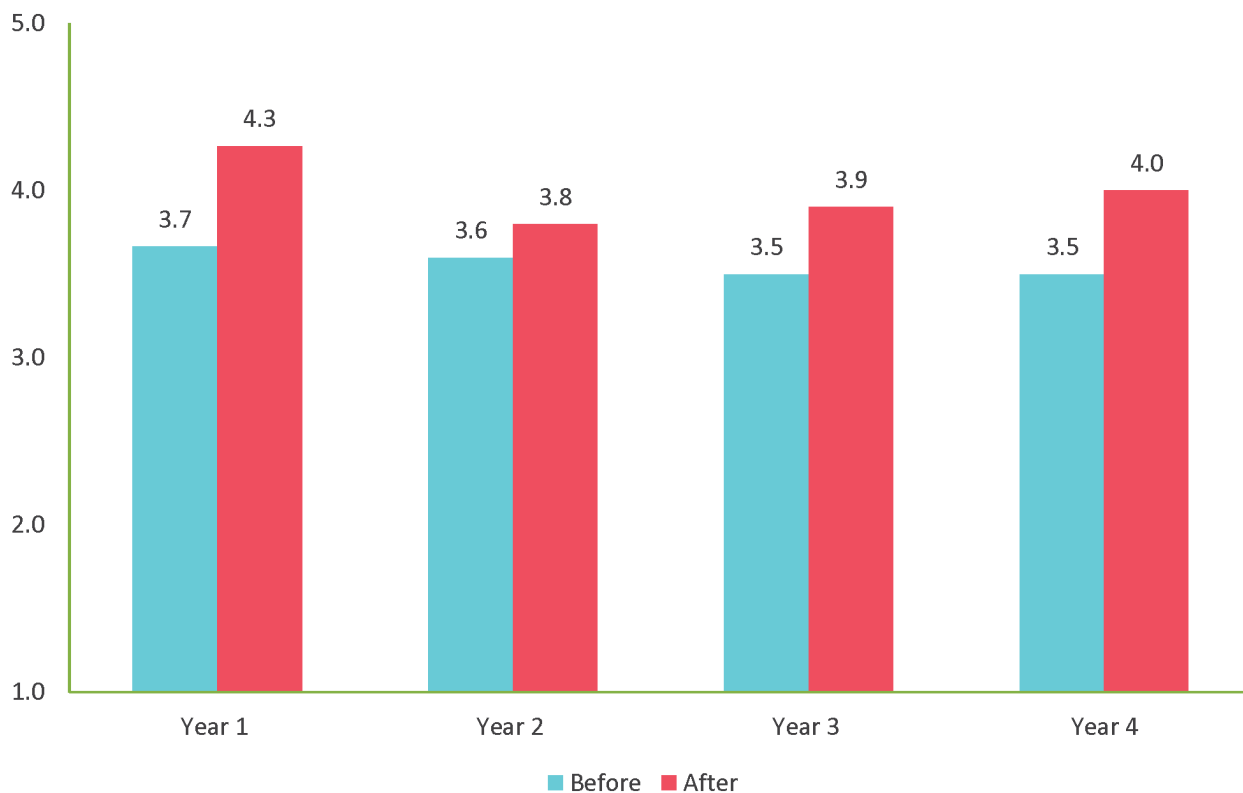
In all four years there was a statistically significant increase in the girls' ratings of how they rated their critical thinking skills from before to after the program. Once again, the largest impacts were noted in Year 1 (effect size was large at .78) but were still quite good in Years 3 and 4 (.52 and .53, respectively). The effect size was smaller in Year 2 (.28).[22]

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22 As described in the Methodology in Chapter 1, and earlier in this chapter, the effect sizes for the girls' survey results were smaller in Year 2 due to different methods used. In that year, most sites used a pre-test/ post-test design and girls' pre-test ratings were high, leaving less room for improvement at post-test.

Figure 8: Parent Ratings of Girls' Critical Thinking Skills
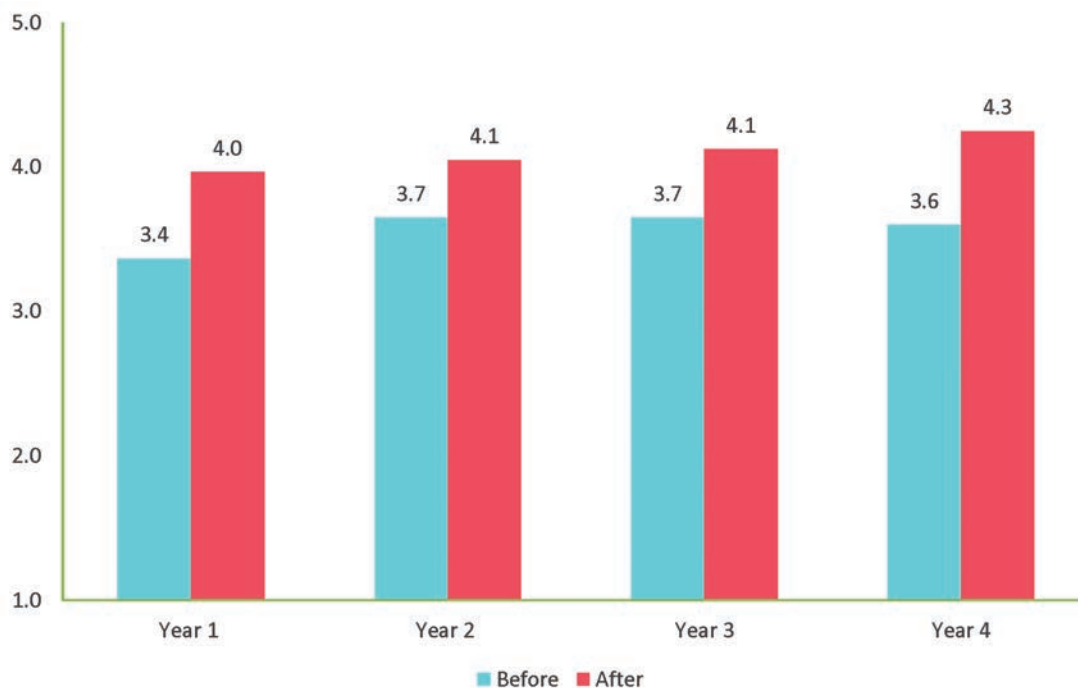
Parents, as well, reported significant increases in critical thinking skills in all years, with the largest impact reported in Year 4. Results were fairly consistent across all four years and were identical for Years 2 and 3. The magnitude of change was similar in the girls' and parent ratings, but parents' after-program ratings were higher than the girls in every year but Year 1. It is possible that parents were more able to recognize these changes in the girls than the girls themselves – as the concept of "critical thinking" was a difficult one for many of the girls to understand.

Figure 9: Staff Ratings of Girls' Critical Thinking Skills
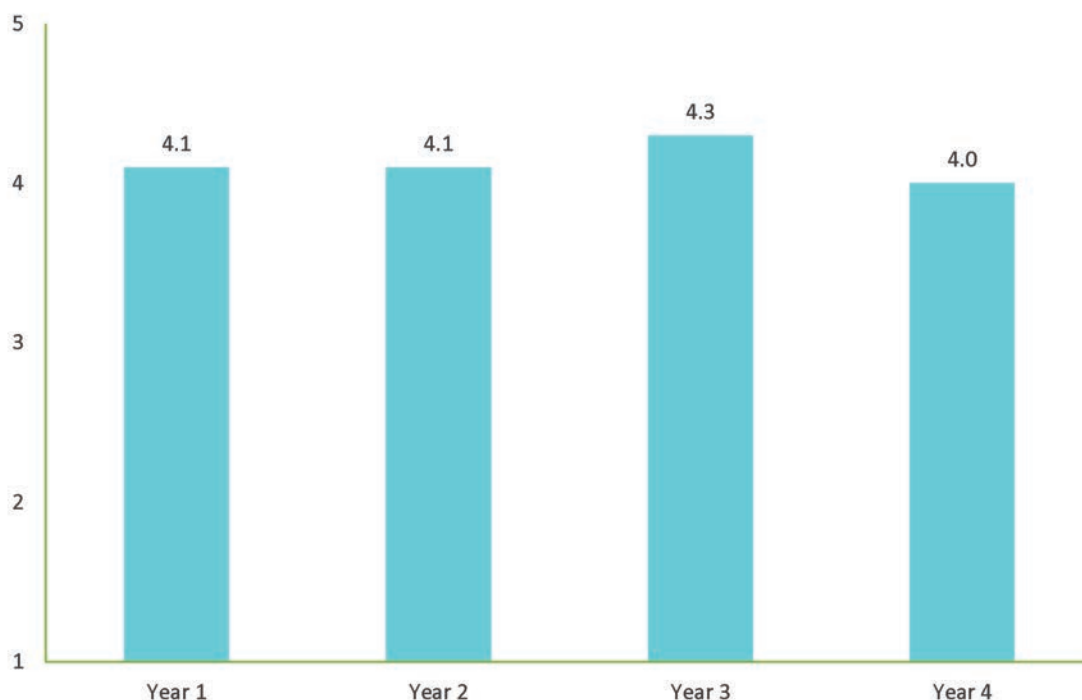
Staff rated improvement in critical thinking highly in all years (and most highly in Year 3); as shown, staff gave a rating of at least 4, on a 5-point scale, in all four years. When asked what they considered to be the top three positive outcomes or benefits for girls, in all years, critical thinking was not a common benefit reported. Nonetheless, in all four years, particularly in Year 3, staff did report on improvements in critical thinking and it was mentioned by several staff as a top-3 benefit.

IMPACTS OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS: THE QUALITATIVE DATA

In the interviews, girls provided examples of how, since their participation in the programs, their critical thinking skills had improved. **The girls reported that they looked differently at the media, were more open-minded, were thinking more about the future and consequences of their actions, were questioning things more, were thinking more about others' feelings and points of view, and were more likely to think before acting.**

In the third year of the site visits, a more explicit attempt was made to assess outcomes in critical thinking skills through a research activity that depicted a scenario using a comic-strip format. Program staff, in collaboration with the evaluation team, chose one of five scenarios based on the five main program approaches: media, leadership and empowerment, STEM, Aboriginal/Inuit culture and teachings, or physical activity/sports and nutrition. The cartoon scenario presented an issue and included an empty cell or two that would conclude the scenario. In a group, the girls discussed the scenario. Then, individually, they answered questions about what they would do in this scenario, why they would do it, and what, if anything, they had learned in the program that had helped them resolve the issue or think through their response. An analysis of the recorded discussions, as well as completed responses, showed that when looking at the scenarios many girls clearly used knowledge they had gained through the groups to analyze or look critically at the situation. Girls reported that through the programs, they had learned the following critical thinking skills:

- How to use STAR (stop, think, act and review)
- To deconstruct stereotypes
- How to analyze and respond to bullying
- About emotions and how to analyze and respond to those
- About the effects of the media and photo-shopping and how to look at ads more critically
- How to put yourself in other people's shoes
- To not be scared and stand up to things
- About consent
- To think carefully about every situation and beyond the immediate situation
- Think about consequences before acting
- Use creative strategies to get out of an uncomfortable situation
- Identify potential bullying situations and act on them
- How to use WITS strategies (walk away, ignore, talk it out and seek help)

The parents also provided some examples of how their daughters developed critical thinking skills as a result of the program. Parents reported several examples of improvements in critical thinking skills including: **their daughters challenging them on issues, improved problem solving, standing up more to others when they sensed an injustice, looking at the media more critically, and thinking more broadly about some issues.**

Staff reported that critical thinking skills were demonstrated by the girls' ability to critically appraise the media, their discussions in group, being more open-minded with respect to other possibilities beyond what the girls are used to, and simply asking more questions or questioning things more. Staff did talk extensively about activities they did to get girls to think critically about different things and to "think outside of the box". For example, in a STEM program, girls learned to think and question through science and technology activities and were also challenged to think about what a scientist looks like. Staff from a media-focused program described how girls were challenged to think critically about the media. In a program with an Aboriginal cultural focus, girls were challenged to think about what it meant to be an Indigenous woman and about stereotypes that exist.

Critical Thinking Skills: Selected Quotations from Girls and Parents (Years 1-3)

> *"Yes, they get you thinking of what's right, what's wrong, who could do this, who could do that and why." (Girls Interview; Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta)*

> *"...It's kind of like we're almost debating. Which is awesome I'm like, 'wow I love this, it's like I'm actually fighting with you on a topic but in a good way!' and she's throwing points back at me that I'm like 'Wow...'. So definitely, yeah, that critical thinking part, she's honing ... those skills and she's definitely learning." (Parent Focus Group; Boys and Girls Club of London)*

> *"My daughter has been more aware of everything, really taking a deeper look at things, or a better look at things." (Parent focus group; Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society)*

As described earlier, in Year 4 of the evaluation the girls' survey (part 2) included an open-ended question asking the girls, in their own words, how they think the programs might have helped or what they had learned. None of the girls specifically reported "critical thinking skills" as a benefit. However, **there were some girls (less than 5%) who reported on benefits that involved critical thinking; for example, in thinking more critically about images in the media, in thinking problems through, in looking at issues or the world differently, or in expanding their world view.**

Critical Thinking Skills: Girls' Quotes Year 4

> *"I have also learned about how to analyze media like magazines, online, social media, etc....[and I] have learned how girls aren't represented in a good way and how many people think girls can't be leaders but I want to challenge that ...." (North York Community House)*

> *"It helped me open my eyes to some new ideas that I never thought of before." (North York Community House)*

> *"Girls Program makes me be more open to others ideas - I'm kind of a closed minded person. I like to keep to myself and do things my way but girls program showed me or taught me to be open to the ideas of others...." (Community Action Resource Centre)*

Parent surveys in Year 4 also an open-ended question asking parents for what they considered to be the top three benefits. Improvements in critical thinking skills were not frequently mentioned (by less than 5% of the parents); nonetheless, parents did comment on these skills.

Critical Thinking Skills: Parents' Quotes Year 4

"She is thinking through things more at length. She seems to be taking her time making important decisions which I approve of." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)

"She is thinking more critically, or is able to articulate better." (YWCA Muskoka)

"She thinks before acting." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society)

CONNECTEDNESS

Connectedness, to both peers and to the community, was a goal of most of the programs, as well as a key protective factor in the Foundation's program logic model. **Throughout the four years the qualitative data in particular demonstrated strong impacts in connectedness and sense of belonging.** According to staff, this was one of the strongest impacts for the girls – the connections and relationships that were built between the girls and between girls and staff. Described below are the quantitative and qualitative results found for the four years.

THE IMPACTS OF CONNECTEDNESS: THE SURVEYS

Figure 10 below shows the quantitative results from the annual surveys:

Figure 10: Girls' Ratings of Connectedness
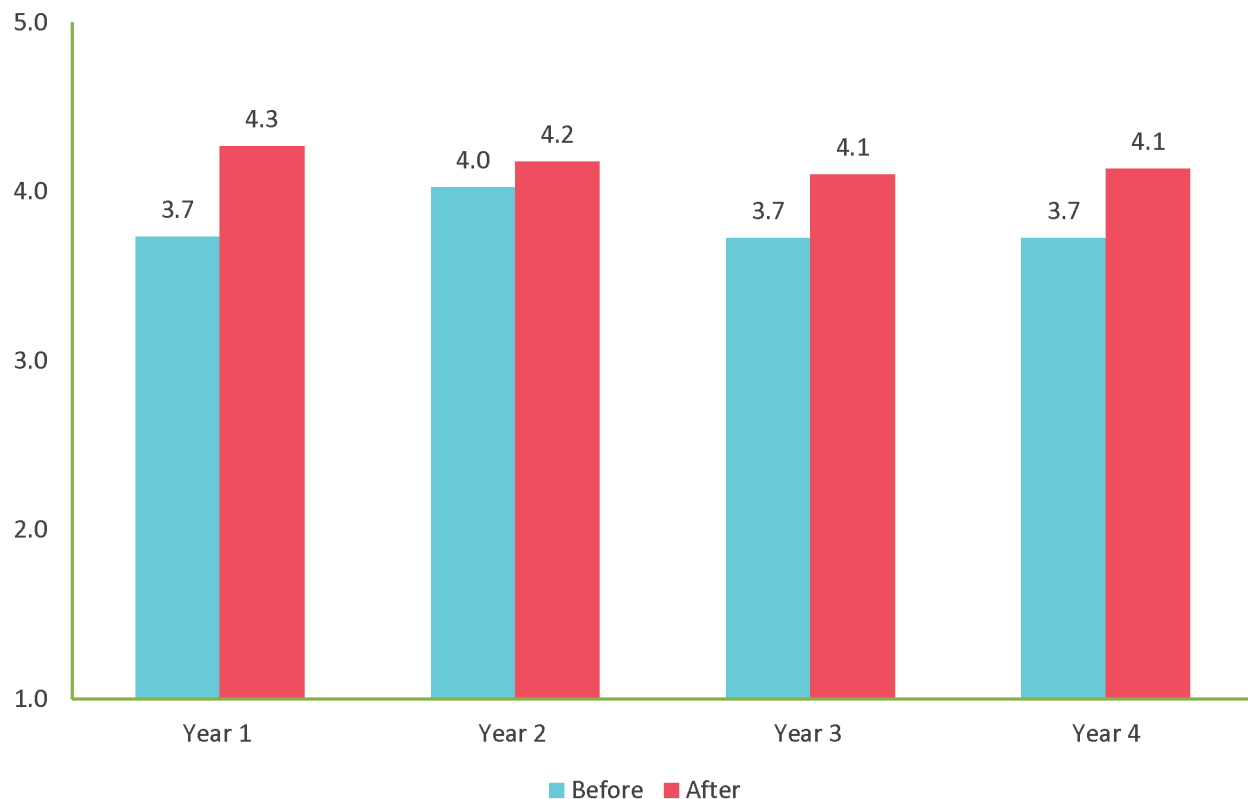
In all four years there was a statistically significant increase in girls' ratings of how connected they felt before the program compared to how they felt after the program. Year 1 showed the largest effect size (.58), Years 3 and 4 were of moderate size although smaller than in Year 1 (.51 and .48, respectively), and the effect size was small in Year 2 (.19).

Figure 11: Parent Ratings of Girls' Connectedness
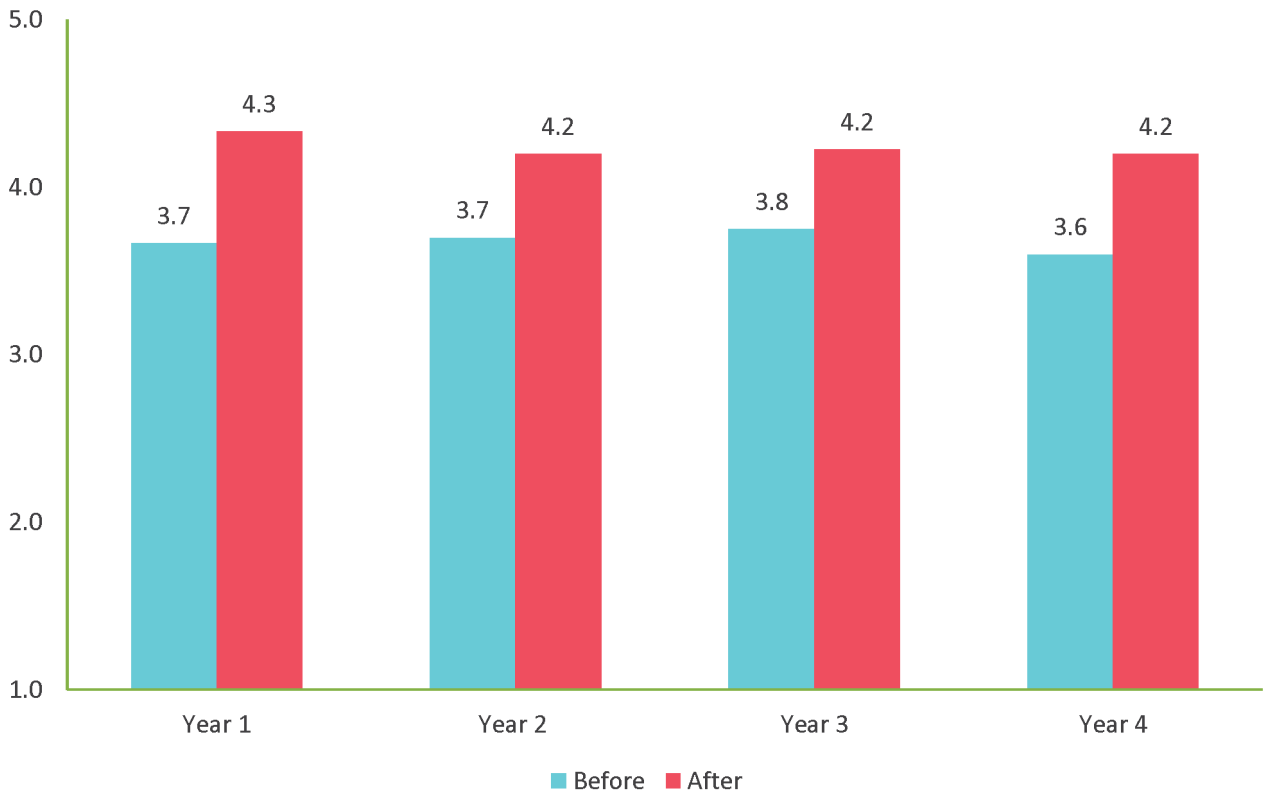
In all four years there was a statistically significant increase in connectedness from before to after the program in ratings provided by the parents. Results across all four years were very consistent, with the largest impact reported in Year 1 and in Year 4. Parent ratings were also very similar to girls' ratings across the years with the exception of the girls' Year 2 before-program ratings which were higher than those given by parents (4.0 vs. 3.7, resectively). In Years 1 through 3 parent after-program ratings were identical to those given by the girls.

Figure 12: Staff Ratings of Girls' Connectedness
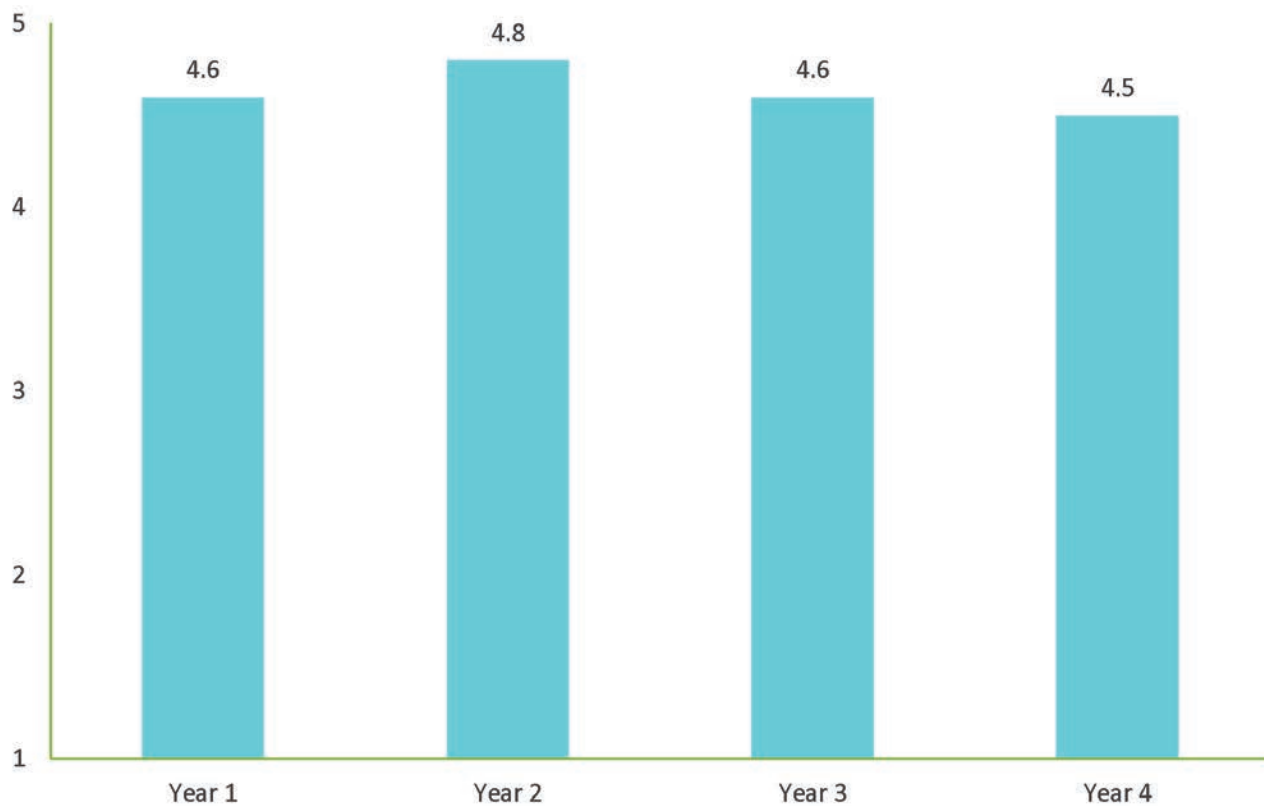
Of the protective factors queried with staff, they rated improvements in connectedness as the highest, or close to the highest, in all four years. Staff rated connectedness higher than both the girls and parents. As well, when asked what they considered to be the top three positive outcomes or benefits for girls, in all three years, connectedness (or building friendships/social support) was mentioned almost as frequently as self-confidence. In all four years close to 60% or more of the staff (in Years 2 and 3 it was as high as 80%) reported this as an outcome. Staff commented on the girls making more friends, being supportive and respectful of one another, an increased sense of belonging, being more comfortable with one another and more accepting of each other.

THE IMPACTS OF CONNECTEDNESS: THE QUALITATIVE DATA

An increased sense of connectedness was a very prominent theme in the girls' interviews and action research activities that were conducted in Years 1-3. In the interviews, the girls' comments reflected that their participation in the programs had resulted in an increased sense of belonging and feeling less lonely. Girls often described the group as a family.

In the various action research activities, an increased sense of connectedness also emerged as a very prominent theme. **Across various activities, girls described feeling loved, not alone, feeling closer to the group, feeling like the group was a family, making new friends, and feeling very comfortable with the girls in the group.** In the Letters to My Little Sister that were written in Year 2 by girls in all programs, the most prominent outcome described by the girls in their letters was how they felt more connected or like they belong more (noted in 32% of the letters from 86% of the organizations). Their descriptions included the social aspects of the program, which included being with friends, meeting friends, as well as feeling a sense of being included and accepted in the groups. **Girls also described themselves as belonging more** — that they were part of the group, fit in with other girls, felt welcome, were becoming closer to people, bonded as friends, were making new friends, getting closer to people, or that they had improved relationships with family or friends.

The parents' focus groups also provide many examples from parents of how their daughters were feeling more connected to others. Parents described how the **programs do a good job of helping girls to feel like they belong.** They also reported that **their daughters had more friends and were more connected to their community.** The connectedness theme was especially prominent in the focus groups in programs with an Aboriginal/Inuit focus.

Parents also reported that their daughters were now socializing with girls they would not normally be socializing with and were learning to be more accepting and understanding of others. Some parents reported that their daughters were more connected to their communities. These included parents from First Nations groups who reported that a positive outcome of their daughters' time in the group was that it connected them to other Aboriginal and Inuit girls. The increased sense of connectedness to other girls was also reported to help girls be more aware of the world around them and to make them generally happier.

Staff in some programs also reported that girls seemed more connected since joining the program. They described how girls were more likely to be in cliques at the start of the program and as the year progressed they were more likely to interact with different girls. Staff reported that they had seen the girls in the programs grow closer together and feel more connected. As well, they reported how girls learned to get along as the program progressed and that girls learned about bullying and how to deal with conflicts.

Connectedness: Selected Quotations from Girls and Parents (Years 1-3)

> *"I think we're all connected because we're all girls... we're all sisters and we care about each other ...." (Girls' Interview; Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)*

> *"She loved having a group of girls where she felt part of the group." (Parent Survey; Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)*

> *"Being with other girls her age and making a bond with the girls has helped her very much." (Parent Survey; Boys and Girls Club of London)*

In the open-ended question about benefits from the programs included in the Year 4 survey, many of the girls reported making friends, feeling a sense of belonging, or being more social – approximately 13%.

A further 6% of the girls, approximately, also reported learning more about how others are feeling or what they are going through, and being more supportive of others. When asked what were the three most important things about the girls' group in which they were involved, about one-quarter of the girls reported friends or friendships as one of the three most important elements of the group. Of all the responses given for the three most important elements, the connections to the girls, spending time with them, and feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion was mentioned very often (about 20% of all responses). [23]

Connectedness: Girls' Quotes Year 4

"This program provides a place for girls to call home." (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)

"I have learned to make new friends and the program has helped me with being more open with people....it's girl time only and it's fun to be all girls." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"...[Être en] dans une groupe de fille de mon âge et ça ma fait plaisir d'être avec tout mes amis." [English translation: "[To be] in a group with girls my own age and it makes me happy to be with all of my friends."] (Y des Femmes de Montreal)

In the top three benefits question included in the Year 4 survey, **many of the parents (about 15%) also reported that a main benefit of the programs was making friends, making different types of friends (girls they normally would not have been friends with), and having supportive relationships in the group.**

Connectedness: Parents' Quotes Year 4

"Knowing she has a group of girls her age, as well as adults, to support her if she needs it. She is learning more about who she is as a girl, how to choose better friends and relationships." (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)

"My daughter now feels more connected to more adults and has a closer group of friends as a result of participating in the program." (YWCA Muskoka)

"I think because of her experiences in the program, she feels connected to some of her peers because of her/their background." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society)

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

The impact of the programs, particularly of the enhanced mentoring, on girls' engagement in school was of interest to the Canadian Women's Foundation, and was an expected outcome in their program logic model. With a few exceptions (mostly mentoring programs and STEM programs), however, this was not an expressed goal of most of the girls' programs. Yet, many of the programs did include goals for making healthy choices and for building strong and resilient young women – presumably, by extension, this would include making positive choices related to school.

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23 That is, the total number of responses given by the girls was 2078. A total of 423 responses were related to friendships, connectedness, or the people in the group.

Considering that improved school engagement was not an expressed goal of many of the programs, it is significant that the results still showed positive outcomes in this area, although they were not as strong as for the other protective factors. Referring back to our diagram in Figure 3, this may well be because other outcomes feed into improved school engagement. That is, improved self-confidence, skill development, and connectedness help the girls to be more engaged in school. Girls' ratings on school engagement are shown in the figure below.

Figure 13: Girls' Ratings of School Engagement
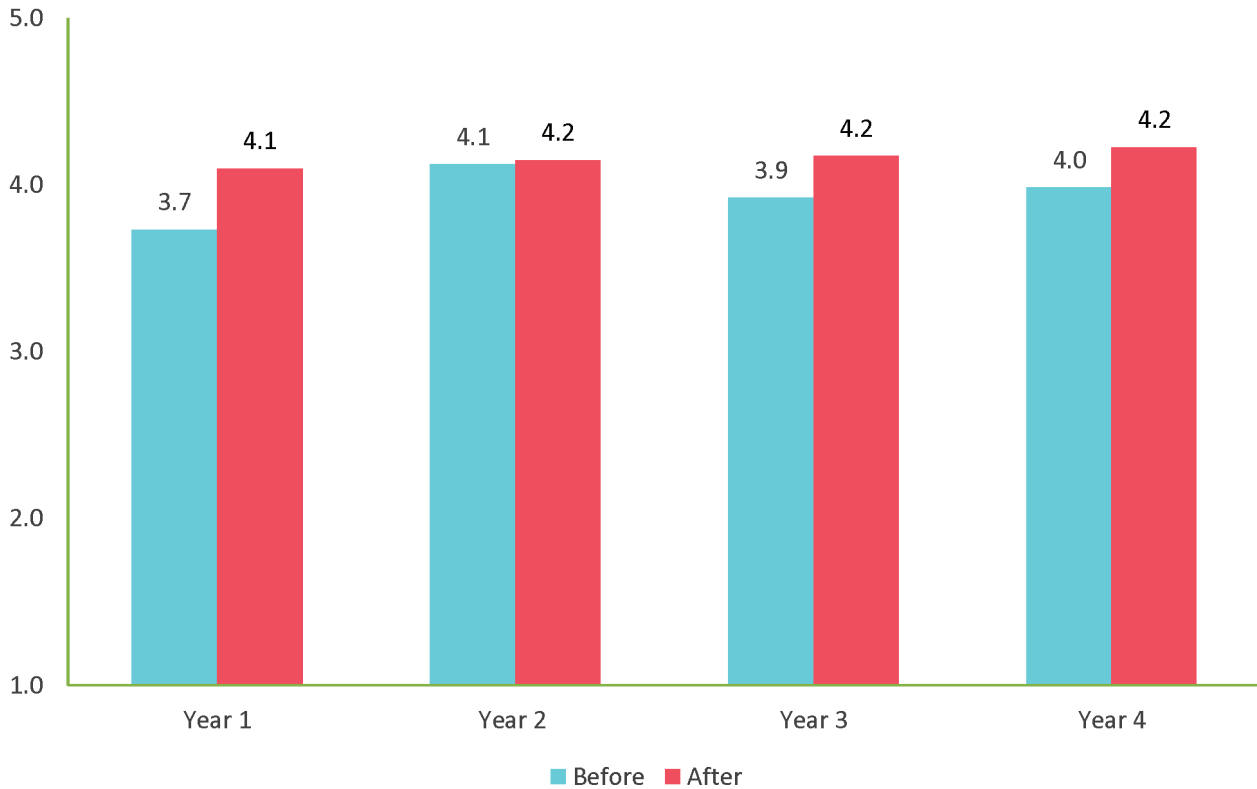
There was a statistically significant increase in school engagement in Years 1, 3 and 4, when the retrospective survey methodology was used. There was not, however, a significant increase in Year 2 when most organizations used pre/post surveys. The largest impact was seen in Year 1 (effect size=.47); a smaller impact was seen in Years 3 and 4 (effect sizes were .30 and .29, respectively).

Parent ratings on school engagement are shown in the figure below. In all four years parents reported a significant improvement in school engagement – a larger impact than that reported by the girls themselves. The largest impact was reported in Year 1; however, results across all four years were quite similar.

Figure 14: Parent Ratings of School Engagement
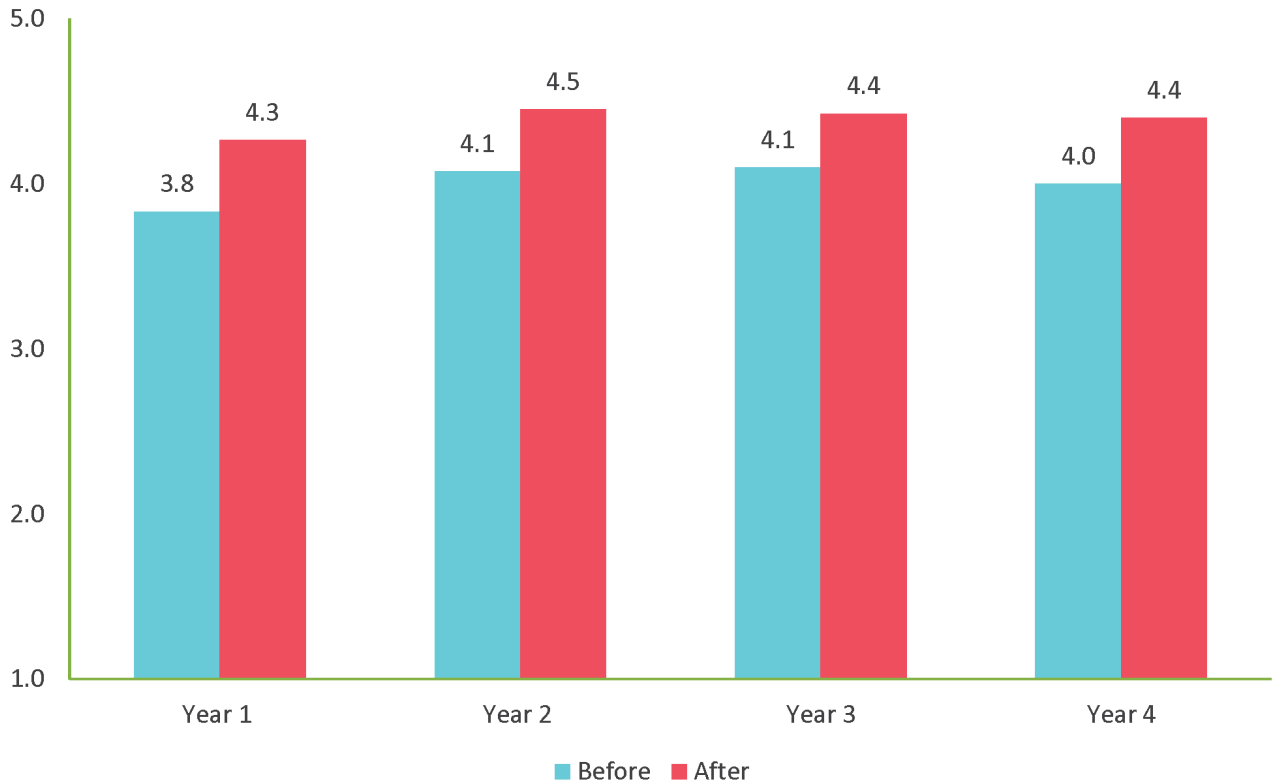
Figure 15: Staff Ratings of School Engagement
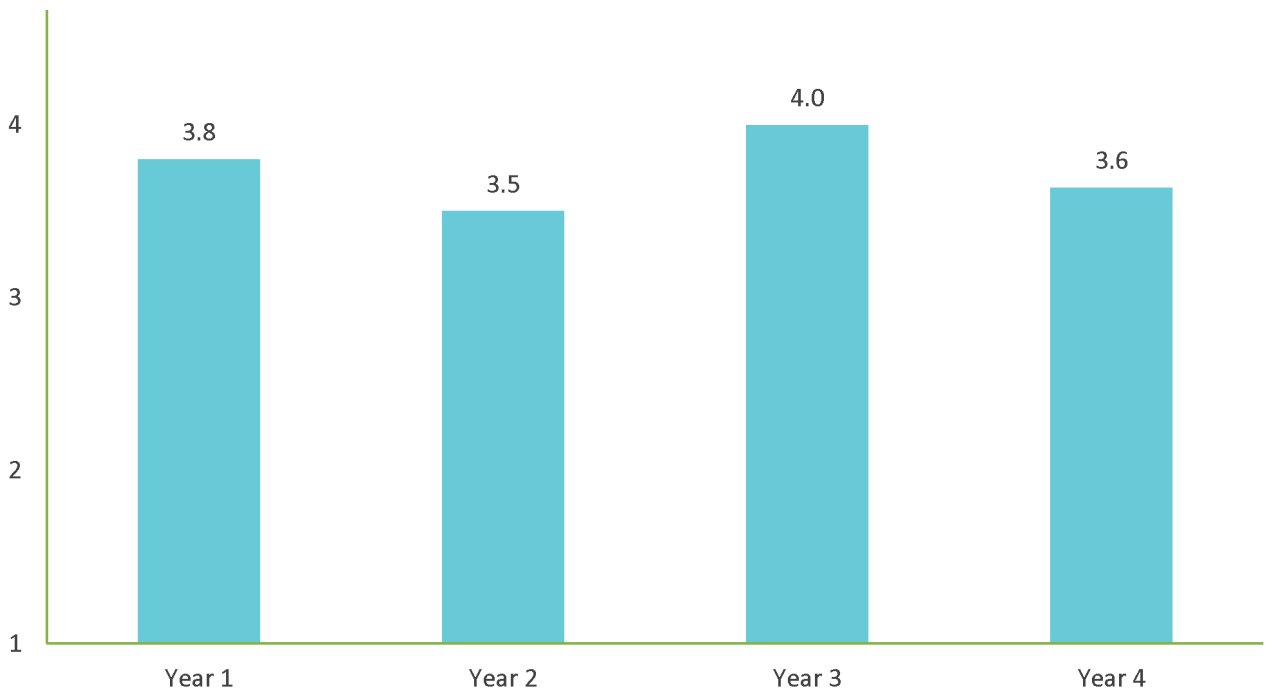
School engagement was the area that staff rated the lowest in all four years. When asked what they considered to be the top three positive outcomes or benefits for girls, in all four years, school engagement was rarely mentioned. When it was mentioned, staff mentioned they saw girls have a greater enthusiasm for school and post-secondary education, and a better and more positive attitude toward school and education.

THE IMPACTS OF SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT: THE QUALITATIVE DATA

The magnitude of the impact that participation in girls programming has on school engagement (attitude, enjoyment, performance) is more difficult to establish through the qualitative data. When asked directly about outcomes, school outcomes were rarely mentioned by girls and parents. This usually required direct questioning about the impact on school, or probing for more details. Despite this, **there are many examples from both girls and parents, which demonstrate that at least for some girls, participation in a girls program had a direct impact on either her attitude towards school or on school enjoyment or performance.** Parents and girls provided some specific examples of positive school outcomes, including the following:

- Improved math ability
- Easier transition to high school
- More engaged in school
- Deals more effectively with conflicts in school
- Attend school more regularly/more willing to go to school
- More focused in school
- Better grades
- Increased interest in science
- Trying out for a school play because of increased confidence
- More willing to ask for help at school
- Increased interest in going to university
- Improved social aspects at school
- Feels smarter

The following quotations exemplify school outcomes described by girls and their parents:

School Engagement/Impacts: Selected Quotations from Girls and Parents (Years 1-3)

"Better at science ... because here we learn the same kind of things as we do at school, and I think if we learn the stuff here then we would know them for later in school." (Girls' interview; YWCA Cambridge)

"I was a very bad kid in school, and now I've got my grades up and my first report card the lowest grade was an E but now they're Cs." (Girls' interview; YWCA Agvvik)

"Je sens qu'elle aime plus son école parce qu'il y a un lien différent entre l'école et le chalet. Il y a plus de motivation pour venir a son école et pour s'intégrer avec les autres filles, elle a plus de motivation." [English translation: "I feel that she likes her school more because there is a different link between the school and the clubhouse. There's more motivation to come to her school and to integrate with the other girls, she has more motivation."] (Parent Focus Group; Action Jeunesse)

In the open-ended question about benefits of the program, included in the Year 4 survey, only a small proportion of the girls reported on positive school-related outcomes. Of the 712 girls that provided responses for that question, only about 1-2% of the girls commented on positive school outcomes. Most of the comments were from girls in the STEM programs — who said that learning about science and math helped them in school. There were a few comments from girls in programs that ran in the schools that being in those programs has helped them to have fun at school or enjoy school more. Others commented that they were more committed to school as a result of participating in the programs. Girls also commented on improved confidence and skills which helped in school (e.g., in dealing with other people).

School Engagement/Impacts: Girls' Quotes Year 4

"I didn't really want to be in school with all my problems. Now I want to continue with everything." (Kwadacha Education Society)

"This program has helped me in focusing more in science and math. I have more knowledge in science because of this program." (Actua; University of Lethbridge)

"I tried harder in school. I was able to appreciate what I already had and make the best of it." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

Parents, in their open-ended responses to the question about top 3 benefits in the Year 4 survey, did not frequently mention school engagement – approximately 5% of parents reported on this outcome in their top three benefits. Nonetheless, there were parents who answered that their daughters had a more positive attitude toward school and were trying harder; as well, a few mentioned that their girls were more able to deal with non-academic issues at school (e.g., social issues, bullying).

School Engagement/Impacts: Parents' Quotes Year 4

"Much better attitude about her school work." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)

"There's been a couple girls at school making fun of her and she is able to see that they have an issue…not her." (YWCA Muskoka)

"Started trying harder in school." (Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation)

RESILIENCE

All of the items measuring the four impact areas described above were combined to create an overall 'resilience' score for both the girls and the parents. Not surprisingly, given the results reported above, **there was a statistically significant gain in resilience overall from before to after in all four years, as reported by both girls and parents.** Please see the figures below.

Figure 16: Total Resilience Scores – Girls' Ratings
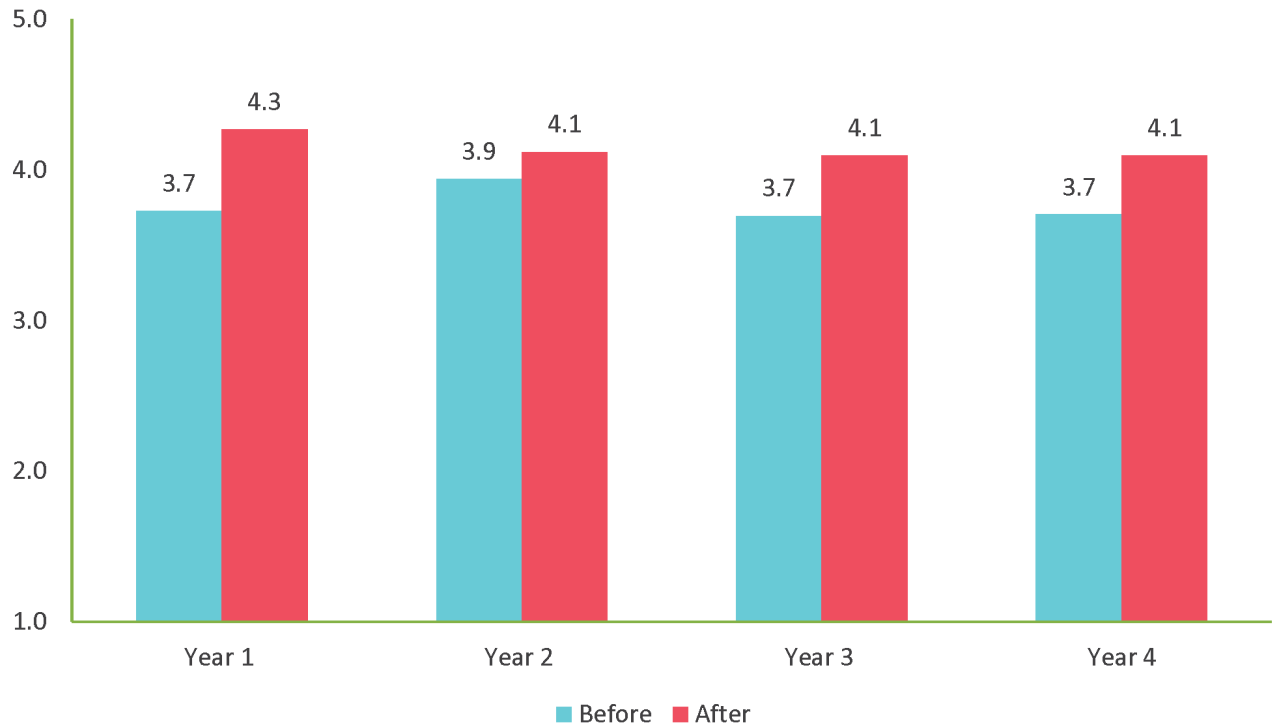
Figure 17: Total Resilience Scores – Parent Ratings
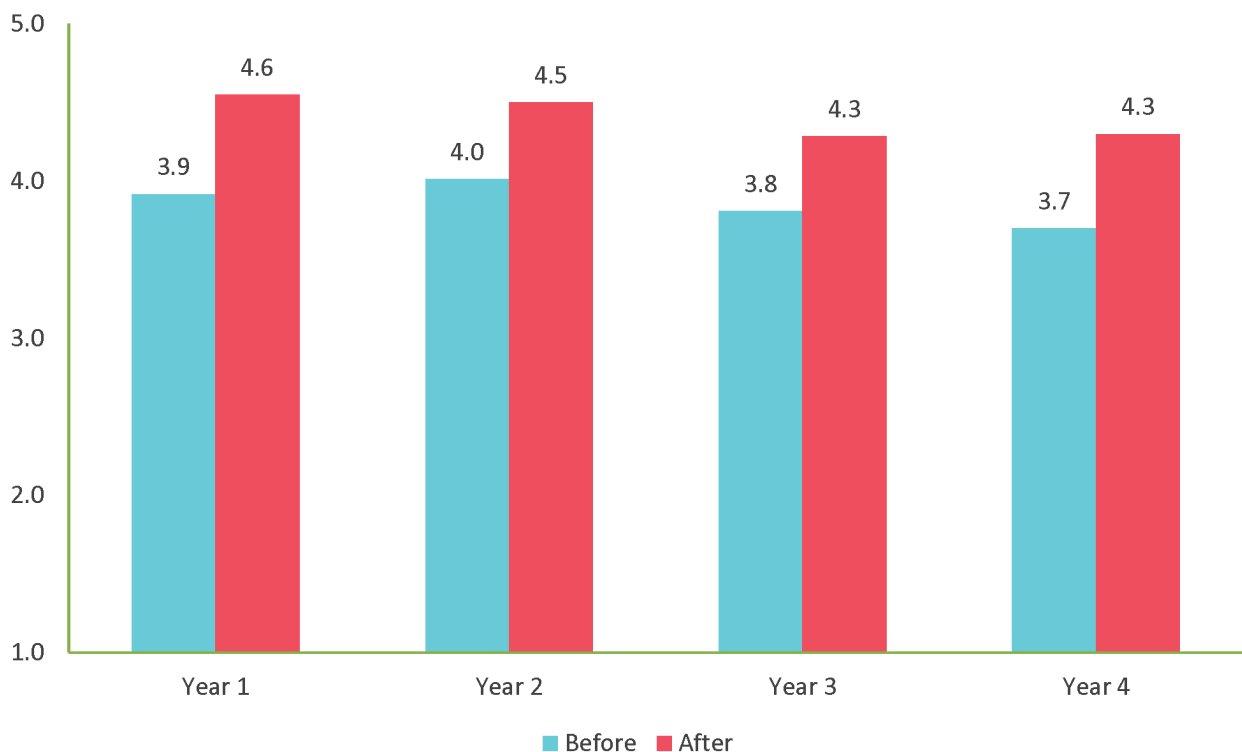
HOW MANY GIRLS REPORTED IMPROVEMENT?

In addition to looking at the differences in average ratings from before to after the program, we also examined the proportion of girls who reported any improvement in the four main areas for after the program. What we found was that in Years 1, 3 and 4, where the same methodology was used, most girls reported at least some improvement in all of the main protective factor areas:

75% or more of the girls reported at least some improvement in overall resilience:

- 62% or more of the girls reported at least some improvement in self-confidence
- 59% or more of the girls reported at least some improvement in critical thinking skills
- 57% or more of the girls reported at least some improvement in connectedness
- 45% or more of the girls reported at least some improvement in school engagement

This is significant since the average ratings in each of the areas was quite high to begin with. That is, the average 'before' ratings in each of the four areas was 3.5 at the lowest. Yet, even given that their 'before' ratings were quite high, the majority of girls noted some improvement in the 'after' ratings.

Many of the girls did provide high 'before' ratings in each of the areas in each of the years, as mentioned above. These girls may likely have been faring well in these areas before entering the programs. We thought it would be interesting to filter out those girls who had high 'before' ratings and just examine the group of girls who gave lower overall average ratings for 'before' in the four main areas – that is, a rating of less than 4 on the 5 point scale. Although we cannot know for sure, it is possible that these are the girls that are more vulnerable or 'at risk'. When we examined only those girls, the proportions of girls reporting some improvement for 'after' increased significantly:

85% or more of these girls (who gave lower ratings for 'before' the program) reported at least some improvement in overall resilience:

- 81% or more of this subset of girls reported at least some improvement in self-confidence
- 74% or more of this subset of girls reported at least some improvement in critical thinking skills
- 77% or more of this subset of girls reported at least some improvement in connectedness
- 71% or more of this subset of girls reported at least some improvement in school engagement

Results for Year 2, where the pre/post methodology were used were also positive, although the proportions were lower. For the group as a whole, in Year 2:

- 60% reported at least some improvement in overall resilience
- 49% reported some improvement in self-confidence
- 51% reported some improvement in critical thinking skills
- 50% reported some improvement in connectedness
- 37% reported some improvement in school engagement

When the subset of girls who had lower pretest averages was examined, again we saw greater proportions reporting some improvement:

- 77% reported at least some improvement in overall resilience
- 68% reported some improvement in self-confidence
- 63% reported some improvement in critical thinking skills
- 72% reported some improvement in connectedness
- 65% reported some improvement in school engagement

SKILL DEVELOPMENT, RELATIONSHIPS/ SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND EMPOWERMENT

In addition to the four main protective factors investigated, there were a number of other protective factor areas that were included in the evaluation. All of these items were included in the parent surveys and most were included in the staff surveys; however, not all were included in the girls' surveys. Programs could choose to select which of these additional items to include in their girls' surveys based upon their programs' goals and objectives. This choice was given because we were cognizant of not making the girls' surveys too long. These other protective factor items fell into three separate categories: skill development, relationships/ social support, and empowerment. Not all of these items, however, were specifically asked about in the qualitative data collected. We did ask about benefits and outcomes, in general, and in the face-to-face interviews/activities we inquired about these items if the girls, parents or staff mentioned them. Therefore, as will be seen, there is less qualitative data reflecting these outcomes.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT: THE SURVEYS

There were six protective factor items that involved skill development. These included:

- Communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Skills to deal with bullying
- Skills in dealing with peer pressure
- Knowing when to seek help or advice
- Knowing where to go for help or advice

Data collected from girls, parents, and staff over the four years shows that all three groups were in agreement that the girls improved in each of these areas.

All of the protective factor items that involved skill development showed significant improvement in all four years, as rated by the girls, parents and staff. Girls and parents rated a statistically significant gain in these areas from before to after the program and staff rated all six areas at least 4.0 on a 5-point scale[24] in all four years.

The three areas, as rated by the girls, that showed the most consistent improvement year to year included:

- Communication skills
- Skills in dealing with peer pressure
- Knowing where to seek help or advice

Girls, parents and staff all rated communication skills among the top three skills improved through the programs.

When staff reported their top three benefits in the staff survey, skill development was mentioned frequently. Communication, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork skills were mentioned by staff in each of the four years. As well, some staff did report on girls learning more skills that enabled them to resist peer pressure and to deal with bullying. Knowing when to seek help/advice or knowing where to go for that help/advice was rarely mentioned among the top three benefits.

More detailed information about the survey ratings, for girls, parents and staff are included in Appendix I*.

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24 For the staff ratings, 4="somewhat improved" and 5= "very much improved".

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

IMPACTS ON RELATIONSHIPS / SOCIAL SUPPORT: THE SURVEYS

There were four items that assessed relationships/social support in the girls' surveys:

- Pro-social relationships (i.e., having friends who encourage and support them)
- Get along well with others own age
- Having caring adults to go to for advice or help
- Feeling close to/supported by family

Girls reported statistically significant improvements in all of the relationship/social support areas in all four years. Girls noted the greatest improvement in getting along well with others their own age.

Parents were only asked one rating item about relationships – the quality of the relationships their daughters had with peers/friends. **In each of the four years parents rated a statistically significant improvement in the quality of the relationships their daughters had with peers/friends.**

With respect to having access to adults, parents were asked if they thought the programs had helped their daughters to have more access to caring and supportive adults. This was not asked in the "before/after" format – rather as a "yes/no/not sure" question:

- Year 1: 89% answered "yes"
- Year 2: 87% answered "yes"
- Year 3: 83% answered "yes"
- Year 4: 86% answered "yes"

For the remaining 11%-17% of the parents who did not answer "yes" in each of the four years, the majority answered "not sure". In all four years, very few answered "no".

Staff surveys also included the four items asked of girls. As with other items, staff were asked to rate the level of improvement in each of these areas. **Staff rated two of the relationship/social support items highest in the four years: getting along better with others and access to caring adults for advice/help. Both items received a rating of at least 4.4 on the 5-point scale in each of the four years.**

The item regarding having pro-social friendships was added to the staff survey in Year 3; therefore, there were no ratings for Years 1 and 2. Relationship items, with the exception of the "family" item, received some of the highest ratings reported by staff. In every year, staff frequently commented on the relationships amongst the girls in the groups as a "top 3" benefit. Staff remarked on the girls being more respectful of one another, more understanding of one another, that they listened to each other more, and that they were more supportive. As well, some staff also remarked on that girls had more access to caring and supportive adults in their lives, because of their involvement in the programs.

More detailed information about the survey ratings, for girls, parents and staff are included in Appendix I*.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

IMPACTS ON EMPOWERMENT: THE SURVEYS

There were two items that assessed the girls' feelings of empowerment:

- Feeling good about being a girl
- Focusing on strengths and skills

The results for the two empowerment items were significant in all four years as rated by both the girls and parents. Staff also rated these two items highly – at least 4.4 on the 5-point scale.

Staff ratings on these two items were very positive in all four years. In Years 1 and 3, in particular, these items demonstrated some of the strongest results reported by the staff – particularly "feel good about being a girl". Although these items were rated highly, when asked to provide the top three benefits of the program in their own words, staff rarely directly commented on these two outcomes. Nonetheless, although reported less frequently than other outcome areas, some staff did report on the girls becoming more empowered in general, more empowered about being a girl, and feeling more confident because they recognized their strengths and skills.

More detailed information about the survey ratings, for girls, parents and staff are included in Appendix I.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT, RELATIONSHIPS/SOCIAL SUPPORT AND EMPOWERMENT: THE QUALITATIVE DATA

The results of the qualitative component of the evaluation clearly show that in addition to the primary protective factors, **participants in the girls' programs are gaining other skills, a sense of empowerment about being a girl, and increased comfort and confidence to express who they really are.** In fact, there are three prominent themes seen in the qualitative data — including both the interviews/focus groups with parents and girls and in the research activities. First, through the groups girls found their voice – that is, the confidence to communicate their points of view and the skills to communicate more effectively. Second, girls gained a strong and positive sense of self and felt more comfortable to be able to express who they really are. And, third, girls learned skills such as problem solving, standing up to peer pressure, dealing with or standing up to bullying, and how to be a good friend.

Other outcomes girls reported included feeling better about being a girl, having more adults (usually the staff or mentors) they trust to go to for help, learning they have strengths and are good at different things, meeting new friends, and increased social skills (e.g., talking to people).

Skill Development, Relationships/Social Support and Empowerment: Selected Quotations from Girls and Parents (Years 1-3)

"Girls talk and say a lot of mean things about each other. Communication is one of the big skills we learned here." (Girls' Research Project; Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

"I'm good at being friends now." (Girls' Interview; YWCA Agviik)

"[The program] gives them value as being a girl ….. For girls in my country all the time they are shy and they are upset why they are girls and society does not give them value as being girls…. And when they come in this program … they grow up with self-esteem and really we are so happy and we appreciate." (Parent focus group; Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)

"She has benefited from the information on drugs and peer pressure. She is more talkative about things bothering her." (Parent survey; Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta)

In the open-ended question about benefits of the program, included in the Year 4 survey, a large number of girls reported on benefits related to skill development, relationships/social support, and empowerment. Although it is difficult to quantify because the girls were often not specific in their responses, a conservative approximation of the proportion of girls that commented on these benefits is 21%. Girls commented on how they learned girls are important, feeling better about being a girl and about girls' potential (approximately 11% of girls). Girls also reported on learning skills that helped them open up and communicate better with others, and that they had learned to support one another (approximately 6% of girls). Some of the girls also reported that they had learned how to stick up for themselves and how to deal with peer pressure (approximately 5% of girls), while some also reported that they had learned how to solve problems or developed coping skills (approximately 5% of girls).

Skill Development, Relationships/Social Support and Empowerment: Girls' Quotes Year 4

"I have learned so much in this program it would be hard to list. I find myself using skills I have learned in this program on a day-to-day basis." (YWCA Yellowknife)

"The program helps me to not be peer pressured and to say 'no'." (Tsleil Waututh Nation/ Musqueam First Nation)

"I learned that it is OKAY to be a girl and that girls really CAN do anything boys can do!" (YWCA Cambridge)

Parents, in their open-ended responses to the question about top three benefits in the Year 4 survey, very frequently cited development of various skills as a result of their daughters' involvement in the program – 31% of all responses given.[25] Skills reported by parents included:

- Getting along better with others/social skills
- Communication skills
- Greater awareness -- of world issues, the world around them, risky behaviours, media
- Assertiveness
- A range of other skills such as self-care, leadership, taking greater responsibility, patience, understanding, organizational skills, problem-solving

Some parents (about 7%) reported on their daughters feeling more empowered or better/happier about being a girl. Parents also reported their daughters having made friends and have access to supportive peers and adults (about 23% of parents). Finally, some parents also reported their daughters feeling more empowered and feeling better about being a girl (7%).

Skill Development, Relationships/Social Support and Empowerment: Parents' Quotes Year 4

"We can see that her maturity level has gone up quite a bit. She is a lot calmer in certain situations...." (Cornerstone Family and Youth Centre)

"Able to communicate better with those around her." (Sarnia-Lambton Rebound)

"She is more of a leader now." (Ininew Friendship Centre)

"Confirmation that being a girl is a great thing and something to be proud of." (YWCA Cambridge)

25 A total of 686 answers were given by 251 parents. Given that parents often reported on more than one skill area, we looked at number of answers given rather than number of parents.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

In addition to the protective factors, the evaluation also investigated outcomes related to specific program goals and objectives. As programs were grouped into general categories based on their approach, we developed questions that, as much as possible, could be used in more than one program. Despite this, there were several items that were specific only to a single program – those items will not be reported on here.

In the sections that follow we report on the survey results for the different groupings of program-specific outcomes. The qualitative data is reported on as a whole after all of the survey results are presented.

ABORIGINAL TEACHINGS/CULTURE: THE SURVEYS

Three items were developed to help capture outcomes for the programs focusing on Aboriginal teachings and culture. The items are shown below; as well, the number of organizations that included these items in their surveys is indicated in the brackets.

- Knowledge of Aboriginal culture and traditions (9 organizations)
- Feeling good about being an Aboriginal girl (9 organizations)
- Participation in Aboriginal ceremonies (9 organizations)

Please note that in Years 1 and 2, there were far fewer organizations that chose to include the participation item and the sample sizes were too small to include in the data analyses. (Please see Appendix J* -- details for both the girls and parent survey results.)

In all four years there was a statistically significant improvement noted in knowledge of Aboriginal culture and teachings by the girls. In three of the four years (Years 1, 3 and 4), significant improvement was found for 'feel good being Aboriginal girl'. Although improvement was seen on this item in Year 2, the change was not statistically significant. The girls did not rate themselves any lower in Year 2 at post-test – rather, their pretest rating was higher than in the other three years and, therefore, there was no statistical difference detected.[26] **In Years 3 and 4, a significant improvement was noted in participation in Aboriginal ceremonies/events.**

Parents reported significant improvements in both knowledge of culture/teachings and in feeling good about being an Aboriginal girl, in all four years. In particular, parents reported large gains in knowledge in all four years; and in Years 1 and 2 parents reported large gains in both areas. Parents, like the girls, gave the highest 'after' rating to the item 'feeling good about being Aboriginal girl'. In Years 2, 3 and 4 an additional question was added to the parent survey – the frequency with which the girls participate in Aboriginal ceremonies and events in their communities. **In Years 2, 3 and 4 when the question was asked, parents reported an increase in participation in Aboriginal ceremonies and events.**

Staff were not asked to rate these items. Rather, they were asked, as explained previously, to describe the top three benefits for the girls in their programs. In that question, a few of the staff did report that the Indigenous girls were learning more about their culture, feeling more proud of their culture, and that their self-identity had improved.

MEDIA LITERACY: THE SURVEYS

Two items were developed to help capture outcomes for the programs focusing on media literacy:

- Questioning images in the media (14 organizations)
- Taking action re: images in the media (4 organizations; Years 2, 3 and 4 only) [27]

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26 It should be noted, as well, that the sample size in Year 2 was much smaller, making it more difficult to detect statistically significant change.

27 There were too few organizations that included this item in Year 1; sample size was too small to run analyses.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

More organizations chose to only include the first item rather than both because while many programs may do a media segment, where they focus on questioning and challenging images in the media, far fewer programs have media as their main focus where they may then challenge the girls to take action on images or content in the media that they do not like. (Please see Appendix J* – for both the girls and parent survey results.)

There was improvement noted in the first item, questioning media content, in all four years; however, the increases were not significant in Year 2. The improvements were statistically significant for Years 1, 3 and 4. The 'taking action' item showed significant improvement in Year 3 only – no significant improvements were noted in Years 2 and 4 (and the sample was too small for Year 1).

In the parent survey, only the item regarding questioning media content was included in all four years. **There was a statistically significant improvement noted by parents, in all four years, with regards to their daughters questioning media content.** In Years 3 and 4, the 'taking action' item was added but the sample sizes were quite small in both years, particularly Year 4 (N=22 and N=5, respectively). Nonetheless, although the sample sizes were small, there was a very significant improvement noted in both years.

As was noted in the previous section, staff was not asked directly about site-specific outcomes. However, they were asked about the top three benefits for the girls in their programs. In that section, in Years 1-3, several staff respondents reported on media literacy skills as a top benefit for girls in their program. This was not mentioned by any staff, in the top three benefits, in Year 4. In Years 1-3, they reported that the program helped girls to build the skills to question media content and to understand the impact of the media on their lives.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY/SPORT AND NUTRITION: THE SURVEYS

Four items were developed to help capture outcomes for programs that focused on physical activity/sport and/or healthy eating/nutrition:

- Knowledge of healthy food choices (5 organizations Years 1-3; 6 in Year 4) [28]
- Making healthy food choices (6 organizations Years 1-3; 7 in Year 4)
- Finding different ways to be physically active (5 organizations Years 1-3; 6 in Year 4)
- Being physically active (5 organizations Years 1-3; 6 in Year 4)

Although there were some organizations that included one or more of these items, only those organizations whose main focus was activity and healthy eating included all four items (four organizations in Years 1-3; 5 in Year 4).

There was significant improvement in three of the four years (Years 1, 3 and 4) on all four items – the healthy food choices and physical activity items. In Year 2 no significant differences were found (although the "knowledge of healthy food choices" did approach statistical significance). The sample sizes in Years 3 and 4 were much higher than in the first two years (more than double); this is mainly because two of the organizations that focused on these outcomes completed many more useable surveys in Years 3 and 4 than they did previously. The late start in Year 1, and the methodological issues in Year 2, resulted in lower sample sizes for these items in those years.

In each of the four years, parents reported very significant gains in both the healthy eating and physical activity items – larger gains than those reported by the girls themselves.

When staff were asked about the top three benefits, in their own words, outcomes specific to physical activity and nutrition were only mentioned a few times; it was not a common response.

Please see Appendix J* for both the girls' and parent survey results.

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28 One of the four mentoring-only grantees, present in the evaluation for Year 4 only, chose to include these four items in their surveys.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH: THE SURVEYS

There were four items developed to assess STEM outcomes:

- Interest in STEM in general (8 organizations)
- Interest in STEM careers (7 organizations)
- Interest in post-secondary education (7 organizations)
- Interest in other STEM camps and activities (8 organizations)

All seven program sites that had STEM as a focus included these four items in their surveys. As well, one organization that focused on Aboriginal teachings and culture also included the post-secondary education item in their surveys. Finally, one organization that included STEM as part of their programming included just the first item in their surveys.

In Year 2, because many of the pre-tests could not be used because they were not completed on time, the sample ended up consisting of only one organization; therefore, STEM outcomes were not reported for the girls in that year. In Year 1, the sample size was quite small for the 'careers' item and the post-secondary item. In Years 3 and 4, the sample sizes were larger and representative of the organizations focusing on STEM outcomes. **Results from the girls for each of the four STEM items, for Years 3 and 4, were significant.** Interest in post-secondary education was very high to begin with, but there was still a significant improvement discovered in both those years.

When the Aboriginal-focused program was removed from the analyses in Year 3, the results on the 'post-secondary' item changed only marginally in Year 3 and remained virtually the same in Year 4.

Parents were not asked about STEM camps or activities. Additionally, in Year 2 the sample size was too small to include for the items regarding careers and post-secondary education. **In each of the four years parents reported a very significant increase in their daughters' interest in STEM in general. In Years 1, 3 and 4 parents also reported on significant increases in their daughters' interest in STEM-related careers. Although the change was smaller, parents also reported greater interest in post-secondary education in Years 1, 3 and 4.**

As with the girls' Year 3 analyses, for the parent analyses we also examined the 'post-secondary' item solely for those programs focused on STEM (i.e., the Aboriginal-focused organization was excluded from the analyses). As with the girls, this did not change the averages significantly in either Year 3 nor in Year 4.

In each of the four years staff reported on STEM outcomes when reporting on the top three benefits for the girls. Staff reported that the girls' confidence in STEM had improved, as they were able to problem-solve during their hands-on experiments. Additionally, their enthusiasm and interest in STEM had grown, and girls were learning that science can be fun.

Please see Appendix J* for both the girls' and parent survey results.

LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT: THE SURVEYS

Programs that were grouped in 'Leadership and Empowerment' had diverse foci. Some of those programs included program objectives that were covered in previous sections (e.g., media literacy, physical activity). There were, however, two groupings of items that we developed around two common themes: one theme focused on safety and healthy relationships and the other focused on leadership, decision-making and coping skills.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

SAFETY, VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

A number of organizations included program objectives centred on safety, preventing violence, and improving the girls' ability to recognize healthy relationships. To that end, we developed five items to assess these program objectives, four dealing with safety and violence prevention, and one assessing healthy relationships. These items are shown below; the number of organizations that included these in their surveys is indicated in brackets:

- Awareness of safety issues and how to stay safe (11 organizations in Years 1-3; 13 in Year 4) [29]

- Feeling safe in community (7 organizations in Years 1-3; 9 in Year 4)

- Knowing how to protect self from violence (8 organizations in Years 1-3; 10 in Year 4)

- Aware of how to prevent violence among friends or others my age (6 organizations in Years 1-3; 8 in Year 4)

- Awareness of elements of a healthy relationship, or what 'healthy relationship' means (4 organizations in Years 1-3; 5 in Year 4)

In Years 1, 3 and 4, all four items dealing with safety and preventing violence showed a significant improvement as rated by the girls. In Year 2, 'know how to protect self' showed a significant improvement and the improvement shown for 'more aware of safety' approached statistical significance. The other two items were not significant in Year 2. **Over the four years, the largest impacts noted were for increased awareness around safety issues and knowing how to protect self.** The smallest was seen in 'feeling safe in the community' – which has larger contextual issues, of course, and may be a more difficult area to show change.

The questions for the parent survey differed somewhat than those asked of the girls. Parents, like the girls, were asked about safety awareness and knowing how to protect self, but they were not asked if the girls felt safe in the community, nor if they felt their daughters could prevent violence among friends/peers. Rather, parents were asked to what extent they felt their daughters were prepared to defend themselves.

In all four years parents reported significant improvements or gains in safety awareness and being prepared to defend themselves. As with other outcomes, parents tended to rate the girls lower than the girls themselves did for 'before' and 'after'.

Understanding the elements of a healthy relationship, and what a healthy relationship is, was also assessed with one item that was included in both the girls' and parent surveys. **In Years 1, 3 and 4 girls reported significant gains in knowledge of the elements of a healthy relationship**; in Year 2 there was improvement, but it was not significant. In Year 3, this item showed the single largest gain than any other item or scale. **Parents also reported significant improvement in knowledge of healthy relationships in all four years.**

When asked to comment on the top three benefits, in their own words, staff did not commonly report on these items. There was mention about increased safety awareness, gaining knowledge about how to avoid risky situations, and in knowing what a healthy relationship was versus an unhealthy relationship.

Please see Appendix J* for both the girls' and parent survey results.

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29 The change in the number of organizations was due to the 4 mentoring-only grantees added in Year 4.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING AND COPING SKILLS

Two of the organizations had similar goals around improved leadership, decision-making and coping skills. Three items were used to assess leadership skills, three to assess decision-making skills, and one to assess coping skills. Because there were three items in each of the first two areas, an average score was calculated across all three items.[30] The results are only for the girls, and only in Year 3. The sample was too small for the girls in Years 1 and 2, and for the parents in all four years. In Year 3, although only two organizations included these items, we had a sizeable enough sample (from the girls) to include results here (i.e., more than 100 cases in each of these three areas). Unfortunately, surveys were not received from one of the two organizations in Year 4, and, therefore, the sample size was too small.

Results revealed there was improvement in all three areas – and these improvements were statistically significant. A few staff in each year also noted improvements in leadership and decision-making skills when they were asked to report on their top three benefits for the girls in their programs. (Please see Appendix J* detailed results on leadership, decision-making and coping skills items.)

PROGRAM SPECIFIC OUTCOMES: THE QUALITATIVE DATA

While the qualitative evaluation did not explore in detail the specific outcomes unique to each program, we did clearly hear in the site visits that girls in media programs, STEM programs, leadership and empowerment programs, programs focused on Aboriginal or Indigenous culture, and physical activity and healthy eating programs reported gaining skills and outcomes related to these areas.

In the media programs and other programs that included some activities or discussions on media, girls and their parents often reported that they had learned about photo-shopping or how the media distorts how women and girls really look. They also reported learning about social media and how to use it appropriately and safely.

In programs that focused on Indigenous culture and traditions, girls and their parents often reported that they had gained knowledge about their culture and its traditions. They also reported that they felt more proud or special as a result of the Indigenous focus and had gained more self-awareness. Some parents also reported that they were learning about their culture through the knowledge their daughters brought home.

Across the STEM programs girls and their parents reported that girls learned more about science, that science can be fun, and some reported improvements in school as a result. They also learned that women can pursue careers in science, and what those careers look like. Girls in those programs meet women who are accomplished in their science careers; thus, the girls gain role models to help them pursue careers that they may not have considered before being in the programs.

Many programs had girls reporting learning about different stereotypes (e.g., body image, what girls can and cannot do, about Indigenous people, and about women in science) and how these are not true. They also reported improvements in body image and increased comfort with sports and physical activity. They reported learning to deal with stress, safety skills, about healthy relationships, and to stand up to others and for their rights.

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30 Cronbach's alpha was run to see if the three items demonstrated internal consistency (i.e., hung together as a scale) and the criteria for acceptance was fulfilled (alpha=.7 or greater) for both the leadership and decision-making items.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

Program-Specific Outcomes: Selected Quotations from Girls, Parents and Staff:

"Going to girls' group makes me feel proud to be Native." (Research Activity; Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"I think it was good because we saw other women in science and it made you think you can do it too. It's not all just all guys in science." (Research Activity; Actua; University of Lethbridge)

"Being in Media Smarts has helped me to feel that it is good to be different. We don't have to look like models on TV. Now, after the program, when I watch TV I notice how real and not real the TV shows are." (Research Activity; Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta)

"I see she has a lot of pride in her culture and who she is ...." (Parent focus group; Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"I think it just reinforces that science is an actual career choice, where her only role model before was Lisa Simpson. Now I think for her, going into university studying sciences is a no-brainer, if she wants to she can. So it reinforced it." (Parent focus group; ACTUA Destination Exploration)

The open-ended questions in the Year 4 girls' survey about benefits, outcomes and learnings yielded rich information about some of the program specific outcomes. Many of the girls from the Indigenous program (about 58 girls or approximately 8%) talked about what they had learned about their culture and how that was important to them. Girls also reported on making healthier choices – physically as well as more responsible choices in terms of safety (approximately 7%). Most of the girls who were in STEM-focused programs reported learning more about science, that science can be fun, that it piqued their interest in STEM-related careers, they learned about the contributions women scientists had made and that girls and women are equally capable of STEM. Some girls also reported on developing social skills, respect, and learning about healthy relationships (approximately 13% of the girls). Finally, a small proportion of girls also reported on learning about the media (approximately 1% of the girls).

Program-Specific Outcomes: Girls' Quotes Year 4

"I learned not to be afraid to tell people I'm Aboriginal." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"Being in this program has helped me by me making better food choices." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

"I have learned many things in science and before taking this program I did not have much interest in science but now I do." (Actua: University of Lethbridge)

"I have ... learned about how to analyze media like magazines, online, social media, etc.." (North York Community House)

In the open-ended question about the top three benefits in the Year 4 survey, parents were less likely than the girls to report on program-specific outcomes. **Approximately 8-10% of all parent responses included comments specific to the foci of the various programs**: learning more Indigenous culture and feeling more pride in being Aboriginal, commenting more about images in media, eating healthier and being more active, increased interest and engagement in STEM, having positive female role models in STEM, and more awareness and interest in STEM-related careers. Other program-specific learnings and skills reported by parents included the development of cooking skills, more care given to personal hygiene, and improved body image.

Program-Specific Outcomes: Parents' Quotes Year 4

"An awareness and understanding of more STEM careers. Meeting positive role models in STEM careers." (SuperNOVA)

"She's proud of who she is and her culture." (Ininew Friendship Centre)

"Being more healthy, thinking of eating and being healthy as a way of life, and not only on diet and weight." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

HOW GIRLS DESCRIBE OUTCOMES

In 17 of the 26 site visits conducted, girls participated in an activity where they were asked to state three words to describe themselves as a result of their participation in the programs. A total of 213 girls participated in this activity. The words were all entered into a Word Cloud generator and results can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 18: Word Cloud – Words Girls Use to Describe Themselves as a Result of Program Participation
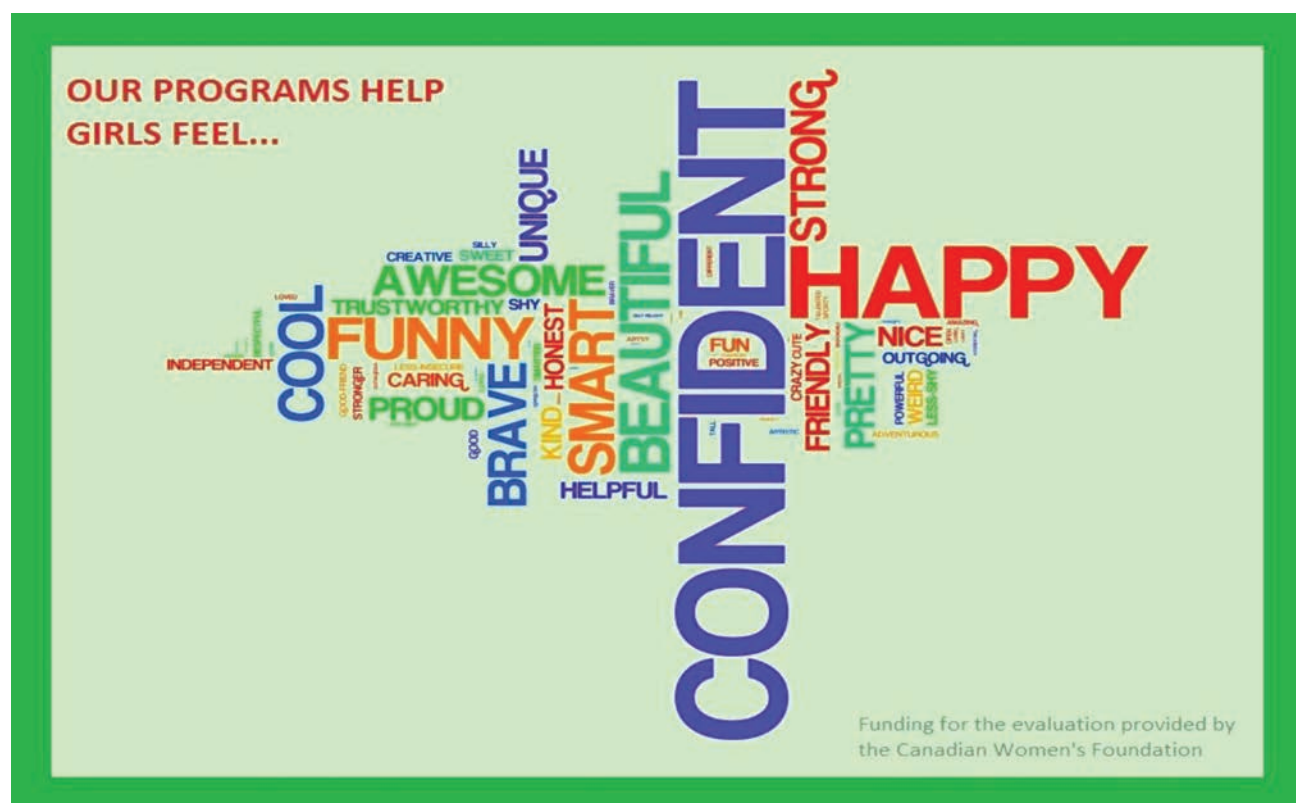
A detailed analysis (including overall content analysis for all programs and for each program separately), showed that there were some words that were quite prominent across a number of programs. The chart below outlines those descriptors that were reported by at least 10% of girls. **As seen in the chart, the two main words girls used to describe themselves as a result of their participation in the programs were 'confident' and 'happy'**, mentioned by 60 and 55 girls, respectively. While 'confident' was mentioned slightly more often than 'happy', 'happy' was mentioned in more programs (14 as compared to 11).

Figure 19: Words Girls Use to Describe Themselves as a Result of Program Participation

Word	# of girls	# of programs
confident	60	11
happy	55	14
pretty/beautiful	45	9
fun/funny	38	6
unique/not normal/weird	33	9
smart/intelligent	32	11
brave/less afraid	29	10
cool/chill	26	7
nice/kind	25	8

■ # of girls
■ # of programs
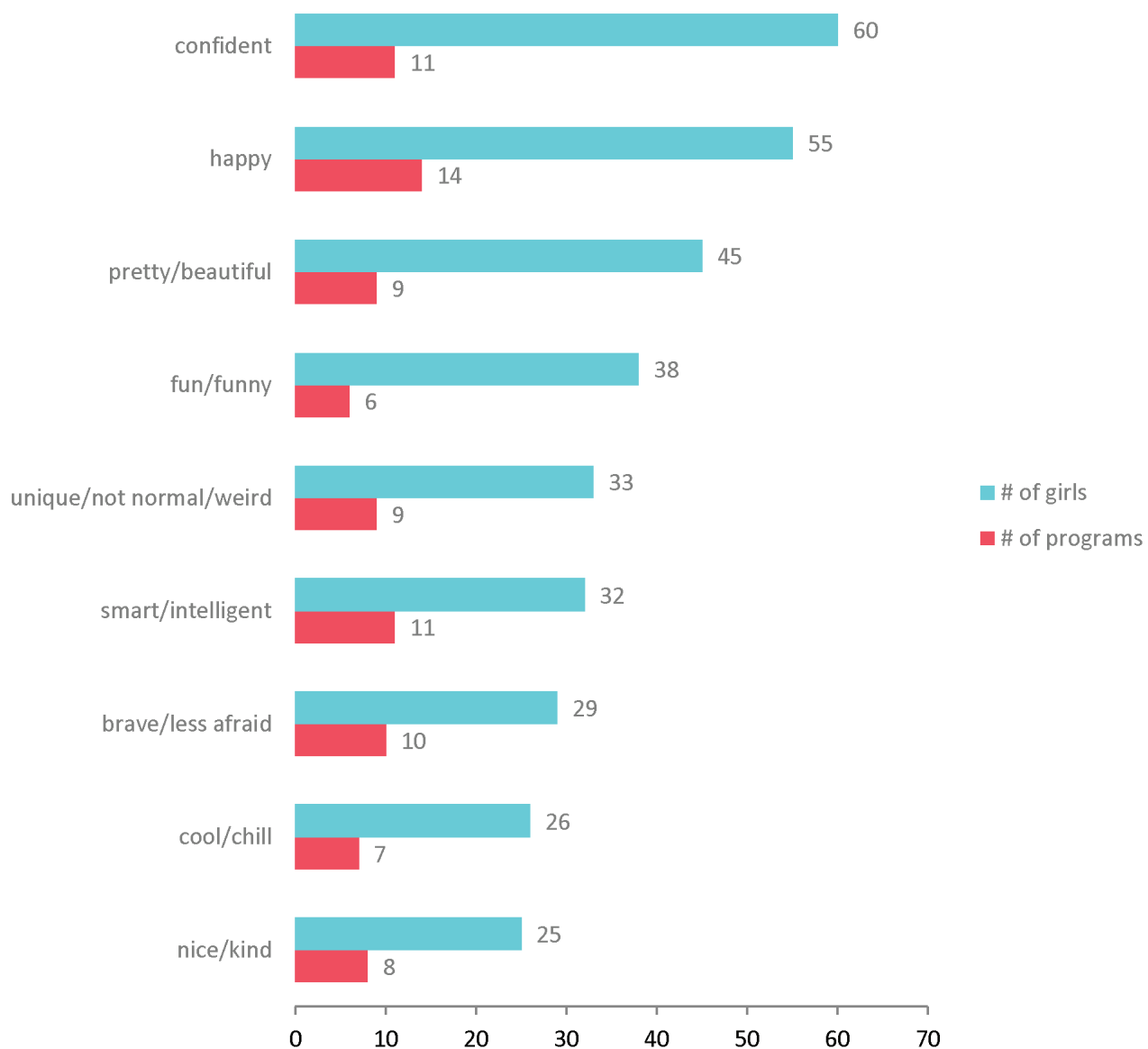
SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

SELF-CONFIDENCE

In each of the four years, self-confidence was the area that showed greatest improvement among the girls. This improvement in self-confidence was evident in the survey results from each year, as reported by girls, parents and staff. Girls, parents and staff all reported improvements in confidence when asked for the top three benefits from the program: staff in all four years and girls and parents in Year 4. From the qualitative data collected girls reported feeling that their confidence had been enhanced, that they were less shy and more outgoing, that they had found their voice, and they were more aware of their abilities and skills. Parents' comments from interviews and focus groups conducted were very similar to those of the girls.

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Girls and parents also reported significant gains in critical thinking skills in all four years. Staff also rated improvement in this area, although it was not among the highest ratings given by staff to improvements they noted in the girls. This was a more difficult outcome for the girls to articulate over the years, but there were definite examples provided by girls, and parents, about how these skills had improved. Girls reported that through media literacy components in the programs, their critical thinking skills had improved. Through discussions about bullying and relationships, girls learned how to think about how others may be feeling and about how to have supportive and equitable relationships. Girls learned to think about the consequences of their behaviour and to think critically about the role of women in our society. In some programs girls' learned specific skills like STAR (stop, think, act and review) or WITS (walk away, ignore, talk it out and seek help). Parents, as well, provided examples of skills developed by their daughters – improved problem-solving, thinking more broadly and critically about issues, and looking at media more critically. Staff reported on different activities they did with the girls to increase these skills and felt that the girls' abilities to think more critically were improved.

CONNECTEDNESS

In all four years girls and parents reported significant improvement in connectedness to others. In all years, staff rated improvement in this area very highly. In response to the question about top three benefits for girls, staff reported connectedness as a benefit almost as frequently as self-confidence and commented on the girls making friends, being supportive and respectful of one another, less 'cliqueness' as girls got to know one another, an increased sense of belonging, and being more accepting of one another. Girls and parents when asked about the top three benefits of the program in the Year 4 surveys frequently reported connectedness as a positive outcome. This was also a prominent theme in the qualitative data collected from girls in Years 1-3. Girls described feeling closer to the group, making new friends, and feeling very comfortable with the girls and staff in the groups. Parents reported that the programs do a good job of helping girls to feel like they belong. They also reported that their daughters had more friendships and were more connected to the community – this connectedness theme was especially prominent in the programs focused on Aboriginal/Inuit content. Parents reported that the programs do a good job of helping girls to feel like they belong. Their daughters were socializing with girls they would not normally socialize with and were learning to be more accepting of others.

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Considering that improved school engagement was not an expressed goal of many of the programs, it is significant that the results still showed positive outcomes in this area, although they were not as strong as for the other protective factors. Referring back to our diagram in Figure 1, this may well be because other outcomes feed into improved school engagement. That is, improved self-confidence, skill development, and connectedness help the girls to be more engaged in school. There was a statistically significant improvement noted, by the girls, in Years 1, 3 and 4, but not in Year 2. [31] Parents reported significant improvement in all four years, with post-test scores that were higher than the girls; parents reported a larger impact in this area than did the girls themselves. School engagement was the area that staff rated the lowest in all four years and was rarely mentioned in the top three benefits of the programs. When it was reported, staff mentioned a greater enthusiasm for school and post-secondary education, and a better and more positive attitude toward school and learning. When girls and parents were asked about outcomes and benefits of the programs, in the qualitative data collected, school outcomes was rarely mentioned unless interviewers probed for more information or directly asked about school impacts. Despite this, parents and girls did provide examples of how the programs had helped: more engaged/more positive attitude towards school, dealing more effectively with conflicts in school, more focused in school, more willing to ask for help, improved social relations at school, and better grades.

OVERALL RESILIENCE AND PROPORTION OF GIRLS REPORTING IMPROVEMENT

Each of the items assessing the four main protective factors was summed to create an overall 'resilience' score – for both the girls and the parents. Given the results for each of the main protective factors reported above, it is not surprising that in all four years there was a statistically significant improvement in resilience from before to after the programs as rated by both the girls and parents. We also looked at the proportion of girls reporting improvement after the program. In Years 1, 3 and 4, where the same methodology was used, most girls reported some improvement. That is, 75% or more of the girls reported at least some improvement in overall resilience. Given that girls' 'before' ratings were fairly high to begin with, this is significant. When girls who rated themselves lower in their 'before' ratings were examined on their own we found that 85% or more of the girls reported improvement in resilience in Years 1, 3 and 4.

OTHER SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNINGS

In addition to the four main protective factor areas queried in the evaluation, program sites could also choose to evaluate other outcome areas that were relevant to their programs. These other skill development areas and learnings were evaluated in some, but not all programs. Statistically significant improvements were noted for both the girls and parents, in all four years in the following areas:

- **Skill development**: communication skills, problem-solving skills, skills in dealing with peer pressure, skills in dealing with bullying, and knowing when and where to seek help/advice. Girls, parents and staff all rated communication skills among the top three skills improved through the programs.

- **Relationships and social support**: supportive and pro-social relationships with friends and peers, getting along better with others their own age, having adults to go to for help or advice and feeling closer to/ supported by family. Girls noted the greatest improvement in getting along well with others their own age.

- **Empowerment**: focused on strengths and skills and feeling good about being a girl. Girls noted the greatest improvement in feeling good about being a girl.

Staff also rated these elements highly when asked to rate changes in the girls overall. Staff, in particular, rated relationships and empowerment items favourably, and commented often on the connectedness and friendships built in the groups.

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31 Year 2 results were not as strong as results in Years 1 and 2. As discussed in the Methodology section in Chapter 1, the reasons for this are because pre-test and post-test surveys were used in most program sites in that year, rather than the retrospective post-test survey used in Years 1 and 3. It is suspected that girls over-inflated their pre-test ratings in the pre-test/post-test design; anecdotal evidence from staff, as well as other research, indicates that this may be the case. Higher pre-test ratings in Year 2 meant there was less room for improvement to be noted at post-test.

The results from the qualitative data collected clearly show that girls are gaining skills, a sense of empowerment about being a girl, and increased comfort and confidence to express who they really are. The main themes that emerged were that girls find their voice, gain a strong positive sense of self, and feel more comfortable expressing who they are. Girls also learn life skills: problem-solving, dealing with bullying, peer pressure, and how to be a good friend. Their social support is boosted by the friendships they form and having adults they can go to for support and help, if needed. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected in Years 1 to 3 were reiterated in the open-ended questions included in the girls' survey in Year 4.

In the survey and qualitative data collected in site visits, girls and parents were also asked about program-specific impacts. In as much as possible, items were developed that could be used in more than one program that had similar program goals. There were some items that were developed for individual programs, but through the program logic models we tried to identify as many commonalities as possible and develop items around those common goals. In the end, six groupings of items were developed based upon the program approach (Aboriginal culture and teachings, media literacy, physical activity/sport and healthy eating, STEM, and leadership and empowerment). The leadership and empowerment approach, however, was broken out into two groupings: safety, violence prevention and healthy relationships, and leadership, decision-making and coping skills. There were improvements noted in the survey data, in greater and lesser degrees, in each of the program specific areas. For example, girls in the Aboriginal-focused programs reported on learning more about their culture, having a better sense of identity and feeling more pride in their culture. Girls from programs focused on media talked about what they had learned about how images in the media are altered and how that had an impact on self-confidence and body image. Girls in STEM programs reported that it was good to have role models – to see women in science in these programs. In the physical activity and healthy eating programs, girls reported learning more about healthy food choices, choosing healthy food options more frequently, and being more active. Qualitative data collected in Years 1 through 3 support the survey results: girls and parents did report on positive outcomes and skills related to the various program approaches.

HOW GIRLS DESCRIBE OUTCOMES

In an activity conducted at many of the site visits, girls were asked to state three words to describe themselves as a result of their participation in the programs. Some words emerged prominently in those remarks: confident, happy, beautiful, fun or funny, unique and smart.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the survey data and the qualitative data, collected from girls, parents and staff, that the girls' programs have significant benefits for the girls. Self-confidence, connectedness and social support, and skills' development are the areas that show the greatest improvements as a result of program participation.

CHAPTER **3**

CRITICAL
PROGRAM
ELEMENTS

OVERVIEW

In this chapter we review the key programming, process and structural elements that led to the outcomes and benefits reported on in Chapter 2. That is,

- How did best practices and relationships affect outcomes observed?

- What other factors affected the outcomes observed? How did program approach, amount of time in the programs, age and other factors affect outcomes?

- What did girls, parents and staff see as critical components of these programs?

HOW BEST PRACTICES AND RELATIONSHIPS AFFECT OUTCOMES

In all four years correlations were run between post-resilience scores and best practice items. As well, in Years 3 and 4 further analyses were run to determine how best practices predict post-resilience scores.[32] In each year the strength of the relationship between individual best practice items and resilience scores varied somewhat. Nevertheless, there were several best practices that had the most positive relationship with resilience scores over the four years. These included:

- **An emotionally safe environment** – group was a place where the girls felt comfortable talking, listening and sharing ideas, and where people trusted one another

- **Positive environment** – group was a happy and positive place

- **Good variety/holistic** – good range or variety of things to do or topics covered

- **Staff** – instructors made them feel comfortable in sharing what they wanted to do or did not want to do

In Years 2, 3 and 4 correlations were run between post-resilience scores and the relationship items. As mentioned previously the relationship items were added in to the surveys later in the year in Year 2 and, therefore, not all organizations completed surveys with these items (13 organizations in total); the sample for that year does not represent all organizations. The samples in Years 3 and 4, however, were complete. As well, in Years 3 and 4 further analyses were run, as with the best practices, to determine how the relationship items predict post-resilience scores.[33]

What we found was that three relationship items had the strongest association with post-resilience scores:

- **Instructors make me feel good about myself**

- **I learned from the instructors**

- **I look up to the instructors**

When we examined the best practice average score and the instructor-relationship average score in relation to predicting post-resilience scores, **we found that the best practice average score was more predictive of positive outcomes (i.e., post-resilience scores) than the instructor-relationship average score.** Although best practices appear to be more influential in producing positive outcomes for the girls, instructors are key to implementing the best practices and in creating an emotionally safe, positive environment where girls feel comfortable sharing what they want to do.

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32 We are referring here to regression analyses which we ran in both Years 3 and 4. A regression analyses looks at the impact that a number of independent variables – in this case, each of the best practices – has on the dependent variable, in this case, resilience. That is, how well do the best practice ratings explain girls' resilience ratings?

33 For this analysis we included only the girls in the 'regular' group because girls in mentoring were asked about the relationship with their mentors, while the girls in the regular groups were asked about their relationships with the program instructors. Results on the mentor-mentee relationship items are included in Chapter 4.

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PROGRAMMING ELEMENTS AND CRITICAL COMPONENTS: WHAT FACTORS AFFECTED OUTCOMES?

This section will report on what girls, parents and staff viewed as critical components in the girls programs. That is, those components that were necessary to have in place in order to produce the positive outcomes or benefits for the girls. The results related to critical components were derived from both survey results and the qualitative data collected in interviews and focus groups. As well, we examined different factors to see which ones affected outcomes for the girls, including: program approach, amount of time spent in the programs, length of program sessions, and girls' age.

FACTORS AFFECTING OUTCOME RESULTS

PROGRAM APPROACH

Across the four years, we examined how outcomes varied based on the type of program the girls were attending. As part of the Girls' Fund, organizations selected one of five program approaches to focus on within their program development and delivery. We used these program approaches to categorize the girls into five groups:

- Leadership and empowerment
- Aboriginal/Inuit culture and teaching
- Physical activity/sport and healthy eating
- STEM
- Media literacy

Although programs were grouped in this way, some of them also included elements of more than one approach. For example, some programs grouped into 'leadership and empowerment' included a focus on media literacy or on activity and nutrition. As well, although the other four approaches were, perhaps, more single-minded in their focus, 'leadership and empowerment' programs often had varied content with multiple foci.

Further, although programs may be grouped together under a certain approach, those programs could be quite different in terms of ideology, staff, length of program or the types of girls they served. Finally, the number of useable surveys completed by organizations varied year to year, which affected sample sizes in each of these categories each year and also had an impact on results. For example, in Year 1, the sample size was influenced by our late start, and some programs had fewer surveys for that year than others. In Year 2, many programs' surveys could not be used because they were not completed in time.

These caveats are important when trying to decipher the impact that a program approach may have had on results. In Years 1 and 2, there seemed to be a pattern where girls in the media-focused programs showed greater gains in resilience than did girls from other approaches. In Year 3, girls in the physical activity and healthy eating programs showed the greatest gains (followed by girls in media-focused programs). In Year 4, girls in the physical activity and healthy eating and girls in the media programs showed the greatest gains. The shift toward greater gains for the physical activity and healthy eating programs in Years 3 and 4 was most likely related to the sample size from two key organizations that have physical activity and nutrition as their main focus. That is, their samples were much smaller in Years 1 and 2; in Years 3 and 4 we received many more surveys from these two organizations.

Media-focused programs showed some of the highest gains in each of the four years. Yet it is not clear if it is the media focus in general, the way in which these particular organizations delivered the media programs specifically, or more generally if it was the way in which these organizations worked with the girls. When we looked at ALL programs that had at least some focus on media literacy – that is, outcomes around media literacy were included in their program logic models and/or they opted to include the media literacy question in their surveys – there was no difference in post-resilience outcomes between programs that had a media literacy focus and those that did not. For that reason it is difficult to know if the better outcomes experienced for those programs categorized as a media approach is because the focus is almost exclusively on media OR if it is because of the way in which those programs operate.

It is also important to note that although there were significant differences by program approach in each of the four years, <u>the differences were not large.</u> We suspect that there were **other elements or components that were key to producing outcomes, rather than program approach.** When we looked at which organizations produced the best outcomes, there were programs from each of the five approaches. This is not to say that program approach and ideology do not matter; rather, we believe that **each program approach has its merits and is responding to the needs of each particular community it serves.** Many of the organizations that had the best outcomes also had the highest ratings on best practices and on the relationship items.

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT IN PROGRAM

In each of the four years we examined the impact that total time spent in the program had on outcomes. Total time spent in the program was categorized in 10-hour increments (less than 10, 10–20, 20–30, 30–40, and 40+ hours). **Results by total time spent in the programs varied from year to year; no clear pattern emerged.** In Year 1, there was no difference by time category on resilience overall, nor for confidence, connectedness or critical thinking skills, but there was a difference found for school engagement. The girls spending 30–40 hours in programs reported the greatest gain in school engagement. In Year 2, no differences were found for resilience overall, nor for any of the main protective factors.

In Years 3 and 4 we found differences for resilience overall, as well as for some of the main protective factor areas. In both of those years we found some evidence that girls in the lowest time category (10 hours or less) made some of the largest gains, as did girls with more time spent in the programs (30 or more hours). **There were also mixed results with respect to the length of program sessions.** In Years 3 and 4 we found that programs whose sessions were 2-3 hours in length showed the greatest overall change from before to after in their resilience scores. In Year 1 programs whose sessions were either 1-2 or 2-3 hours showed the largest overall change. But, in Year 2, it was programs whose sessions were less than 1 hour in length that showed the largest overall change. **The differences found – for both total time spent in program, and in program session length - were not large.**

NEW OR RETURNING

In Years 2-4 there was no difference between the girls who were reported to be new to the program, and those who had been in the program before ('returning') in the amount of change from before to after the program, nor in post resilience scores. In Year 1 there was no difference in the amount of change in resilience, but the new girls had a slightly higher post-resilience score than did girls who had been in the program before.

AGE OF THE GIRLS

In all four years there was no difference in the ***degree of change*** in resilience scores (from before to after) between older girls (12 and up) and younger girls (11 and younger). However, in all four years, the post-resilience scores were lower for the older girls than the younger girls. **Older girls rated themselves lower for before and after the program than did younger girls - although the overall change was no different between the two groups.**

With respect to all of the factors examined – program approach, total amount of time spent in the program, if girls were new to the program or not, or the age of the girls – few differences were found in change overall in resilience scores, nor in post-resilience scores. We suspect there are other variables that are important to producing positive outcomes and that these factors have only have small impacts on the positive outcomes found. **That is, when programs are strong – good curricula, the presence of best practices, and a good relationship between staff and the girls – they can have positive outcomes**.

PARENT AND STAFF RANKINGS OF CRITICAL COMPONENTS

In all four years, both parents and staff ranked a number of critical components in terms of their importance in producing the positive outcomes they saw in the girls. The list of critical components was developed based on data collected in the previous phase of the Girls' Fund (2009-2012), and was supported by the qualitative data collected in the current phase.

The critical components both parents and staff were asked to rank in order of importance were:

- Program staff/facilitators
- Program activities
- Program being girls-only
- The supportive environment
- Safe environment where girls can openly share thoughts/feelings
- The social aspects of the program (e.g., having fun, meeting friends)
- The skills gained or things learned through the program

In all four years, when parents and staff were asked to rank these elements, they ranked the following three items as most important:

- Program staff/facilitators
- Safe environment where girls can openly share thoughts/feelings
- Program being girls-only

While the order of importance varied from year-to-year, for both parents and staff, these components were consistently identified as the most important elements by parents in all years.

PARENT AND STAFF RANKINGS OF MOST CRITICAL PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Critical Element	Parents - % Ranking Item #1				Staff - % Ranking Item #1			
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Safe and Comfortable Environment	**30%**	**35%**	23%	25%	**33%**	**38%**	28%	12%
Girls-only	28%	28%	29%	**29%**	28%	16%	**34%**	24%
Program staff	27%	32%	**36%**	29%	22%	16%	11%	**28%**

The table above shows the proportion of parents and staff who ranked each item as most important in producing the positive outcomes and benefits for the girls. In Years 1 and 2, the safe and comfortable environment was ranked #1 by the greatest proportion of the sample for both parents and staff. In Year 3, parents ranked the staff as most important and staff ranked the girls-only nature of the program as most important. In Year 4 parents ranked the girls-only nature of the program as most important, followed closely by program staff, and staff ranked program staff as most important.

In the next section we examine the qualitative data collected to help us better understand the factors and components that affected outcomes.

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WHAT THE QUALITATIVE DATA TELL US ABOUT IMPORTANT PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND COMPONENTS

The site visit data from the girls, parents and staff helped us to further understand how the program content, process and structure were linked to outcomes. Responses to questions measuring outcomes often included a description of how the outcome developed (e.g., how confidence developed). In addition, parents, staff and girls were asked to reflect on the critical aspects of the program and how they had seen the program outcomes develop.

PARENTS

In their discussions, the **parents often linked the outcomes their daughters experienced through the program to the caring and supportive nature of the staff and the supportive nature of the group.** The program elements that they commented on included several documented best practices such as a safe and comfortable environment where the girls felt they could be themselves and not be judged. **Some parents also linked outcomes to some of the teachings in the program, specifically the Aboriginal teachings in cultural programs.** Finally, the **consistency in both staff and ongoing meetings** were mentioned by some parents as a critical link to the outcomes.

When asked about critical program elements, **parents also commented on how the girls-only nature of the programs was a critical element** in the outcomes girls experienced through the program. In a separate question, parents were asked specifically about the girls-only aspects of the programs. Across programs, most parents agreed that the girls-only nature of the program was very important. In fact, as mentioned in the next chapter, it was one of the reasons some parents chose the program in the first place. Parents explained that their daughters were more comfortable talking openly in a girls-only program. Parents also mentioned that since girls and boys develop differently and at different rates and experience different issues, having a girls-only program allowed staff to focus specifically on issues girls were facing. Parents also liked the fact that the staff and/or mentors were female and could be good role models for the girls in the program.

> *"I don't think there's a lot out there that's similar, like there's Girl Guides, but that is a different kind of angle. So there isn't really anything out there that's just for girls at this age group that targets safe communication... Other girls groups have different agendas I think. This is focused." (Parent focus group; Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)*

> *"Je ne pense pas qu'ils se confieraient de la même façon si c'était un groupe mixte. Je pense qu'ils sont plus à l'aise juste avec des petites filles pour se confier. Personnellement pour ma fille." [English translation: "Personally, for my daughter, I think they're more at ease with just other little girls to confide in." (Parent focus group; Action Jeunesse)*

Parents also expressed that the subsidized nature of the program was critical. While some parents said they would pay for the program if there was a cost, many said that their daughters would not be able to participate if there was a cost. Most parents, however, regardless of whether they could pay or not, agreed that having a free program was important because it makes the program accessible to all, or as some parents described it, the subsidy is 'an equalizer', allowing girls from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to participate together. [The survey data also supports the importance of the programs being free or low cost: in each year over 80% of the parents felt that this was 'extremely' or 'very important'.] [34]

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34 In all four years, the mean rating, on a 5-point scale, was at least 4.2.

"Before taking this program, I did not have much interest in science, but now I do."

GIRLS

Girls often linked many of their outcomes to the confidence they gained in the program. That is, they described how they first gained confidence and then how this led to other outcomes, such as improved communication skills. They also talked about **the staff and girls in the group and how their caring and supportive nature was critical to program outcomes.** The **safe and non-judgmental nature of the groups** was also cited by girls as an important component in the benefits they gained from the program (often included confidentiality, girls only and not being judged). The groups were often described as a safe space in many of the research activities and this aspect seemed to be foremost with the girls when they described the groups.

The girls-only nature of the programs was explored further in the girls' interviews. In all three years, girls were consistent in their message: most girls believed that being with only girls in the programs was very important. They said this when they were asked about it specifically, but they also mentioned it over and over again in the various research activities and ice breakers that took place during the site visits. **The consistent message was that in girls-only groups girls could talk more openly and they were more comfortable.** The comfort came from the fact that girls understand each other better – girls felt they had more in common and shared many similar experiences. Many girls described that they felt uncomfortable or shy around boys because boys often dominated conversations or laughed at them.

"...In having a space that's only for girls, where girls are more of a priority than boys, where everyone kind of understands better what your situation is, growing up, your body changes and stuff like that. And you can ask these questions and feel so much more comfortable because these people here are girls, they've gone through it, they understand and it's a sisterhood. And I'm an only child and that's important." (Girls' interview; Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

"...I think it's important that its only girls because I think there are a lot of boys out there who would make fun of you and girls are going through the same problems, so they won't laugh at you because they're going through the same thing." (Girls' interview; YWCA Muskoka)

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STAFF

During the site visits, staff were asked to comment on what they thought were the most important best practices and critical program aspects. **One of the most frequently mentioned best practices was ensuring that the program was girl-directed.** Staff from many programs indicated that one of the most important practices was to have girls provide input into the activities and group rules. It was critical that the girls had a voice in the program and that the programs were truly girl-centred.

Consistent programming was also mentioned by staff from numerous programs as another very important practice. They reported on consistency in terms of activities (e.g., a regular check-in), frequency and timing, but also consistency in staff. Staff from many of the programs also discussed the critical role of program facilitators. Staff conveyed that it was really important that the programs were **facilitated by leaders that were supportive and good role models,** and that program facilitators needed to establish good relationships with the girls. A safe space and a girls-only space were also reported by many staff as critical program elements.

In several of the Aboriginal programs, staff stated that the cultural focus of their program was a critical component. Finally, in a few programs, staff mentioned that **discussion time and check-ins** were program aspects that were critical to the program outcomes.

> *"For me it is always the cultural part of it. Having culture integrated into any activities that we do. Just that sense of pride and who you are and where you come from, really goes a long way for those girls." (Staff interview; Kwadacha Education Society)*

> *"The fact that it is a safe space and it encourages questions without any further repercussions. I think I have heard girls say that if I was in school and we were trying to do this I know that boys would take over and I wouldn't get to do anything. So just having that space and being able to do everything themselves and not having to worry about some random dude taking over." (Staff interview; SuperNOVA)*

> *"Creating a safe place, for sure. And that goes into maybe there is no boys here but it goes into everything we learn. So, if a girl wants to say 'I don't feel like a girl on the inside' she feels safe to do so, because we've set up that everybody gets to express themselves here. So safety isn't just physical safety, it's emotional safety and that they can share how they are feeling or how their day was or the weekend or what they're struggling with and everybody just accepts that." (Staff interview; YWCA Yellowknife)*

PATHWAYS TO POSITIVE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Given all of the data reviewed thus far, we developed four figures that chart the pathways to the main program outcomes. These four figures are based on the qualitative data and outline program paths to confidence, connectedness, critical thinking and school engagement. That is, the charts articulate the main components of the program and other program outcomes that are directly linked to these protective factors. The charts represent the most prominent themes in the qualitative data from Years 1 to 4 on how girls gain confidence, connectedness, critical thinking and enhanced school outcomes through their participation in the programs. **It should be noted that these are the most common paths seen in the data as a whole; however, since programs each vary in their approach, not every program provides all of these paths.**

Figure 20: Paths to Developing Self-Confidence

GIRLS' GROUPS: PATHS TO DEVELOPING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Girls can take different/multiple paths to developing self-confidence, depending on the program with which they are involved

FOCUS ON TRYING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES
Girls are encouraged to try new things they might not otherwise get a chance to and feel a sense of accomplishment. They find activities they like and/or are good at.

FOCUS ON CULTURAL & INDIGENOUS TEACHINGS
Girls learn about their culture which helps them understand their identity and feel proud of who they are.

FOCUS ON MEDIA
Girls learn that the media misrepresents women and recognize that many images are not real; from learning this they start to compare themselves less.

ATTENTION FROM FACILITATORS
Girls are listened to, have their strengths acknowledged, and have somebody who is consistently there for them.

POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Girls learn to solve conflicts & communicate, which helps their friendships and other relationships.

FINDING A VOICE
Programs encourage girls to express themselves and communicate, which helps them find their voice.

INCREASED SENSE OF BELONGING & CONNECTEDNESS
Girls meet new friends, feel part of a group, and feel like they belong.

FOCUS ON VALUE OF GIRLS & WOMEN
Mentors/staff provide strong role models. Girls learn to understand inequality and recognize the value of women and themselves. They are proud to be girls.

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS
Girls learn to stand up to bullies and to not bully, how to stand up to peer pressure, and how to maintain friendships.

FOCUS ON STEM
Girls learn they can be good at STEM, see strong women role models in STEM and learn that women can be involved in STEM careers.

FOCUS ON POSITIVE BODY IMAGE
Girls learn about healthy eating, exercise, healthy body image and accepting and respecting their bodies.

"Me, I feel confident in myself. I feel like I can just share my thoughts and everything. I (like) how the girls' group just accepts us for who we are and we can just be ourselves with them. That's what I (like) about being here... I feel more confident... I feel like I could do anything..." (Kwadacha Education Society)

Figure 21: Paths to Developing Critical Thinking Skills

GIRLS' GROUPS: PATHS TO DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Girls can take different/multiple paths to developing critical thinking skills, depending on the program with which they are involved

LEARNING ABOUT PEER PRESSURE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT

By learning how to confront peer pressure, girls are gaining the analytical skills to understand the situation in which they find themselves.

PARTICIPATING IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In a safe environment, girls learn to listen, provide opinions, and be part of a constructive discussion.

LEARNING TO DEAL WITH BULLYING

In groups girls do activities to deconstruct and analyse stereotypes, learning the critical skills to understand what makes up a stereotype.

THINKING ABOUT ACTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

By learning about thinking before they act, girls learn to take a step back and fully analyse situations.

LEARNING TO ACCEPT DIFFERENCES AND VALUE UNIQUENESS

In order to properly respect others and value differences, girls acquire critical skills to properly analyse differences they observe around them.

LEARNING TO BE EMPATHIC

Girls learn to think of others and put themselves in others' shoes, thus helping them see multiple perspectives.

LEARNING ABOUT MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT

Girls develop critical thinking skills by learning about the many ways the media affects their lives and how to assess and identify how it does so.

DECONSTRUCTING STEREOTYPES

Girls learn to analyse situations for potential bullying and learn contructive tools to deal with it.

POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Girls learn skills to solve conflicts and communicate, which helps their friendships and other relationships.

"Now every time I look at a magazine I see a different perspective than what I saw before. Now I question everything I see ." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

Figure 22: Paths to Developing Connectedness

GIRLS' GROUPS: PATHS TO DEVELOPING CONNECTEDNESS

Girls can take different/multiple paths to developing connectedness, depending on the program with which they are involved

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Openly discussing issues and experiences in a small, supportive group allows girls to see that others' experiences are similar. Program foci such as Indigenous culture or STEM also help promote shared experiences.

TRUSTING ADULTS THEY CAN TALK TO

Staff and/or mentors help girls open up, connect, and feel welcome.

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

The groups make it easier to make friends, often with girls outside of their main circle, some they might otherwise not get to know.

LEARNING HOW TO BE A FRIEND

Program content on relationships helps girls learn to be a good friend by learning empathy, respect, forgiveness, not to gossip, and communication skills.

SUPPORTIVE & SAFE GROUP

Rules about behaviour (e.g., no bullying, no insults), strict confidentiality rules, and activities that celebrate everyone's strengths make group an accepting, welcoming, and safe place to feel connected to others.

GIRLS ONLY

Being only with girls allows them to be more open, more comfortable, and to be their true selves.

EVERYONE IS EQUAL & IMPORTANT

Girls get clear messages that they are important and unique and are encouraged to express their uniqueness, thus enhancing their sense of belonging.

STAFF/MENTOR INTERVENTION IN RELATIONSHIP CONFLICTS

The mentorship and guidance of staff/mentors enables girls to deal with personal conflicts when they arise and helps them develop stronger friendships.

"I used to feel like an outsider and I wanted to belong. Now I do."
(Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society)

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Figure 23: Paths to Enhanced School Outcomes

GIRLS' GROUPS: PATHS TO ENHANCED SCHOOL OUTCOMES

Girls can take different/multiple paths to enhancing school outcomes, depending on the program with which they are involved

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In group girls develop communication, social, and problem-solving skills, as well as skills to deal with peer pressure and bullying, which in the long run help improve school success.

LEARNING TO ASK FOR HELP

Girls learn that they have access to helpful adults who care and they feel more at ease asking for help with school-related issues.

FEELING MORE CONNECTED

As girls feel more connected to other girls their own age, various social aspects of their school lives are improved.

INCREASED SELF-CONFIDENCE

Girls feel smarter, that they are good at many things, and that they can succeed, all which help them do better in school.

STRONGER SENSE OF SELF

As girls feel more comfortable in who they are and become more assertive, they are more easily able to resist peer pressure in school settings.

LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING TO SCHOOL

Many groups are based in schools themselves, providing a motivating factor for girls in these groups to go to school.

STEM-RELATED OUTCOMES

Programs that are STEM based help increase interest in science and mathematics.

"I would say since it has given her more confidence she definitely is performing better in school. She's not afraid" (parent, YWCA Yellowknife)

SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

When the relationships between best practices and outcomes were examined there was consistency across the four years. The following four best practices seemed to have the most impact on outcomes:

- **An emotionally safe environment** – group was a place where the girls felt comfortable talking, listening and sharing ideas, and where people trusted one another
- **Positive environment** – group was a happy and positive place
- **Good variety/holistic** – good range or variety of things to do or topics covered
- **Staff** – instructors made them feel comfortable in sharing what they wanted to do or did not want to do

As well, we found that three relationship items had the strongest association with outcomes:

- **Instructors make me feel good about myself**
- **I learned from the instructors**
- **I look up to the instructors**

When the best practice average score and the instructor-relationship average score was examined in relation to post-resilience scores, we found the best practice average to be more influential in producing positive outcomes than the instructor-relationship average score.

Other factors were also examined to determine their impact on outcomes: program approach, time in the program, session length, whether girls were new to the program or returning, and age of the girls. No clear patterns emerged. Although programs were grouped by these different factors – and those differences were examined - it was challenging to draw conclusions because the programs themselves differ significantly. For example, programs grouped by the number of hours the girls were in the programs could have been *very* different: different approaches, different curricula, different staff, and different girls. We suspect there are other variables that are important to producing positive outcomes and that these factors have only have small impacts on the positive outcomes found. That is, when programs are strong – good curricula, the presence of best practices, and a good relationship between staff and the girls – they can have positive outcomes.

This conclusion is also supported by the reports from girls, parents and staff about what they consider to be the critical components of the programs. These components include: a safe and comfortable environment, the girls-only nature of the program, consistent, caring and engaging program staff, and girls having input into activities. In several of the Aboriginal programs, staff stated that the cultural focus of their program was also a critical component.

CHAPTER

4

PROGRAM
IMPLEMENTATION
and
SATISFACTION

OVERVIEW

In this chapter we review the data that helps us understand the outcome results. That is, the "process" evaluation component, which includes the following:

- An examination of how best practices were implemented in the programs: How well were these implemented? What challenges were faced?

- Program satisfaction: How satisfied were the girls and their parents with the programs? What recommendations did they have for improvement?

BEST PRACTICES

In previous years, the evaluation team developed a list of 'best practice' questions related to the 'best-practice-based activities' in the Foundation's program logic model. The list of best practices included the following:

- The environment created was a positive one – there was a focus on girls' strengths and assets and staff created a positive atmosphere.

- The environment created was one where girls felt comfortable talking, listening, and sharing their ideas, and where the girls trusted and respected each other.

- The environment created was one where girls felt physically safe.

- The environment created was one that was girl-directed and/or girl-involved - where girls had a say in programming and could be actively involved in the program.

- The program was holistic – there was a range of activities and topics covered in the program.

- The program encouraged and fostered parent/caregiver support and/or involvement.

- The program recognized and addressed the diversity of girls.

- The program was easily accessible to girls (convenient time, easy to get to, friendly location, affordable, etc.).

- The program was provided in a girls-only space.

These items were all measured in staff surveys. As well, we developed complementary items for the girls' surveys to assess, from their perspective, if they thought these practices were present in their groups. Finally, we included two items in the parent survey: How satisfied were they with the communication from the program? How connected did they feel to the program session-to-session?

In the sections that follow, we discuss implementation of these practices from the perspectives of the girls, parents and staff. As well, we include the challenges to implementation from the staff perspective.

IMPLEMENTATION

GIRLS' SURVEY RESULTS

In each of the four years, girls were asked to indicate their agreement with the extent to which different best practices were present in their groups. The first six items in the figure below were asked in all four years. The seventh item ("Instructors made you feel comfortable sharing with them") was added in Year 2. The final three items in the figure were added in Year 3 (Encouraged by program staff to talk about the program with your parents; Parents are provided with information about the program; Girls help contribute to the rules for the group).

Each of these items was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally). All best practice items were combined to create an average best practices score. **The results were very positive: girls reported that all of the best practices were well implemented in the programs. In all four years, the average rating was at least 4.3 and all items were rated as at least a 4.0 on the 5-point scale.**

Each year, the highest ratings were for the following three items:

- Facilitators are caring and supportive (4.6 or 4.7 in all years).
- I feel physically safe (4.4 or 4.5 in all years).
- The group is a happy and positive place (4.3 to 4.5 in all years).

The qualitative data collected in previous years highlighted the importance of relationships in the girls programs. Given this, in Year 2 we added items to assess, in more detail, the relationship girls had with staff and with mentors. The modification to the surveys came a bit later in Year 2 and not all sites participated. However, in Years 3 and 4 all surveys included the items. All eight relationship items were combined to create an average relationship. The results were very positive. **In all three years girls gave an average rating to the relationship with instructors of at least 4.2 on a 5-point scale.**

Girls rated all but one of the items as 4.1 on the 5-point scale in each of the three years (Years 2, 3 and 4). Only the 'have a lot in common' item was rated lower than 4 in all three years. Each year, the highest ratings were given to the following three items:

- Instructors are a lot of fun (4.5 or 4.6 in all three years)
- Instructors care about what happens to me (4.4 or 4.5 in all three years)
- I learned a lot from the instructors (4.4 or 4.5 in all three years).

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Parents were asked two questions to assess the best practice related to parental support on a 5-point scale:

- How satisfied were you with the level of communication and information received from program staff? (referred to as 'Communication' in figure below)

- How connected did you feel to the program and what was going on session-to-session? (referred to as 'Connection' in figure below)

Figure 24: Parent Ratings of Communication and Connection with the Programs
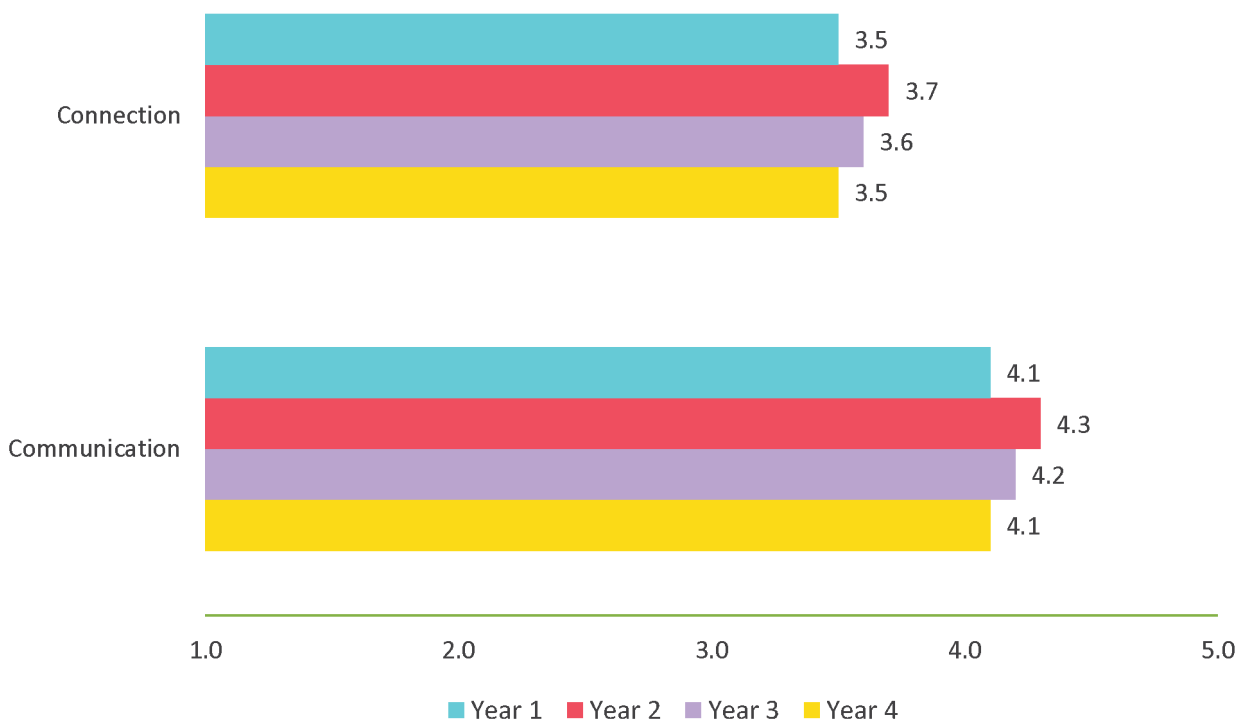
As shown above, parents seemed quite satisfied with the level of communication and information received from program staff – in all four years they rated this item at least 4 on the 5-point scale ("very satisfied").

They rated their connection to the program as between 'somewhat connected' (3) and 'very connected' (4) in all four years. Staff from a number of programs reported that the best practice of parental support was one of the elements that was most challenging to implement; therefore, it was not surprising that the 'connection' item received a lower rating from parents.

Parents were also given the opportunity to comment, or provide recommendations on communication and feeling connected to the programs. In all four years, the majority of parents (more than 50%) did not provide any comments. Of those that responded, some took the opportunity to comment favourably on the program, the program staff and the work that they do, while others provided some suggestions for improving the communication and connection with the programs. **When suggestions were provided, the main theme was that parents would like to be better informed about the program overall and also to know what was going on session-to-session.** Some also commented on wishing to be kept informed of their daughter's progress or how she was doing in the program. There were some parents who reported that they were not well informed about the programs, but that it was okay; that they understood the programs were for their daughters and they knew they enjoyed it and were safe.

Over the four years of evaluation, there were some recurring suggestions around parental involvement that emerged which included:

- Schedule of activities and/or an outline of the program content

- Newsletters

- Emails or notes sent home

- Facebook page for parents

- Ensuring website is up-to-date

- Introductory meetings between parents and staff, and/or periodic meetings between parents and staff to review how things are going

- Periodic gatherings or special nights where parents are invited and can watch what the girls are doing, or where the girls could have displays of what they have done

It should be noted that some programs have already incorporated some of these elements into their programs.

STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

In each of the four years staff were asked to indicate the extent to which a list of best practices had been implemented in the girls' programs. These included:

All four years:

- The environment created was a positive one

- There was a focus on girls' strengths and assets

- The environment created was one where girls felt comfortable talking, listening, and sharing their ideas, and where the girls trusted and respected each other

- The environment created was one where girls felt physically safe

- The environment created was one that was girl-directed and/or girl-involved - where girls had a say in programming and could be actively involved in the program

- The program was holistic – there was a range of activities and topics covered in the program

- The program was hands-on and interactive

- The program encouraged and fostered parent/caregiver support and/or involvement.

- The program was easily accessible to girls (convenient time, easy to get to, friendly location, affordable, etc.)

- The program was provided in a girls-only space

Years 3 and 4 only:

- Girls were given a voice

- The program included racial and cultural awareness and was inclusive

- Activities were not stereotypically girl focused

- Girls had a chance to try out things they might not otherwise be encouraged to try

- Programming reflected and connected girls with their cultures

- There was consistency with respect to program facilitators

- There was awareness and inclusion re: girls with disabilities/otherly-abled

All items were rated on a 5-point scale from 'completely implemented' (5) to 'not at all implemented' (1).

In all four years the following best practices were 'completely' or 'mostly' implemented as reported by most (approximately 90% or more) of the staff:[35]

- The environment created was a positive one.

- There was a focus on girls' strengths and assets.

- The environment created was one where girls felt comfortable talking, listening, and sharing their ideas, and where the girls trusted and respected each other.

- The environment created was one where girls felt physically safe.

- The program was holistic – there was a range of activities and topics covered in the program.

- The program was easily accessible to girls (convenient time, easy to get to, friendly location, affordable, etc.).

- The program was provided in a girls-only space.

And in Years 3 and 4, where new practices were added to the surveys, the following were 'completely' or 'mostly' implemented as reported by 90% or more of the staff:

- The program was hands-on and interactive.

- Girls were given a voice.

- Girls had a chance to try out things they might not otherwise be encouraged to try.

- There was consistency with respect to program facilitators.

The practices that were not as fully implemented across years included:

- Program was girl-directed or girl-involved

- Parental support/involvement

- Programming reflected and connected girls with their cultures

- The program included racial and cultural awareness and was inclusive

- There was awareness and inclusion re: girls with disabilities/otherly-abled

In each of the years, the number of organizations reporting that these practices as not fully implemented varies considerably. This may well be because of different staff completing the surveys each year and interpreting the questions or the ratings differently. Nonetheless, these are the practices that staff seemed to struggle to fully implement; the challenges for implementing these best practices are discussed in the next section. The best practice that continued to be the biggest challenge for staff year to year was 'parental support/involvement', followed by 'program was girl-directed or girl-involved'. While staff reported some challenges, **overall the organizations reported doing a good job implementing best practices year over year.**

35 It should be noted, however, that not all organizations completed staff surveys every year. As reported in Chapter 1, for each year the number of organizations represented in the staff surveys was: Year 1 – 28 of 29, Year 2 – 27 of 29, Year 3 – 25 of 29 and Year 4 – 27 of 33.

STAFF-REPORTED CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES

In each of the four years after staff reported on the extent to which best practices were implemented in their programs, they were then asked to rate the extent to which each practice was a challenge to implement. The rating scale was a 4-point scale and ranged from 'very challenging' (4) to 'not at all challenging' (1).

In all four years the three practices that were most challenging for staff to implement included:

- Fostering parent/caregiver support and involvement
- Creating a positive environment
- Creating an emotionally safe environment

Although two of these practices – creating a positive environment and creating an emotionally safe environment – were, for the most part, fully implemented in the sites, doing so was not without challenges. Fostering parent/caregiver support was not fully implemented across sites, as reported above; staff reported a number of challenges, including:

- Language barriers and/or communication barriers (i.e., finding the most effective ways to communication with parents/caregivers)
- Some parents not involved due to time, work shifts, etc.
- Parents' issues (mental health, violence) that prevented or precluded their involvement
- Parents didn't seem to care or want to get involved

Staff reported that creating a positive environment was difficult for a number of reasons:

- Complex needs of girls (e.g., behavioural, social, psychological issues, negative attitudes)
- Cliques/conflicts or interpersonal issues among girls
- Varying needs of girls (e.g., age differences, different issues)
- Establishing trust is difficult for some girls
- Issues with space or unsuitable location

Creating an emotionally safe and comfortable environment was also challenging because girls often knew each other outside of the group and brought interpersonal issues and conflicts into the group. Breaking down those issues and building trust takes time.

Staff reported that ensuring that the programs were girl-directed or girl-involved also provided some challenges: the girls may have wanted to do different things; the programs were sometimes highly structured, and the girls were sometimes reluctant to share their ideas. Having girls 'find their voice' took time, as reported by staff, because girls were shy and quiet; however, through intentional programming and efforts by staff this challenge was overcome.

In general, staff over the years also reported on resource challenges with respect to space and time. The space used for group was not always ideal and sometimes not exclusively girls-only – although staff always sought to ensure that group time was in a girls-only space and tried to limit outside intrusions as much as possible. For school-based programs, staff sometimes reported that finding suitable space in the school was challenging. As well, occasionally school events precluded girls coming to programs, as did teachers sometimes – that is, not allowing girls to miss class and attend the programs.

In Years 3 and 4, as new best practice questions were added to the staff survey as reported above. Staff reported challenges in implementing:

- Programming reflected and connected girls with their culture

- Program included racial and cultural awareness and was inclusive

Given the nature of some of the programs, cultural programming is not explicitly addressed in some programs. In both Years 3 and 4 staff did not provide any other further comments about challenges faced in these areas.

Staff's thoughtful responses to our questions suggest that they sought to address challenges they faced in implementing the best practices. The efforts they made to address some of the challenges appear effective as the qualitative and quantitative data from the girls suggest that the best practices were present in the programs.

PROGRAM SATISFACTION

Program satisfaction was examined mostly through the qualitative measures in the evaluation. In the surveys, girls were asked if they would recommend the program to a friend in Years 2, 3 and 4. **In all three years when asked if they would recommend the program, over 80% of the girls answered at the high end of the 5-point scale (4 or 5). The average rating was 4.4 in all three years.** Clearly, most girls were very satisfied with the programs and would recommend them to others. The qualitative data collected provides more detail on the girls' satisfaction with the program and is discussed below.

WHAT GIRLS LIKED/VALUED MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAMS

In the interviews conducted during site visits in Years 1 to 3, we asked the girls to report on the top three things they liked in their girls program. In Year 4, the girls' survey contained an open-ended question that asked girls to report on the three most important things to them in the programs. Several prominent themes emerged in the results from both these questions.

ACTIVITIES/FUN

One of the most prominent themes that emerged was related to the program activities. The activities were both liked and important to the girls. **In the interviews, when the girls described the activities they liked best they reported the following most frequently: food and eating, physical activities, field trip and cultural activities. In both the interviews and the Year 4 survey the girls discussed having fun during the group activities.** In the Year 4 survey question about the three most important components of the program, 'fun' was the most common response given (approximately 9% of all responses). This was mentioned 183 times by the girls. They also emphasized the following with respect to the activities:

- Learning from the activity

- Building relationships during the activities

- Experiencing new things through the activities

- The outcomes and benefits experienced through the activity

"I would have to say, whenever we do science experiments and stuff like this it's a lot of fun because, you know, everyone is just laughing and joking around and a lot of the time our stuff doesn't come out right, but it doesn't really matter because it is so much … fun to make it ……" (Girls' interview; Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

"The arts and crafts, love doing them and sharing them to the girls; the food and snacks, always gotta have that extra energy; the elders that come in and teach us life lessons." (Year 4 survey; Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation)

CONNECTEDNESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Many girls in both the interviews and Year 4 survey responses reported liking the social aspects of the program and that these were important to them – they made new friends, spent time with friends, and they liked the girls in the program or felt connected to others in the program. In fact, this aspect of the program was often mentioned in the girls' research activities (e.g., mapping, letters, mandalas) and was clearly a very important program element. When asked more specifically about it, girls described how in the groups it was easier to form relationships than in school or other activities because you talked and shared openly and because it was only girls. The girls' groups also set rules about bullying, acceptance, and conflicts, which helped girls feel more connected.

"I have had lots of fun since I joined it. I met a lot of friends and come closer with some of the girls. You get to just spend time with your friends and not be bugged and you don't have a certain time limit to hang out and to talk to them." (Girls' interview; Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)

"All the girls are really nice in it and it's just the experience of being able to do that and meet new people that we usually don't talk to." (Girls' interview; YWCA Muskoka)

"I feel good when I come here because I feel like I belong." (Year 4 survey; Sarnia-Lambton Rebound)

DISCUSSIONS/LEARNING

When asked about what they liked most about the program, girls also reported liking the discussions on specific topics and/or the learning that took place in the groups. This was also a prominent theme in the Year 4 survey responses about what was important to them in the program. Girls reported generally on the discussions and/or what they learned, but also shared specific things that they learned or discussed or the process by which they learned, which was reported to be interesting or fun. They also reported that being able to talk to other girls about feelings was an important aspect of the program.

"How they teach us right from wrong. To think good thoughts and to be positive." (Girls' interview; Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation)

"I didn't know drugs were that bad like I thought it was some kind of small thing but I didn't know it was that bad and it was really fun learning new stuff." (Girls' interview; Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta)

"My first one is the advice that they give us, it's pretty good advice, that we probably need… they don't just give us the advice, they actually make it fun, kind of, which is really good." (Girls' interview; Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)

STAFF/MENTORS

In the interviews, many girls reported that one of their favourite things in the programs was the staff or the mentors. In the Year 4 survey, this was also a prominent theme, with both staff and mentors reported to often be the most important part of the program. During the interviews, in other discussions related to staff, the girls described the program facilitators as very supportive, as a teacher who was also a friend, and as caring and helpful. Staff were said to take the time to listen and talk to the girls and many girls reported that if they had a problem, they would not hesitate to go to staff to talk about it.

"I like the staff because they are always supportive of us." (Girls' interview; Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

"They're kind of not just like, our teacher they're just teaching us things, but they're actually kind of our friend too, like they get us …If we actually ever have something that we have on our mind or we need to talk about, they're always open we can just go talk to them about it." (Girls' interview; Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)

"She's amazing. She's very supportive, very kind. She always tries to stay positive about everything. She makes me feel like I belong, like I fit in… Very caring." (Girls' interview; YWCA Muskoka)

SAFE, POSITIVE AND NON-JUDGMENTAL ENVIRONMENT

In the interviews conducted during site visits, girls often reported that they liked the group atmosphere, especially the safe and non-judgmental environment in the groups. They described a safe environment where they could open up and not be judged. In fact, the safe and non-judgmental environment was one of the most prominent themes in many of the research activities. In their survey responses, when girls reported on the most important parts the program for them, they frequently cited aspects of the program related to the group atmosphere. These aspects included: the supportive and non-judgmental environment; the relaxing, calm and happy space; the fact that they were respected, not bullied and that people were kinder in the groups than in other places; the trust and confidential nature of the groups; and the feeling of safety and security they received from the groups.

"This program provides a place for girls to call home. They take [their] time to listen to our problems and help solve them. They teach us important things that we need to learn about the world." (Year 4 survey; Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)

"The honesty and kindness that fills the room, the way each and every one of us support each other, friendships that have been built." (Year 4 survey; YWCA Muskoka)

"You can trust people. You can be yourself and be accepted 100%. You don't have to worry about being scrutinized and judged." (Year 4 survey; YWCA Toronto)

GIRLS-ONLY NATURE OF THE PROGRAM

In the site visit interviews conducted some girls reported liking the fact that the group was for girls only. In the Year 4 survey responses, about 6% of the responses focused on the girls-only nature of the program or space/ time away from boys. As described earlier, this was also consistently described throughout the site visits as a critical program element. [More about the importance of girls-only programming is discussed in Chapter 6.]

"That it's only girls and they can talk about stuff that only girls would normally talk about. If you tell (staff name) something she won't tell anyone. You learn about stuff about girls rights and other things." (Year 4 survey; YWCA Yellowknife)

"Getting to be with girls my own age and understand what I might be going through. Knowing that the mentors have explain to us about things they know about. Having people just to talk to makes me feel good." (Year 4 survey; Community Action Resource Centre)

POSITIVE IMPACT ON SELF

In the interviews, numerous girls also reported liking what they had gained from the group, for example the confidence they gained, that they were more creative, felt special or important, or that they had found their voice or had better communication skills. In the surveys, at least 12% of the girls reported specific outcomes of the program as most important to them. Their survey responses outlined the following benefits as important to the girls: learning to love oneself/feeling better about who they were; increased confidence; improved relationships and connectedness; being healthier and more active; feeling better about being a girl, and an opportunity for stress relief and getting a break.

"I liked using my voice, I was really quiet at the beginning of it and then I got louder." (Girls' interview; Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta)

"They made me feel important, like I was meant for something." (Girls' interview; Northern Committee Against Violence)

"...I liked that if we wanted to show our creativity they didn't stop us, they let us do whatever we want, well not really do whatever we want, but let us show our creativity and really just to see that you actually can make friends and that if you let it, it can help you." (Girls' interview; Northern Committee Against Violence)

PARENTS' SATISFACTION

In the site visits conducted in Years 1-3, focus groups were conducted with the parents of girls. Parents were asked why they had chosen the program for their daughters. In their responses several main themes were reflected: because they liked that it was girls-only; they liked the focus (e.g., Aboriginal, women-centred, media, STEM); they had heard positive things about the program; they thought the program could help their daughters with issues such as shyness or lack of confidence; and they liked that it would be an opportunity for their daughters to socialize with other girls.

When asked what they liked most about the program and their daughters' participation, the parents' responses were similar to the reasons why they chose the program. One of the most prominent responses was that they liked that the program had benefitted their daughters. They liked: that the program helped their daughter develop into who she is as a person (encouraged them to be themselves); that their daughter had gained confidence; that she was more connected to other girls; or that she communicated more openly. Parents also reported liking: that their daughters were happy attending the programs; that the staff were positive, caring and good role models; that the girls had fun; the diverse activities; the cultural focus (in Aboriginal programs); and that the program provided a positive activity in a safe space.

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In the qualitative data collected during the site visits, both parents and girls were asked about the program limitations or to provide recommendations on how to improve the programs. For the most part, parents did not have much to say related to program weaknesses and offered few suggestions for change. When parents did comment, the most prominent theme centred on parental involvement and communication. **Parents across many programs reported that they would like improved communication from staff. They suggested more frequent updates on what activities and topics were being covered in the program.** The suggestions for how to improve communication varied across programs, but in numerous programs, parents recommended a newsletter periodically or an information meeting at the start of the program. Others suggested having parents in for some special sessions (e.g., a meet and greet).

Another prominent theme related to recommendations in the parents' responses was to expand the program in some way. They recommended more sessions, longer sessions, additional activities, or that the program be expanded and available to more girls.

When the girls were asked about program weaknesses or limitations, for the most part they responded that they did not have anything to say; they liked the program the way it was. When the girls did provide a recommendation, one of the most prominent responses related to expanding the program. **Girls, like their parents, recommended that the program be longer, have more sessions or that it be expanded so that other girls could join.** Another prominent theme across programs was that they include more field trips. Regardless of the type of program, **many girls wanted to go out into the community and leave the centre or school where the program was held.** Some girls also suggested that the programs include other activities. These responses varied across programs and included sports and more games. Other more limited comments related to issues specific to some programs, such as a few disruptive girls or the inclusion of younger girls in the program, which some girls did not like.

SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

Girls reported year-over-year that best practices are being implemented well in their programs. Parents rated the communication with the program staff highly but felt less 'connected' to the programs, and throughout the four years parents recommended more information be provided to them about the programs (e.g., through emails, newsletters, up-to-date websites or Facebook pages). In sum, parents wished to have more details about the program that would help them feel more connected session-to- session.

Similarly, staff reported that most best practices were well implemented in their programs – albeit not without some challenges. Over the four years, there were definite themes that emerged in the challenges faced by staff: creating a positive environment; building trust and creating an environment where girls felt safe, comfortable and willing to share their ideas and thoughts; and trying to build the support of parents were all reported in each year. Staff's thoughtful responses to our questions suggest that they sought to address challenges they faced in implementing the best practices. The efforts they made to address some of the challenges appear effective as the qualitative and quantitative data from the girls suggest that the best practices were present in the programs.

Finally, with respect to the process results, satisfaction with the program was also examined in each of the four years. Girls and parents both indicated they like the structural and content components of the programs. The girls like/value many different aspects of the programs including:

- Activities/Fun
- Connectedness and relationships
- Discussions and learning
- Staff and mentors
- Safe, positive and non-judgmental environment
- Girls-only nature of the program
- Positive impacts on self

As well, in all three years when asked if they would recommend the program, over 80% of the girls answered at the high end of the 5-point scale (4 or 5). The average rating was 4.4 in all three years. Clearly, most girls were very satisfied with the programs and would recommend them to others.

Parents, as well, liked the ways in which the programs had helped the girls. They liked the staff and felt they were good role models. The program was a safe space for their daughters and recommendations were few. Parents would like more communication from the programs and just 'more' in general – longer sessions, more sessions, or that the program be expanded. Girls wanted more field trips, or like their parents, for the program to be expanded.

CHAPTER **5**

ENHANCED MENTORING COMPONENT

CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION Girls' Fund (2012–2016) Evaluation Results: Final Report
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OVERVIEW, METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPATION

In this phase of the Girls' Fund (2012-2016), the Canadian Women's Foundation extended their funding for girls programming to include an enhanced mentoring component, through the Nancy Baron Mentorship for Girls Program. The goal of this enhanced mentorship component was to support girls' programs across the country to create intentional, effective, and sustainable mentoring initiatives to enhance the positive impact of the girls programs.

The mentoring component built on the unique approach of the program and extended beyond its length to run activities separate from the girls' program. Ideally, the girls were to meet with their matched mentors at least twice a month over an extended period of time (ideally at least one year).

By the third year of this phase, 17 organizations were actively delivering enhanced mentoring programs. In Year 4, following a pilot program, four additional organizations were funded to deliver the enhanced mentorship program, resulting in a total of 21 organizations. (See Chapter 1 for a list of these organizations).

The following outlines the specific data collection methods and participation rates from Years 2-4 of the evaluation. (Please see Appendix K* for tools.)

- Group interviews/focus groups in Years 2 and 3 with a sample of 73 mentors
- Interviews and/or focus groups with a sample of 144 girls[36] in Years 2 and 3
- An online survey completed by 45 mentors in Year 2, 113 mentors in Year 3, and 141 mentors in Year 4 (representing approximately 50% response rate in Year 2 and 61% in both Years 3 and 4).
- An online survey completed by 18 staff members from 17 programs in year 2, 20 staff members from 17 programs in year 3 and 27 staff members from 20 organizations in year 4.
- A Letters to My Mentor Activity completed by 230 mentees[37] from 15 programs in Year 3
- Surveys with 255 girls in Year 3 and 327 girls in Year 4.[38]

The evaluation of the enhanced mentoring component assessed both the process and program outcomes. The outcome evaluation focused on enhanced protective factors for girls as well as other benefits for girls and their mentors. The process evaluation assessed how programs were being implemented. This included program elements as well as effective practices related to training and support, the process used in mentor screening and recruitment, and the challenges faced in implementing programs.

36 Most of these were separate groups focused specifically on the mentoring component; however, in four sites, where girls were involved in both mentoring and regular girls groups, the questions were asked at the end of the interviews.

37 In this activity girls wrote letters to their mentor indicating what they liked or disliked about their relationship, how their mentor had helped them, etc.

38 This included girls who were in a separate mentoring program from the regular girls program, or who were in both a "regular" girls program and in mentoring. It also excludes those with less than 25% attendance and who fell outside of the 9-13 age range.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS OF THE MENTORING PROGRAMS

OUTCOMES FOR GIRL PARTICIPANTS

THE MENTEES' PERSPECTIVE

SURVEY RESULTS

In this section we report on the results of comparing girls who were in mentoring groups to those girls who were not in a mentoring group, but in the "regular" girls groups only. These results, as discussed below, provide some indication that the mentoring programs are resulting in enhanced benefits for girl participants, above and beyond the impact of the girls groups.

In Years 1, 3 and 4,[39] we examined the potential impact on outcomes by comparing two groups:

- Those in a "regular" girls program **only** (no mentoring); and
- Those in mentoring – this included girls who were only in mentoring (a separate group), girls who were in both a "regular" girls program **and** mentoring (two separate groups), and girls who were in a blended program with a regular group and mentoring (one combined group).

We conducted two analyses to assess if there was a difference: **First,** we looked at whether or not there were differences for the main protective factors (and resilience overall) in the average (or mean) ratings from "before" to "after" the program, between the two groups – that is, did the two groups differ in the average ratings they gave for "before" and "after". As part of this analyses we also looked at the magnitude of change in the average ratings from before to after – that is, the effect size. Results for the difference in mean ratings (from before to after the program) were mixed across the three years (Years 1, 3 and 4):

- In Year 1 there was a significant difference found between the two groups on overall resilience, as well as for connectedness, with the girls in mentoring programs showing a small advantage over the girls in the regular group. As well, differences on school engagement approached statistical significance, again with the mentoring girls showing an advantage.
- In Year 3 we found no significant differences in resilience overall, nor in each of the main protective factors – although school engagement did approach statistical significance.
- In Year 4 we found a small advantage for the mentoring group in resilience overall and for self-confidence but not for critical thinking skills or school engagement.

We also examined each group (regular vs. mentoring) separately – looking at the **magnitude of change** from "before" to "after" for each of the main protective factors, as well as for all additional protective factors.[40] When we looked at the magnitude of change as reported by the girls (the "effect size") we found a pattern:[41] [42]

39 In Year 1, when not all mentoring programs were up and running, the sample size for those in mentoring was small (N=66), compared to those who received only the "regular" girls' programming (N=490). In Year 2, due to some methodological issues, we were not able to do a comparison of girls in mentoring and those without mentoring through the girls' surveys. The larger sample size in Years 3 (n=359) and 4 (n=296), allowed us to make the comparisons

40 These other protective factor items included skill development (communication, problem-solving, getting along better with others, skills in dealing with bullying and peer pressure, knowing when and where to seek help/advice) relationships/social support (pro-social relationships, feeling close to/supported by family, having adults to go to), empowerment (feel good being a girl, focusing on strengths and skills) and risk avoidance.

41 Whereas a statistical test of significance can tell you if there is a difference between two means (i.e., average scores), an effect size tells you the magnitude of that difference or effect. It has been suggested than an effect size of .80 is large, .50 is medium, and .20 is small.

42 The only exceptions were: in Year 1, knowing where to go for help/advice, and in Year 4, dealing with peer pressure.

In Years 1, 3 and 4, girls in the mentoring groups had larger magnitudes of change (effect sizes) than girls in the regular groups across almost all of the protective factors.

Some of the differences in magnitude were small (.05 or less), but others were quite large. The differences that were most notable (a difference of approximately .20 or more) and occurred in more than one of the three years included:

- Getting along better with others/making friends: Years 1, 3 and 4
- Focused on strengths and skills: Years 1 and 4
- Feeling good about being a girl: Years 1 and 3
- Problem-solving skills: Years 1 and 4
- Communication skills: Years 1 and 3
- Knowing when to seek help/advice: Years 1 and 4
- Knowing where to go for help/advice: Years 3 and 4

There were also several protective factors that showed greater improvement for the mentoring group that occurred in only one of the three years. These included:

- Having pro-social relationships with peers/friends (Year 1 only)
- Feeling close to/supported by family (Year 3 only)
- Having adults to go to for help/advice (Year 3 only)
- Avoidance of risky behaviours (Year 4 only)

In the **second analysis,** we examined the difference in the proportion of girls who improved "after" the program by their group type – regular versus mentoring. We then conducted a crosstabs analysis to see if the proportions differed significantly between the two group types (regular vs. mentoring). **Again, a pattern emerged: in Years 1, 3 and 4, there was a greater proportion of girls in mentoring, compared to girls in regular groups alone, who reported a positive change for self-confidence, connectedness, school engagement and for resilience overall.**

In both Years 1 and 3 the differences were statistically significant for connectedness and school engagement. Differences between the two groups, for these two areas, are shown in the figures below:

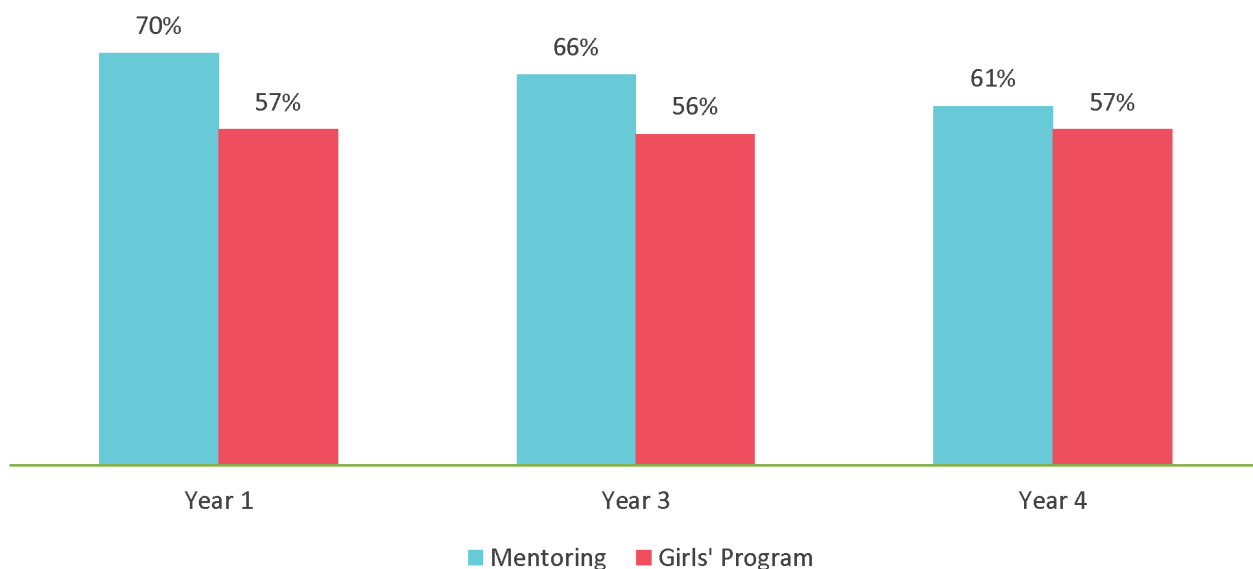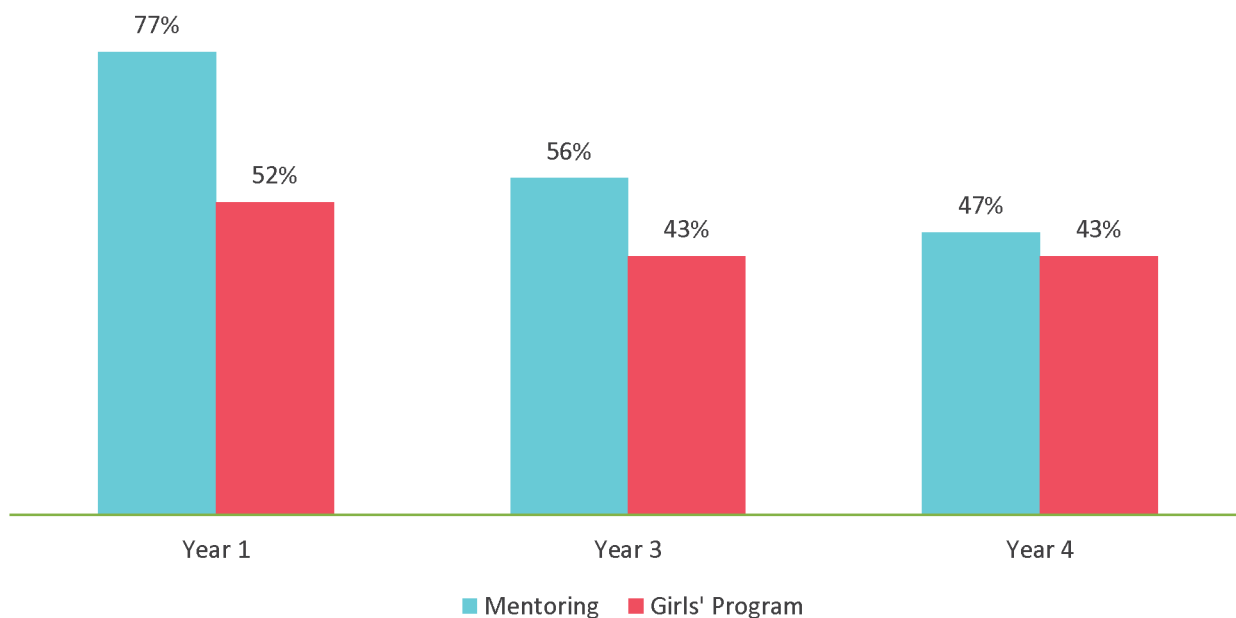*Figure 25: Proportion of Girls Reporting Positive Change - Connectedness*

Figure 26: Proportion of Girls Reporting Positive Change – School Engagement

The proportion of girls who reported after-program improvement was also compared for the two groups for the remaining protective factors. **For other protective factors, again there was a general pattern of greater proportions of girls in mentoring showing improvement for "after" the program, as compared to those in the regular program.**

This advantage for girls in mentoring was not present in *all* protective factors queried, but it was present in most. Of the protective factors queried, more girls in mentoring reported a significant improvement for "after" the program in the following areas: [43]

- Problem-solving skills (Years 1, 3 and 4)
- Getting along better with others/making friends (Years 1 and 3)
- Focused on strengths and skills (Years 1 and 4)
- Having adults to go to for help/advice (Years 3 and 4)
- Communication skills (Year 3)
- Feeling closer to/supported by family (Year 3)
- Feeling good about being a girl (Year 3)
- Knowing when to seek advice/help (Year 4)

As shown above, there were four protective factor areas where girls in mentoring showed an advantage in more than one year: problem-solving skills, getting along better with others, focusing on strengths and skills, and having adults to go to for help and advice. Please see the figure below for results in these areas:

43 Protective factor items below were included in there was a statistically significant difference between the mentoring group and regular group (p < .05), or the difference approached statistical significance (p<.10).

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Figure 27: Proportion of Girls Reporting Positive Change – Problem-Solving Skills
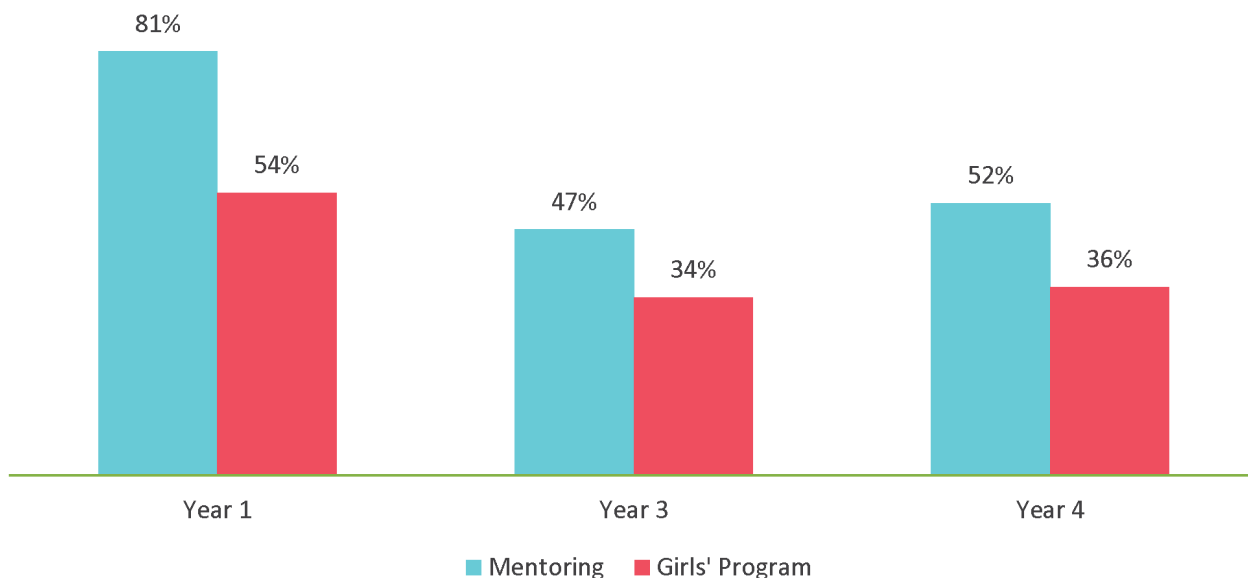

Figure 28: Proportion of Girls Reporting Positive Change – Getting Along Better with Others
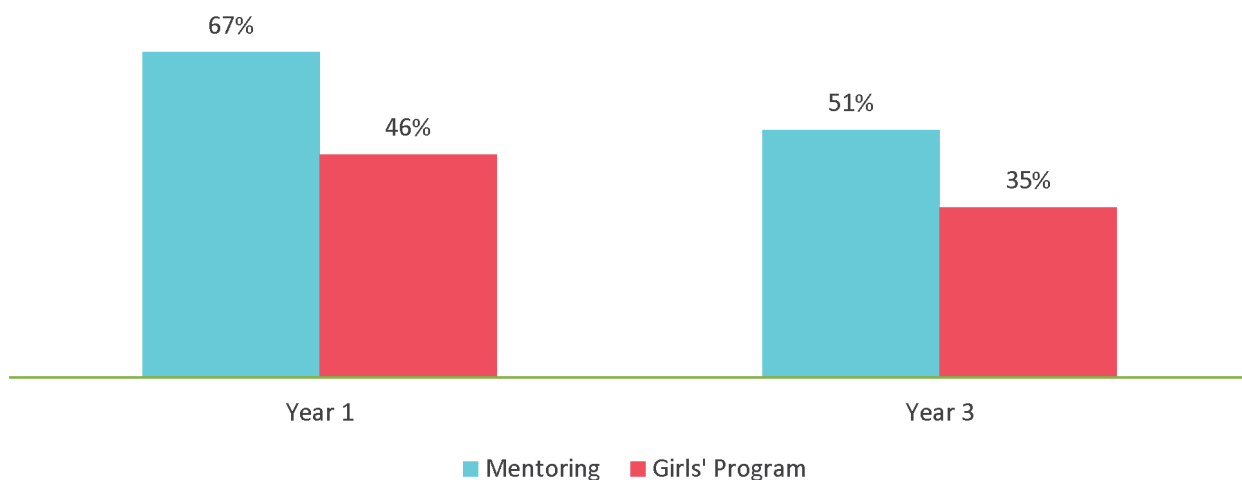
Figure 29: Proportion of Girls Reporting Positive Change – Focused on Strengths and Skills
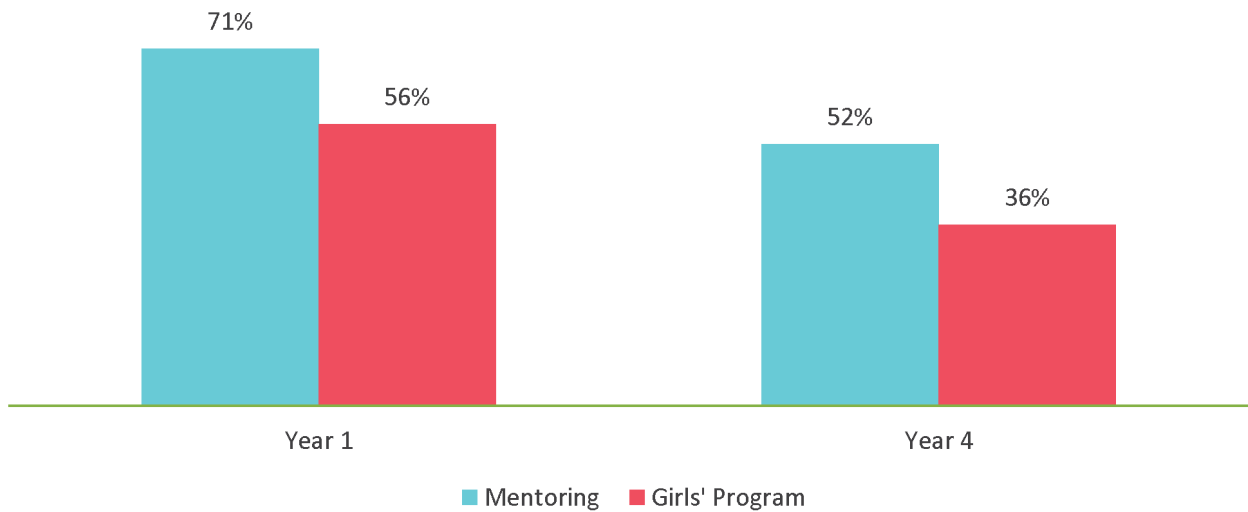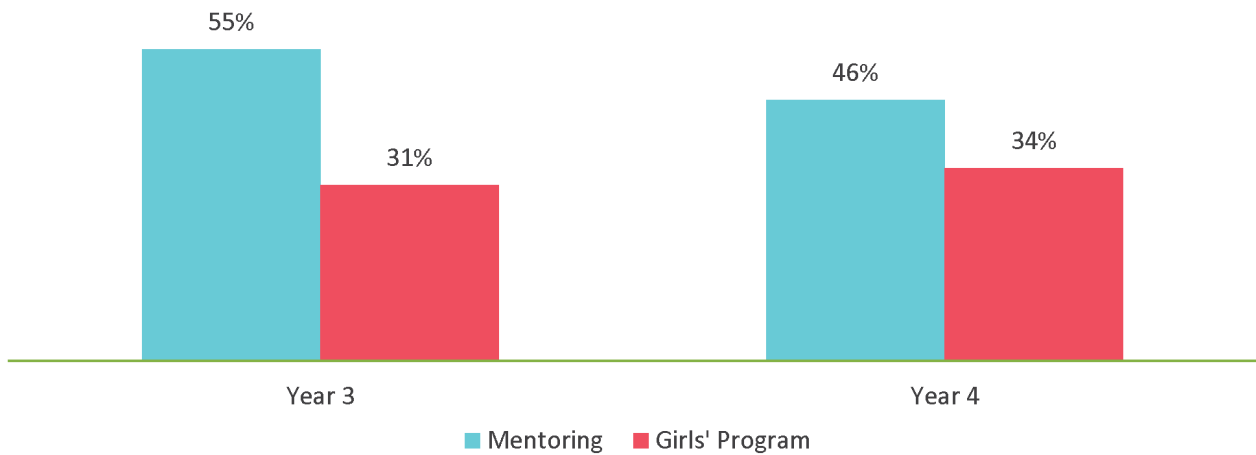

Figure 30: Proportion of Girls Reporting Positive Change – Adults for Help/Advice

THE MENTEES' PERSPECTIVE

THE LETTERS TO MY MENTORS ACTIVITY AND FOCUS GROUPS

The Letters to My Mentors activity was completed by 230 girls across 15 programs in Year 3 and provided extensive comments highlighting what the girls believed they had gained through their participation in the mentoring programs.

In 34% of the letters, girls wrote about how participation in the mentorship program had contributed to an increased sense of belonging or connectedness. These comments focused on both the girls' relationships with the other girls in the group as well as their relationships with their mentors. They wrote about how they felt like they belonged because they felt safe and comfortable in the group. Mentees often described the mentors and the girls in the group as their sisters or their family. They described feeling loved, cared for, and included and welcomed. Girls wrote about making good friends in the group and how the mentors were their friends. They also described how they could communicate with, trust, and depend on the mentors.

> *"For once I feel like I belong somewhere." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)*

> *"It makes me feel happy because I am with people I know and I know every one there has something different to share every time and I feel like I have a whole second family." (Musqueam First Nation)*

In 29% of the letters, girls wrote about how the mentoring relationship and/or participation in the group had helped them gain confidence or had boosted their self-esteem. One third of the girls who wrote about gaining confidence specifically articulated that this was due to their mentors or because their mentor made them feel good about themselves. Numerous girls wrote that they felt better about themselves because they were not judged and were accepted. Some girls wrote that because of their mentor, they were now talking to more people or were more outgoing. A few girls also wrote about how they accepted themselves and loved themselves more because of their mentor. Other comments mentioned that because of their mentors, they felt they were a better person, they felt like they could do anything, and they felt special or important.

> *"You make me feel like a person that can do anything." (YWCA Toronto)*

> *"My mentors taught me that it is okay to be me. They also taught me to love myself." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)*

In about 20% of the letters, girls made comments about how their mentor or the mentoring group had helped them find their voice, speak up more, or communicate more openly. They expressed how it was easy to communicate with their mentor or in the group, how their mentor encouraged them to be themselves and to speak up, and how they could be more open and talk about personal issues with their mentor or the group.

> *"You were the type of mentor that helped me to develop myself. You made me open up and communicate a lot more." (YWCA Toronto)*

> *"Girls' Group makes me feel like I can depend on a space so that I can say how I feel. My mentor supports me in my problems that I may face." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)*

The results of the Letters to My Mentor activity clearly show that in addition to strengthening protective factors, the girls also learned a great deal from their mentors. Some girls articulated, in a general sense, that they had learned a lot. Other girls reported more specific learnings such as the following:

- To love or accept themselves
- About friendship or how to be a good friend
- To think more critically or to open one's mind
- To deal with bullying or to not bully
- How to be nicer or kinder
- How to have fun

> *"Having a mentor is important to me because a mentor is someone who helps you learn new things not in an educational way but in a fun way, where you can get to know someone and look up to someone as well." (YWCA Toronto)*

> *"I learned that being who you are is better than being someone you aren't." (YWCA Muskoka)*

> *"I've learned how to make good choices and to not be ashamed of who I am." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)*

The results of the Letters to My Little Sister Activity also showed very clearly that the girls gained support through their mentors who served as another person they could talk to and go to for advice. In their letters, girls made many comments related to this support, with the most prominent theme relating to communication with their mentors. The girls wrote about how they could talk to mentors about anything, how their mentors listened to them or how their mentors were open with them. The girls wrote about how the mentors gave them a sense of security and made them feel safe. Many girls also mentioned how their mentor gave them advice and a few girls wrote that their mentors had helped them make decisions.

Numerous girls also wrote in the letters that the mentors cared about them, helped them and/or took care of them. A few mentioned that the mentors showed that they genuinely cared by ensuring they said hello every time they saw their mentee, making the mentees feel that they genuinely wanted to get to know them. Other comments provide evidence that the relationships between the mentors and the girls were supportive, including: that the mentees trusted their mentors (or the mentors trusted their mentees); that they could count on their mentors; that they made the girls feel comfortable and welcomed; and that the mentors "had their backs".

> *"Having a mentor is important to me because when I have a problem I always have someone to talk to and trust." (North York Community House)*

> *"She makes me feel happy and safe in girls' group." (Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.)*

In the focus groups and interviews, the mentees were asked about enhanced outcomes as a result of the mentoring program; that is, how the mentoring relationship or other aspects of the mentoring group had helped them change or benefit from the program. Consistent with what was written in the letters, some girls discussed how they had gained confidence through their relationships with the mentors because the mentors helped make them feel comfortable with themselves. They also described how within the group the mentors praised them and encouraged them to stand up and express their opinions. Girls also commented on how their mentors helped them feel they were connected to somebody because they now had someone to talk to. Numerous comments were also made about how the mentor had helped them with school by either giving them school advice, helping them gain confidence in school, or helping them transition into grade 8 or high school.

"Well now I have a lot more people to talk to that I didn't before. Now I have more people that I am closer with that I can to talk to about different thing." (YWCA Yellowknife)

"I used to not do my work in class because I didn't feel like it would benefit me but then I hung around ... the mentors...and it changed my opinion ... and now I do great in school. I did horrible before." (YWCA Muskoka)

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

In Years 2-4 of the mentor survey, respondents were asked to rate their mentees on how much they had changed with regards to the protective factors and other outcomes using a scale from 1 - worst to 5 – very much improved. The three main protective factors of confidence, critical thinking and connectedness consisted of four items. The results below outline the average rating for the four items for each of the 3 main protective factors in Years 2-4. **As can be seen in the figure, the results were quite high consistently for all three years with average ratings ranging from 3.7 to 4.3.** A rating of 3 represented at least some improvement. The average rating increased slightly each year.

Figure 31: Mentors' Ratings of the Mentee Outcomes – Main Protective Factors[44]
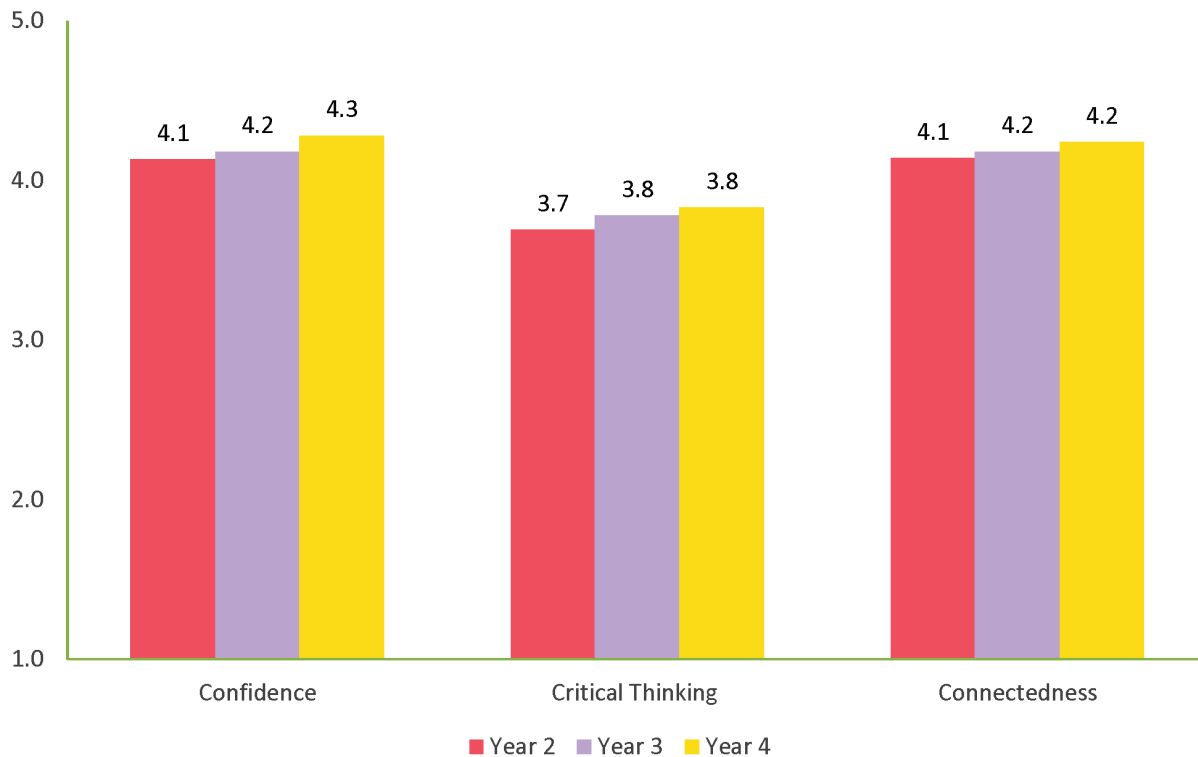
44 The mentors were not asked about school outcomes for the girls.

The figure below outlines the results for items related to skill building. As with the main protective factors, the mentors rated improvements in each of the areas as being quite high – all averages were over 3.8 (close to "somewhat improved") on a 5-point scale. As well, the average ratings for almost three quarters of the items in the three years combined were greater than 4 (between "somewhat" and "very much improved"). **Mentors seemed to see the most changes in communication skills, followed by knowing when/where to get help and standing up to peer pressure.**

Figure 32: Mentors' Ratings of the Mentee Outcomes - Skills [45]

45 The mentors were not asked about school outcomes for the girls.

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The final figure below outlines the mentors' ratings of their mentees' gains in social skills, how they feel about being a girl and in their relationships since participating in the mentorship program. The gains in these areas were also very strong, according to the mentors, with gains in all areas consistently close to or over a 4 ("somewhat" to "very improved"). **The most significant gains observed by mentors were for girls feeling good about being a girl, with the ratings in all three years ranging from 4.21 to 4.46. The second most significant gains appeared to be the relationships with their peers/friends with average yearly ratings for this item ranging from 4.1 to 4.1.**

Figure 33: Mentors' Ratings of the Mentee Outcomes – Social Skills, Relationships & Feelings About Being a Girl

During the focus groups conducted in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation, the mentors described, in further detail, the outcomes they had observed in their mentees. One of the primary themes that emerged from these results was that the enhanced **mentoring programs had helped girls with relationships and enhanced their sense of belonging or connectedness.** As the mentors established positive relationships with their mentees, the girls opened up to them about relationships or conflicts they had been experiencing with friends, peers, or family. These conversations helped the girls understand how to be a friend, how to solve problems, how to stand up to peer pressure, and how to reduce bullying. Mentors in numerous programs also described how the girls were getting along better with each other as the year progressed and were more supportive of each other. In a few programs, mentors explained how they had become an additional person that the girl could connect with in her community.

Mentors also described how **girls gained confidence as a result of the relationships with mentors and other girls in the groups.** Additionally, they reported that because of the safe, comfortable, and non-judgmental environment, **the girls were questioning more and thinking about things more critically.** Mentors often explained how **the program supported many girls to "find their voice"**: girls were quiet at the beginning of the program but as the year went on, and as the relationships were strengthened, the girls gained trust in the safe environment, felt more comfortable, started to talk more, and questioned things more often.

> *"I see change in a lot of them. Some of them talk more in general. When they first came they were really shy, but now they engage more. Every group they always have an opinion on everything. I find it's really amazing, in such a short period of time, you can change so much." (YWCA Toronto)*

> *"I've seen them really open up with each other and become more comfortable with each other and I have seen bonds and friendships grow with each other because we did do a lot of group activities and a lot of things that they enjoyed doing. So I did see them grow together." (YWCA Muskoka)*

THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

In the Years 3 and 4 staff survey, respondents were asked to comment on what outcomes or benefits they thought girls experienced in the mentoring program, beyond what they gained in the regular program. **The responses varied, but many focused on the relationships built with the mentors, seeing the mentor as a role model, increased connectedness, and increased opportunities for more open communication in the mentoring groups and leadership skills development.** In comments on the staff surveys from years 2 and 3 the staff also observed that **outcomes were enhanced because the mentor was a positive role model for the girls.** Girls were able to see the mentors' actions and learn more intensely from those actions.

> *"Role models are everywhere both positive and negative, and the girls who are being mentored are able to develop strong, positive relationships with their mentors at a crucial time in their lives". (Sturgeon Lake Central School)*

> *"The girls had role models, older trusted friends that they could confide in and they were able to seek advice from their mentors. They also were able to learn things by example such as confidence, openness and risk-taking (i.e., speaking up and following your gut)." (North York Community House)*

MENTORS' OUTCOMES

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

As described previously, 45 mentors in Year 2, 113 mentors in Year 3, and 141 mentors in Year 4 completed an online survey. Mentors from most of the programs that ran mentoring girls' groups responded.[46] This survey explored the outcomes mentors experienced as a result of their participation in the program separately for teenage mentors (those 19 and younger) and adult mentors. We wanted to explore the different type of outcomes for the two age groups and see if there was a difference in what teenage mentors and adult mentors were gaining from their participation

In Years 2-4, the teenage mentors were asked to rate how much they had improved on a scale from "1-worse" to "5-very much improved" in a number of areas. Detailed results can be found in Appendix L*; key highlights include:

- The teenage mentors appear to be benefiting from their participation as mentors, rating the impact of their participation in all areas as high across all three years (ratings ranged from 3.4 to 4.5).

- The average ratings in all three years were predominantly over 4 (somewhat improved).

- According to the teenage mentors, their participation as a mentor was having a significant impact on skill development, connectedness, self-confidence, self-pride and feeling positive about the future (average ratings for these areas ranged from 3.8 to 4.5).

- Two items – "how you feel about school" and "how you are doing in school" were rated a little lower – mostly between "a little improved" and "somewhat improved" (from 3.4 to 3.7 over the three years).

In the Years 3 and 4 surveys, the adult mentors were also asked to rate the extent to which they had benefitted from the program in relation to a number of outcomes. Detailed results can be found in Appendix L*; key highlights include:

- Adult mentors also rated the impact of their participation as a mentor as high across areas.

- They reported gaining at least between "a little" and "a lot" on all items; the lowest rating was 3.5 for critical thinking skills in Year 4.

- In general, for the adult mentors, the gains were stronger for giving back and learning how to work with young girls (ranging from 4.4 to 4.6) than they were for skills acquisition (ranging from 3.5 to 3.9).

- While adult mentors did report some skills acquisition such as leadership, problem solving and critical thinking, these ratings were consistently lower than they were for the teenage mentors.

46 Mentors from one program in each of Years 2 and 3 did not respond to the mentor survey.

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

The teenage and adult mentors were also asked in both the surveys (Years 2-4) and the focus groups (Years 2-3) to report on other ways they had benefitted from their participation in the program. Their responses echoed the outcomes described above. The most prominent themes in their responses included:

- Increased confidence
- Gained experience in working with children/young girls
- Increased self-awareness
- Learned about issues women and girls face
- Increased sense of community
- Increased skills – leadership, communication, problem solving & critical thinking skills
- Increased support
- Met new people
- Opportunity to give back to their community
- Felt valued and important
- Learned how to be a role model
- Broadened view on life (e.g., more positive outlook on life, feeling a part of something bigger than oneself, learning the world is a fun place, came out of shell/comfort zone)
- Learning about diversity and to accept people
- Felt happy when volunteering

"Simplement me sentir importante, valorisée et bonne dans ce que je fais, comme si ça avait un sens et que j'aidais les filles." [English translation: "Simply feeling important, valued and good at what I do, as if it has a purpose and I'm helping the girls."] (Y des Femmes de Montréal)

"I have benefitted deeply as a mentor in the girls' program as it was a chance to truly explore and expand on my abilities and knowledge as well networking with different people to strengthen my communications skills. In addition, with the role of a mentor I have been able to enhance my organization, team management and critical thinking skills…. Lastly, my volunteering position as a mentor has forced me to improve upon my punctuality and led to the creation of dedication and commitment as seeing how much of a difference my attendance here makes." (YWCA Toronto)

"I definitely feel more connected to my community and I feel like I am able to make a difference in people's lives. I feel like I am a part of something important. My self-confidence boosted in ways I didn't know were possible and I was able to form new ties and friendships with people." (YWCA Lethbridge)

"I'm more open minded than before, as the things I learned really opened up my eyes. I'm more critical of everything I see in media now — in books and magazines, television, social media etc." (North York Community House)

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THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

An online survey on the mentoring programs was completed by 18 staff from 18 programs in Year 2, 20 staff from 17 programs in Year 3, and 27 staff from 19 programs in Year 4. In Years 3 and 4 respondents were asked to rate mentors' outcomes from their perspective on the same items used in the mentor survey. The rating scale was the same that was used for the mentors, from 1-worst to 5-very much improved. Detailed results can be found in Appendix L*; key highlights include:

- The staff rated the outcomes for mentors as quite high - average ratings for both ranged from 3.3 to 4.7.
- The lowest ratings were for school outcomes, although it should be noted that many respondents did not provide a rating on these items because their mentors were not in school. These outcomes were also somewhat more difficult for staff to gauge; regardless, staff did report at least "a little improvement" in these areas and the average ratings did go up from Year 3 to Year 4.
- With regard to gains in skills, the staff rated the mentors gaining most in leadership and organizational skills (4.4 and 4.6 for Years 3 and 4, respectively), though all skills gains were rated at least 4.2 on the five-point scale.
- In general the staff ratings were somewhat higher than both the teenage mentor and adult mentor ratings of what they had gained.

Staff also made the following observations on the outcomes they observed in the mentors:

- The experience of working as a mentor benefited some of the mentors' careers or future careers.
- The mentors gained a better understanding of the city and the community they lived in, and in some cases were more connected to and were affecting change in that community.
- Mentors gained skills across many areas, including skills in facilitation, leadership, time management, communication, program development/management, and skills for working with youth.
- Mentors gained an understanding of the issues girls face and about the resiliency of girls.
- Mentors gained a sense of belonging or connectedness.
- Mentors now saw themselves as leaders or role models.
- Mentors had gained a voice through the experience of being a mentor.

  "Many girls (mentors) don't come in to the program seeing themselves as a leader or positive role model, but over time they develop a sense of self that includes having something to give, wisdom to share, and the idea that they can contribute positively to their community e.g. despite being a 'bad' student, or having a dysfunctional home life etc." (YWCA Toronto)

  "I think the program has given them a voice as well. They may only have shown one facet of themselves in the community and now they can show a different side of themselves in a safe, non-judgmental environment." (Musqueam First Nation)

  "The mentors have also gained a sense of pride in their community. They feel as if they gain a lot from the program and from the experiences that the younger girls bring...." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCESS

The process component of the evaluation of the mentoring programs included an exploration of program elements and practices which were queried in the mentor survey, the staff survey, as well as the mentor and mentee focus groups and interviews. In this section we summarize evaluation results regarding program models, processes used to screen and recruit mentors, mentor training and support, effective practices and elements, critical program elements, and recommendations for improvement.

PROGRAM MODELS

As previously mentioned, 21 organizations were delivering mentoring programs by Year 4 of the current grant cycle. According to the results of the Year 4 staff survey as outlined below, the programs varied with regards to type of mentor, program model, and timing:

- 63% had mentors who were young women between 18 and 25; 58% had mentors who were teens; 42% had mentors who were women over 25; 4% had specifically recruited mentors based on a shared interest or characteristic with mentees (e.g., athletes, same cultural background, same community); and 3% had mentors who were Elders.[47]

- 48% of the staff reported running groups with an alumnae model (girls completed a structured program where staff [and usually mentors] were involved and then moved into a matched mentoring component with just mentors); 30% had a separate mentoring group, where different girls were in mentoring than in the regular girls program; 22% reported their mentoring group to be concurrent with the girls program (girls participated both in a larger group facilitated by staff and also in another group with their matched mentor on a separate day and time).

- 50% reported that the girls and mentors in their program met weekly; 29% reported that the girls and mentors met every two weeks; 8% reported that the girls and mentors met twice per week; 5% reported that the girls and mentors met once per month.[48]

SCREENING AND RECRUITMENT OF MENTORS

Screening and recruitment is critical to the success of a group mentoring program. The evaluation explored these program elements through the perspectives of both mentors and program staff.

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

In the Years 3 and 4 surveys, mentors were given six reasons for becoming a mentor and were asked to rate these from the most to least important reason for why they chose to become involved as a mentor. In both of these years the three most prominent reason chosen by mentors were:

- "I think it is important work" – chosen among the top 3 reasons by 78% of mentors in Year 3 and 75% in Year 4.

- "I enjoy working with girls"- chosen among the top 3 reasons by 84% of mentors in Year 3 and 75% in Year 4.

- "I wanted to contribute to the community" – chosen among the top 3 reasons by 80% of mentors in Year 3 and 73% in Year 4.

47 Many programs recruited mentors from several categories and thus the total does not add up to 100%.
48 The responses were not clear for the others.

The remaining reasons were chosen much less often in the top three responses:

- "To get experience and build my resume" (34% in Year 3 and 33% In Year 4).

- "To get volunteer hours" (18% in Years 3 and 4)

- "Have been a participant (or my children have been participants) in the organization and wanted to give back" (9% in Year 3 and 21% in Year 4).

In the survey and the focus groups mentors provided additional information on the reasons they became mentors in the girls' programs:

- They wanted to give back by helping girls because they knew the importance of that support. Some mentors said that they had similar supports when they were younger and therefore had first-hand experience about the importance of supporting girls. Others said they did not have the supports or opportunities and think this should be available for girls.

- They wanted to gain skills or get experience that would help them with a future career or job.

- They had been participants in the girls program a few years earlier, or were connected to the organization running the program. They became mentors to stay involved and connected to the program because they believed it was a good program.

- They wanted to meet people in their community or connect more to their community.

- They wanted to be a role model.

- They wanted to help balance gender disparity in STEM. (Volunteered with a STEM program)

- They are committed to the program goals (e.g., challenging how women are portrayed in media).

"I had several strong female mentors throughout my 48 years. I know the difference it made in my life. I hope I can make a difference in someone else's." (Sarnia-Lambton Rebound)

"I wanted to contribute to the future of women in the scientific community. I continued to participate in my second year because of the bond I had made with many of the girls and with the program coordinator." (YWCA Cambridge)

"Because I was in situations as a child and I never had a voice. They should." (Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc.)

"I thought that it was important for me to learn more about the different opinions of others to come up with ways that I could help change the stereotypes that media feeds girls." (YWCA Toronto)

THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

The Year 3 survey asked staff to identify the various recruitment methods they used and to reflect on their satisfaction with the process. According to staff respondents in the Year 3 survey, the most common recruitment method they employed was to contact previous program participants, reportedly used by 78% of programs. The next most commonly used mentor recruitment methods were word of mouth and advertising through local schools, universities or colleges, each used by 67% of respondents. According to staff, another commonly used recruitment method was to promote through their own organization to staff and other program volunteers and participants, used by 56% of organizations. Other less commonly used methods included: promoting through a newsletter/newspaper or though flyers (39%); asking for referrals from other agencies (33%); promoting through Facebook (33%); and holding a special event/mentor night (6%).

Staff respondents rated their satisfaction with their recruitment process quite highly, with 79% rating it as "excellent" or "above average".

TRAINING, SUPPORT AND MENTOR SATISFACTION

Research related to best practices in mentoring programs shows that training, support, and mentor satisfaction are critical to the success of mentorship programs. The evaluation explored these program elements through the perspectives of both staff and mentors.

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

The online mentor survey sought to assess mentors' satisfaction with different aspects of the mentoring programs they were involved in across years two, three and four of the evaluation. The online mentor survey asked mentors to rate how much they agreed with a series of statements. The rating scale was from "1 – strongly disagree" to "5 – strongly agree". Detailed results can be found in Appendix M*. The following highlights key results of the online mentor survey:

- **The ratings were extremely positive, with the average ratings across the three years ranging from 4.2 to 4.7 (between "agree" and "strongly agree"), indicating overall very strong mentor satisfaction in the programs.**

- In all three years, mentors appeared to feel positively about their roles, with 100% of respondents in Year 2, 97% of respondents in Year 3, and 99% in Year 4 agreeing/strongly agreeing that they enjoy being a mentor to the girls in the program. Similarly, 98% of respondents in Year 2, 96% of respondents in Year 3, and 96% in Year 4 indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend becoming a mentor to others.

- Mentors also appeared to be satisfied with their involvement in the program, by agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with their involvement as a mentor (over 87% in Year 2, 92% in Year 3, and 94% in).

- The programs appear to be doing a good job of supporting the mentors. Most respondents strongly agreed or agreed that that their role is clear and understandable (98% of respondents in Year 2, 92% in Year 3 and 96% in Year 4). Further, 98% of respondents in Year 2, 93% in Year 3 and 96% in Year 4 strongly agreed/agreed that they received the support they needed to be a good mentor to the girls.

- In general, most of the ratings were slightly higher in year 4 than in years 2 and 3, showing a general progression in improved mentor satisfaction and increased staff support.

The mentor surveys in Year 3 and 4 also explored the factors that kept mentors involved in the program. In the survey, mentors were asked to rank a series of statements from "1- the most important" to "10- the least important". There was a fair amount of consistency in both years with the same three reasons being selected most often in the top five.

- The reason cited most often in the top five was "The positive relationship with mentors" – rated in the top five by approximately 76% of respondents in Year 3 and 81% in Year 4.

- The second and third most cited reason in the top five reasons were:

- "It is satisfying/rewarding to see the girls grow and change, cited in the top five by 71% of respondents in Year 3 and 55% in Year 4.

- "I feel committed to my mentees", cited in the top five by 69% of respondents in Year 3 and 77% in Year 4.

Thus, the commitment to the mentees, the positive mentee outcomes observed by the mentors, and their relationship with the mentees appear to be the most important things that keep mentors involved.
While support from staff is important, it was only rated in the top 5 by about 24% of respondents in both

years.

Mentors were also asked in an open-ended question to report on other reasons why they continued to be involved as a mentor in the girls program. In both of the years surveyed, the primary reasons cited for continuing their involvement as mentors were the commitment to the girls and helping them; the fact that they had fun and enjoyed mentoring; and the skills and other things they gained through their experience as mentors.

"I believe that through the cultural teachings and other cultural aspects I am meant to help with the girls program. This has been something that was missing from my life and it make sense for me to participate in this program." (Tsleil Waututh Nation/Musqueam First Nation)

"I love being a mentor. It makes me feel that I am a role model. Not only does it influence the mentee to do better things, it influences me to do better things as I know that someone looks up to me." (North York Community House)

"I love it! I feel like I'm inspiring the girls to take an interest in science which is fantastic since science, technology, engineering and math have been traditionally male dominated fields. I think it's important to give girls role models in those fields and facilitate their learning in those fields." (YWCA Cambridge)

In the Year 3 and 4 mentor surveys, respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale from "1- not at all satisfied" to "5- extremely satisfied" with various elements of the training and support they had received from the organizations. The following chart shows how all elements were rated quite favourably; with the average ratings ranging from 3.9 to 4.6. The lowest rating of 3.9 was in Year 3 for how prepared mentors were to work with the girls when they first started mentoring. In Year 4 this rating went up to 4.1 (higher than "very"). Participants' ratings for how prepared they were after working with the girls for a while increased to 4.4 in Year 3 and 4.5 In Year 4 reflecting that the ongoing training and support helped them feel more prepared. This ongoing support was also discussed in open-ended questions and the focus groups. **The programs appear to be doing an excellent job of supporting mentors, with this element getting the highest average rating of 4.6 in both Years 3 and 4.**

	Year 3	Year 4
The support you receive from staff	4.6	4.6
How prepared you are to work with the girls now	4.4	4.5
The content of the training you received	4.0	4.1
The amount of training your received for your mentor role	3.9	4.1
How prepared you were to work with the girls when you started mentoring	3.9	4.1

Figure 34: Mentors' Rating of Training and Support

The surveys also asked mentors to report on what they liked most about the training they received. **The most prominent themes in all three years of the mentor survey were that the training was interactive and engaging and that it was useful, providing the skills and learning that mentors needed to work with girls.** Mentors liked the scenarios and hands-on learning provided across many organizations. Numerous respondents across the two years also reported that the training was clear, simple, and easy to understand, while several others reported that the training and facilitators were easy-going, approachable and non-intimidating and that it was a comfortable atmosphere. Furthermore, numerous respondents reported that they enjoyed the open discussion and the facilitator's openness to answering questions; the small group; as well as meeting the other mentors and learning from them.

> *"The training that I received was very interactive. The mentors actually participated in some of the activities that you would be leading with the girls. This helped the mentors understand the program better. The trainer was very open and approachable and gave lots of supporting ideas." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John)*

> *"I liked how I got to work with the girls, and get some hands-on training so I am more comfortable with future challenges." (YWCA Toronto)*

> *"It was group training so I got to know the other mentors and the content at the same time." (YWCA Yellowknife)*

In all three years of the survey, mentors provided a few suggestions on how to improve the training. Many were program specific, but a few grouped around the following general suggestions:

- More training time throughout the year (including a refresher for returning mentors).
- More training on specific topic areas (e.g. conflict resolution, specific skills, role of the mentor, First Nations culture, talking to girls, available resources in the community, being inclusive of girls with disabilities, addressing language barriers).
- More opportunities for mentors to practice what they learned before the program began (e.g. shadowing mentors).
- More opportunities to share ideas.
- More hands-on experience before starting to mentor (e.g. shadowing mentors for 1-2 sessions before starting).
- Exploring case studies and specific situations they might encounter when they are mentoring.
- More training on the issues that girls face in their lives (e.g. poverty, divorce, anxiety).

Mentors were also asked if they had any recommendations on how to improve the support that they received. Respondents made few suggestions; in fact, some mentors used that space to comment positively on the support received. Only several recommendations were mentioned numerous times in the three years, including:

- More training

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- Meeting with staff more often

- Meetings with just mentors several times a month to discuss what is going on/scheduled feedback

THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

The Mentoring Programs provide training to the mentors. This training can be both formal through workshops and a set curriculum and informal through for example debriefs and conversations between staff and mentors. Based on the results of the staff survey, organizations that were delivering mentoring programs in Year 4 provided an average of approximately 5.6 hours of formal training (range from 0 to 10) and 9.8 hours of informal training (range from 0 to 30). Most programs (indicated by 75% of respondents) provided at least 4 hours of formal training.

In Year 3 and 4 respondents to the staff survey rated how satisfied they were with various aspects of the mentor training on a scale from "1-not at all satisfied" to "5-extremely satisfied". The detailed results can be seen in Appendix M*; key points include:

- Staff respondents were more than somewhat satisfied (a rating of 3) with all aspects of the training they provided for mentors (support provided, how prepared mentors are to start mentoring, the content of the training and the amount of training) in both years.

- Staff appeared to be most satisfied with the support they provided mentors, and least satisfied with the amount of training they provided mentors.

- The average ratings for the support provided to mentors remained the same for Years 3 and 4, but the other ratings that were all related to the training provided went down a little between these years. Interestingly the mentor's ratings on these same elements went up from Year 3 to 4 showing an inconsistency in staff and mentors' satisfaction with the training and support, with the mentors' satisfaction in Year 4 being overall higher than the staff's satisfaction.

- The staff and mentor ratings seem to be consistent in terms of the support that is provided to mentors. Mentors rated the support provided by staff higher than the staff themselves (4.5 and 4.6 for mentors compared to 4.2 in both years for staff), but both staff and mentors rated this highest out of all of the elements.

In Years 2 and 3 of the staff survey, respondents were asked to describe what they believed to be the three most important elements to be covered in mentor training. The elements most commonly cited included the following:

- The expectations, roles, and responsibilities of mentors

- Relationships and establishing boundaries

- Skill building, including mentee engagement, facilitation skills, communication, dealing with difficult situations, and interacting with the mentees

In the final year, staff we asked to reflect on the key lessons they had learned with regards to mentor training. Their responses were varied, but reflected the following key themes:

- Training should be continuous throughout the year

- Informal training is important

- There is a need to work hard at scheduling because it could be a challenge and to provide a variety of training opportunities to suit mentors' schedules (e.g. formal and informal, short sessions)

- Hands-on training is valuable (e.g. tri-mentor model where more experienced mentors mentor the younger mentors)

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

- More training is better (incorporate as much training as you can)
- Support is as important as training (inform mentors that staff is available for support)

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MENTORS AND MENTEES

As illustrated in many comments from the mentors, mentees, and staff, the quality of the relationship between the mentors and the mentees is critical to an effective program. The results from the girls' survey, Letters to My Mentor activity, and the mentee and mentor focus groups provide some detail as to how relationships developed in the groups and some of the key characteristics of these relationships.

THE MENTEES' PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the girls' survey in Years 3 and 4 included items to assess the relationship that the girls had with mentors and staff. Girls were asked to rate a number of items related to the relationship on a 5-point scale. Detailed results can be seen in Appendix M*; they indicate the following:

- The girls rated all aspects of their relationship with their mentors very positively, ranging from 3.9 to 4.6 in Year 3 and 4.0 to 4.7 in Year 4.
- Ratings of the relationship items were high for both the mentors and the facilitators but in Years 3 and 4 girls rated all relationship items for the mentors slightly higher than that given to facilitators.
- The total average rating for the relationship items was higher for the mentors than it was for the facilitators (4.4 vs. 4.2 respectively).

In addition to the survey results, the Letters to My Mentor activity conducted in Year 3 also highlighted important or positive characteristics of the mentoring relationship. Within the letters, the girls often described what they liked about their mentors. **The most common response was that their mentors have positive traits, such as they are "nice", "kind" and "funny".** Other themes in the responses included the following:

- Mentors were energetic, positive, and enthusiastic
- Mentors were helpful, supportive or caring
- Girls could communicate with their mentor, they could open up to her or the mentor made communication easy
- They liked doing activities with the mentors
- Mentors were smart, taught them things and gave them advice
- Mentors were trustworthy and respectful
- Mentors were always there for them (consistency)
- Mentors inspired them
- Mentors made them feel loved
- Mentors made the girls group better

> *"One thing I like about my mentor is the respect and kindness she shows me and actually helps in many ways and the way my mentor makes me feel ... wanted and loved and she is someone that you can look up to ...." (YWCA Toronto)*

> *"I like talking about my life to you. I like having you. You are important to me because you are easy to talk to." (Boys and Girls Club of London)*

> *"I like having you as a mentor because you inspired me to be myself and to not hold anything back." (North York Community House)*

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

"I like how you are always smiling and I can always state my opinion around you." (Musqueam First Nation)

In the interviews and focus groups the girls were asked about their relationship with their mentor. Their comments echoed what was said in the letters regarding what they liked about their mentor. Girls talked about how they trusted their mentors, how their mentors listened to them, and that they could open up to them and share openly. They reported having things in common with their mentors, that they liked them and that they were happy to see them. Their comments reflected that many girls see the groups as a family and their mentor as a big sister. The results also emphasized that the girls see their mentors as fun, supportive, and caring, and that these are important characteristics in a mentor.

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

In the Year 3 and Year 4 surveys, mentors rated various elements of their relationship with the mentees on a scale from "1-terrible" to "10-great". Detailed results can be found in Appendix M*; the following are some key points that emerged:

- **Mentors rated all aspects of the relationship with their mentees very high, with average ratings across the two years ranging from 7.4 to 9.3.**
- The ratings for how much they cared about the mentees, how much fun the mentors had with their mentees, and how much they liked their mentees, were rated the highest with average ratings of over 9 for both years.
- The ratings were quite consistent over the two years, but tended to be slightly higher for most items in Year 4 than in Year 3.

During the focus groups the mentors echoed the girls' comments about the groups' resemblance to a close family. One mentor described herself as an "auntie", another as an "older sister". Mentors in several programs described how their relationship with the mentees had changed over time, observing how the relationships developed over sessions with girls becoming increasingly comfortable to share their feelings and opinions. Many mentors also discussed how they felt like they really knew their mentees, or even described feeling close to them due to the open communication that took place during the groups.

"Well yeah because they don't talk to other people…. One girl, her mom had committed suicide, and she believed it was because her mom didn't love her, but she had never expressed that to anybody. So … we had that conversation and what thoughts sometimes people have through suicide and (that) help(ed) her …." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

"…One of my mentees is really shy so right from the beginning I knew I wanted to get her to open up; so I did and she really opened up to me but then my challenge was to get her to open up to everyone else and not just rely on me and stick right by my side…. It was amazing to see her progress from the beginning to the end. She really opened up, she was talking to others…. I think just going one on one with her was probably the biggest thing …. Just focusing and spending that time with her… I think that's what did it." (YWCA Muskoka)

Some mentors talked about the differences between the roles of the staff and the mentors. The primary difference that they described related to the roles each play. Staff were a formal part of the agency, were paid, and were the primary ones responsible for the program. While the girls might feel close to them, they saw the mentors as less of an authority figure and more like a friend or sister they could have fun with, open up to, and be more relaxed with.

Some teenage or young adult mentors talked about age and explained that because they were closer in age to the mentors, their relationships were more relaxed. Girls could open up more because the mentor understood what they were going through. However, when the discussion came up in programs with adult mentors, mentors explained that they did not think that age was a barrier in forming relationships. They felt

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

the girls could have a close relationship with an older mentor as long as they showed understanding and that the girls could relate to them in some ways (e.g. similar life experiences, from the same community).

BEST PRACTICES AND CRITICAL PROGRAM ELEMENTS

This section will report on what mentees, mentors and staff viewed as critical components in the girls mentoring programs. That is, those components that are necessary to have in place in order to produce the positive outcomes or benefits for the girls. The results related to critical components were derived from both survey results and the qualitative data collected in interviews, focus groups and Letters to My Mentor activity.

GIRLS' SURVEY RESULTS

As was discussed in Chapter 3, when we examined the group as a whole over all four years, there were several best practices that had the most positive relationship with resilience scores. These included:

- An emotionally safe environment – group was a place where the girls felt comfortable talking, listening and sharing ideas, and where people trusted one another
- Positive environment – group was a happy and positive place
- Staff – instructors made them feel comfortable in sharing what they wanted to do or did not want to do
- Good variety/holistic – good range or variety of things to do or topics covered

The relationship between best practices and resilience scores was also examined for the mentoring group only for Year 1, 3 and 4.[49] As with the group as a whole, there were differences from year to year; nonetheless the best practices that seemed to have the most positive relationship with resilience scores included:

- Good variety/holistic – a good range or variety of things to do or topics covered
- Positive environment – group was a happy and positive place
- Caring staff – having facilitators/instructors who were caring and supportive
- Physical safety – feeling physically safe when in group

THE MENTEES' PERSPECTIVE

In the Letters to My Mentor activity conducted in the third year, the girls described the mentoring groups as fun, safe, and comfortable. They also described how they could talk to their mentor in a very open way. As noted earlier, they made many references to the mentors being supportive and trustworthy, and how the groups were close like a family. In their letters girls often wrote about the mentor as being the reason for the positive outcomes they had experienced through the program, and how the key to this relationship was the support and communication they received. Many girls stated that a mentor was important to them because they were there, they could open up to them, they were somebody they trust, and they could easily talk to them. The girls also wrote about learning from their mentors and that their mentors made them feel included and special. Comments in the letters demonstrated that the intersection of gaining or learning from their mentor while at the same time having fun is a strength of the mentoring programs.

> *"My relationship with my mentors is important because they pick me up when I fall." (Boys and Girls Club of London)*

> *"My relationship with (mentor's name) is very important to me because of all the support she*

49 As discussed previously, we were unable to run analyses on the mentoring group in Year 2 for methodological reasons.

has given me and how she's contributed to the person I've become." (Musqueam First Nation)

"You are important to me as my mentor because you teach me a lot. You are funny when we hang out, you are serious when you need to be." (North York Community House)

In the focus groups, when the girls were asked about what contributed to the positive outcomes they had experienced, the size of the group and the mentor as a role model were mentioned repeatedly. Girls noted that the smaller mentoring groups made it easier to talk to the mentors and other girls in the program and that since the mentors were role models they helped them learn how to communicate and stand up to things.

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

In the Mentor Survey in Years 2-4, mentors were asked to rate different aspects (best practices) of the group process on a scale from "1-not at all" to "5-totally". The detailed ratings can be seen in Appendix M*; they indicate that **according to the mentors' ratings, the mentoring programs appear to be doing an excellent job of incorporating best practices.** All ratings for the three years were very high, ranging from an average of 4.2 ("girls had input into the activities in Year 2") to 4.8 ("the staff were caring and supportive of girls" in Year 4).

In order to understand what aspects of the program are critical to program outcomes, mentors were also asked to rank several program elements from 1 to 10 with 1 being the program element that they believed to be the most critical for the program outcomes. In both Year 3 and 4 the reasons selected most often in the top five were:

- **The safe and comfortable, and open relationship between mentors and mentees** – rated in the top five by 85% of respondents in both Years 3 and 4

- The mentors caring, listening and providing support, cited in the top five by 72% of respondents in Year 3 and 77% in Year 4

- The mentor as a role model that the girls can relate to, cited in the top five by 72% of respondents in Year 3 and 68% in Year 4

In the focus groups, mentors also talked about what they believed to be the critical program elements or practices that contributed to the positive outcomes the girls experienced. Consistent with their ratings of program elements, the mentors often mentioned a safe and comfortable space where girls could talk openly and be listened to as one of the key program practices. In two programs where the mentors were teenagers, the mentors commented on how the safe space was extended to the mentors as well. Another prominent theme, again consistent with the ratings outlined above, was the mentor as a role model who the girl can look up to and who helps guide her in becoming who she 'really wants to be'. Other program elements or practices mentioned by the mentors as key to the program outcomes included girls providing input into the activities; taking the time to build trust; stability, and consistency; and open sharing and communication (which is tied to the safe and comfortable space).

"So just giving them that opportunity to express what they want to do; we aren't going to say that any idea is stupid or silly. We're letting them say what they want to say." (Mentor Focus Group; YWCA Muskoka)

"I think we create situations where they know they're not going to be judged and just very open situations where they can share how they feel, and that builds their confidence. Nobody has ever laughed at anyone or made fun of anyone." (Mentor Focus Group; YWCA Cambridge)

"It's a great experience! It has really enriched my personal knowledge and the knowledge of the mentees. I don't have any other space or environment where I can discuss all of these things and feel safe and free to express my ideas, and I'm sure the other girls feel the same way."

*Appendices to this report are available from the Foundation on request.

(Mentor survey; North York Community House)

"This mentoring program is truly fulfilling. It lives up to its motto, 'Every Girl Is Important'."
(Mentor survey; Boys and Girls Club of London)

THE STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

In the Year 4 staff survey, staff respondents from mentoring programs were also asked to rank eight program elements from 1 to 8 with 1 being the program element that they believe to be the most critical for the program outcomes and 8 the one they believed to be the least important. The main program elements selected most often in the top four were:

- **A safe and comfortable environment where girls can openly communicate their thoughts and feelings, selected in the top four by 78% of the respondents.**
- The program staff/facilitators, selected in the top four by 70% of the respondents.
- The mentors, selected in the top four by 69% of the respondents.
- The program being for girls only, selected in the top four by 67% of the respondents.

In the three years of the survey, the staff respondents were also asked in an open-ended question on what elements of the group mentoring component they believed led to enhanced outcomes for the girls. The results reinforced the dominant themes from the mentor surveys and focus groups. The main elements or practices reported by staff to be key elements in the mentoring programs included the following:

- Smaller groups than in the regular program or a lower ratio of mentors to mentees where girls get more individual attention.
- Program consistency, including consistency on the part of mentors.
- Relating to the mentor and the mentors being good role models to the girls.
- A safe environment where girls feel comfortable to share and feel like they belong.
- Group discussions.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

The results of the evaluation of the mentoring program component are quite strong and as seen in this chapter, staff, mentors, and the girl participants have rated the program very highly with respect to outcomes and process. In order to help us understand how the programs can be improved, the surveys, interviews and focus groups did probe into program weaknesses and suggestions for improvements. Those results are summarized below.

THE MENTEES' PERSPECTIVE

Of the 230 letters written for the Letters to My Mentor Activity, there were only five that contained negative comments. Most of these were unique comments, with no themes emerging. The only negative comment that was repeated in three of the five letters was related to the mentor not showing up or not having enough time with their mentor.

In the focus groups, girls were asked to comment on ways that they thought the program could be improved.

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The responses were varied, but a few themes emerged across some of the sites, including the following:

- More girls in the groups (mentioned in about one-third of programs)
- More activities/more varied activities (mentioned in about one-half of programs)
- More time with mentors and having meetings more often (mentioned in about one-half of programs)

THE MENTORS' PERSPECTIVE

When asked to comment on how the program could be improved, the mentors' responses in the Year 3 and Year 4 surveys and the focus groups included the following themes:

- More time to spend with the mentees
- More consistency including consistent goals and programing and consistent attendance for girls and mentors
- More training for the mentors/more orientation
- More organized planning/structure for the groups
- More social media communication between the mentors and mentees (mostly mentioned in programs that have set out to do this)
- More group content-based discussions in the program
- A wider range of activities (including more field trips)

THE STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

In the Year 3 survey and in the staff focus groups, staff was asked in an open-ended question to report on any challenges and issues they had faced in implementing the mentoring component of the program. One of the primary challenges experienced by numerous programs was finding a time to meet with mentors for ongoing training and supervision since mentors are volunteers and either students or women with other time commitments. Related to mentors' time constraints, some staff mentioned that it was challenging trying to recruit mentors to commit to a long period of time to ensure consistency for the girls. Other challenges mentioned by one or two programs included a lack of space for programming, limited staff time to offer ongoing support to mentors, and inconsistent attendance on the part of the girls and mentors.

In the site visit interviews, staff reported on the same challenges reported in the Year 3 survey. Some programs also reported that when working with teen mentors, the support involved was very time intensive. They viewed supporting the young women also as part of the program and felt that at times it was like running two programs – one for the teenage mentors and one for the younger girls. Staff reported, however on the strengths of engaging teenage mentors and believed that the efforts and rewards of the program were worth it.

SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

The evaluation results for the mentoring programs across the four years of this phase of the Canadian Women's Foundation Girls' Fund demonstrate that the programs funded by Nancy Baron Mentorship for Girls Program resulted in clear outcomes for the girls and mentors involved. The organizations involved in the program incorporated best practices, were positive about group mentoring and its effects and learned much about mentoring.

The results of the outcome evaluation of the mentoring programs provide some indication that the mentoring programs are resulting in enhanced benefits for girl participants beyond the outcomes in a regular girls program. Girls in the mentoring groups showed larger magnitudes of change (effect sizes) than girls in the regular groups across almost all of the protective factors. Further, there was a greater proportion of girls who reported a positive change for self-confidence, connectedness, school engagement and for resilience overall from the mentoring programs, compared to girls in regular groups alone. For most of the other protective factors[50], again there was a general pattern of greater proportions of girls in mentoring showing improvement for "after" the program, as compared to those in the regular program. The results were consistent with the qualitative results where girls described how they gained confidence, felt more connected and gained much more from their relationship with their mentors.

The results also indicate that adding a mentoring component can extend an organisation's reach by providing a structured activity for teenage girls and young women who have aged out of the girls' programming or by providing volunteer experiences for adult women. Mentoring results in positive outcomes for both youth and adult mentors. According to the ratings from teen mentors, their participation as a mentor is having a significant impact in skill development, connectedness, self-confidence, self-pride and feeling positive about the future (average ratings for these ranging from 3.8 to 4.5 on a 5-point scale). Adult mentors also rated the impact of their participation as a mentor quite high across areas (ratings ranging from 3.5 to 4.6).

The results of the process component of the evaluation of the mentoring programs provide some information that can be helpful to programs. With regard to mentor recruitment, the main reasons mentors signed up to become mentors were because they thought it was important work, they liked working with the age group, and they wanted to contribute to their community. These reasons were rated much higher than reasons related to gaining skills or resume building.

Across years, mentors appeared to be very satisfied with their roles and the support they received. In all three years, mentors appeared to feel positively about their roles, with between 97% to 100% of mentors

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50 These included: problem-solving skills, getting along better with others, focusing on strengths and skills, having adults to go to for advice or help, feeling closer to/supported by family, feeling good about being a girl, and knowing when to seek help or advice.

across the years agreeing or strongly agreeing that they enjoy being a mentor to the girls in the program; 87% to 94% of mentors agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with their involvement as a mentor; and 92% to 96% of mentors agreeing or strongly agreeing that their role is clear and understandable. The ratings also showed a progression as the programs became more established with higher ratings in Year 4 than the previous years.

The programs appear to be doing an excellent job of supporting mentors, with mentors rating the support they received from staff at 4.6 on a 5-point scale in both Years 3 and 4. With regard to mentor training, the most prominent themes in mentors' survey responses across the years showed that mentors liked that the training was interactive and engaging and that it was useful, providing the skills and learning mentors needed to work with girls.

In the final year, staff reflected on the key lessons they had learned related to mentor training. Their responses were varied, but some of the key themes that emerged were that there should be continuous training throughout the year, that informal and hands-on training is important, and that ongoing support is as important as training. Staff also acknowledged that scheduling mentor trainings is challenging but that is something that organizations need to work hard at achieving.

The relationships the mentors had established with the mentees across programs appeared to be quite positive; girls rated all aspects of their relationship with their mentors very positively, ranging from 3.9 to 4.6 in Year 3 and 4.0 to 4.7 in Year 4. The girls' open-ended comments affirmed the positive relationships reported in the ratings. Girls commented on how they liked their mentors and talked about how they trusted them, how their mentors listened to them, and that they could open up to them and share openly.

Mentors also rated all aspects of their relationship with their mentees very high, with average ratings across the two years ranging from 7.4 to 9.3 on a 10-point scale. Mentors in several programs described how their relationship with the mentees had changed over time. They observed how the relationships developed over sessions which allowed girls to become increasingly comfortable to share their feelings and opinions. Numerous mentors also discussed how they felt like they really knew their mentees, or even described feeling close to them due to the open communication that took place during the groups.

Comments from the mentors and girls do not indicate clearly if the age of the mentor is important. While some girls liked that their mentors were close in age, others also felt close to their older mentors. Some mentors thought that girls could have a close relationship with an older mentor as long as they showed understanding and that the girls could relate to them in some ways (e.g. similar life experiences, from the same community).

Similar to the process results for the girls groups in general, the results of the mentoring component show that a safe and comfortable group environment is key for the groups to be successful. Other critical elements that might be key to the outcomes seen in the mentoring groups are the role of the mentor as

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THE LONG-TERM IMPACT of GIRLS' PROGRAMMING

someone that the girl could look up to (a role model) and the lower girl to mentor ratio.

Overall, the satisfaction with the program was very high for mentor and mentees, but when probed about ways to improve the programs there was some consistency in what mentors and mentees responded with. Numerous mentors and mentees reported that more consistency in attendance (both mentors and mentees), more time to spend together, and a wider range of activities would make the program they attended even stronger.

OVERVIEW, METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPATION

In all three of the funding cycles since 2006, the results of the evaluation of the Girls' Fund have provided much evidence that girls programming does work. Girls participating in girls' programs experience a strengthening of protective factors, feel better about being a girl, and generally feel more empowered. The Girls' Fund programs are geared to girls from ages 9 to 13 because research has shown that as girls grow up they experience declining self-confidence, exposure to violence and other issues that are related to mental health and well-being (Girls Action Foundation, 2015). While the evaluation results have shown clearly that through participation in a girls program, girls not only strengthen their confidence but also other protective factors that help build resiliency as they transition into adolescence, to date, we have not been able to carry out a longitudinal study. As a result, we have not been able to comment on how program participants were doing several years after participation in a girls program.

The long-term impact study, conducted in this current evaluation was focused on collecting data to assess how participation in a program might continue to have an effect several years after participation. In order to gather data from program alumnae, we contacted all organizations who were receiving funding from the Girls' Fund for the second or third time to see if they had contact with their alumnae and determined it was feasible to recruit alumnae to participate in an online survey.[51] Seven organizations agreed to participate. They were sent a flyer to distribute amongst their alumnae outlining the purpose of the study and criteria for participation, as well as a link to an online survey. The online survey contained questions on the impacts, maintenance of those impacts, and reflections on the importance of girls only programming and other program elements.

Organizations were asked to recruit alumnae who had participated in their girls program sometime from

Organization	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total
Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre	7	23%
Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton	6	20%
Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta	5	17%
YWCA of Toronto	5	17%
SuperNova at Dalhousie	3	10%
Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office	2	7%
Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC	2	7%

51 Ideally, we would have liked to have compared a random sample of Girls' Fund alumnae with a comparison group on various outcomes several years after their participation. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the scope and available resources. We did not have access to a comparison group especially since the programs who still had access to alumnae are very different and serve different groups and thus we would have had to have multiple comparison groups. We would also not have baseline data for the comparison group and for the alumnae.

2009-2012 (or earlier if they were in their third phase of funding) and that were between 16 to 22 years of age. Recruiting alumnae for the survey proved to be much more difficult than was anticipated. Regardless, 30 alumnae from 7 different organizations did complete surveys that have provided some data on the long-term impacts of program participation. The organizations and their alumnae's participation are outlined below.

RESPONDENTS' BACKGROUNDS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Over one-half (55%) of the alumnae survey respondents had last attended a girls group in 2012 - four years before they completed the survey, in 2016. The second largest number of respondents had last participated in a girls' program 5 to 8 years ago, between 2008 and 2011. A smaller number of respondents (7%) had last participated in the program 2-3 years ago. Another 10% of respondents reported that they had last attended in 2016, but they were actually now part of a teen program and not the pre-teen girls program funded by the Girls' Fund. We do not have information on when they last attended the pre-teen girls program.

The respondents attended girls' programs for a varied amount of time: 33.3% attended a girls' program for 2-3 years; 20% attended for 1-2 years; 33% attended less than a year; and 13% attended for 3 years or more (between 3 and 7).

The average age of the respondents was 16.7. The majority (62%) was 16. Other ages included 17 (14%), 18 and 19 (7% each), and 14, 15 and 25 (3% each).

Most of the respondents were born in Canada (67.9%) but were diverse in their ethnic backgrounds. Most identified as Canadian (Anglophone). Other ethnic identities included the following:

- Aboriginal (32%)
- Caribbean (14%)
- British (14%)
- Western European (14%)
- South Asian (11%)
- Eastern European (7%)
- French Canadian (4%)

At the time of their involvement in the program, 45% of respondents lived with two parents, 38% lived with their mother, 10% lived with their father, 3 % lived with grandparents, and 3 % split their time between two parents.

At the time of completing the survey, 86% of respondents were in high school, 7% were in post-secondary full-time (university), 4% were taking a gap year, and 4% were working full time.

52 Percentages will not add up to 100% because many had more than one focus.

Participants were asked about the focus of the girls program they attended.[52] Most of the programs had a focus on leadership and empowerment (87%). Other areas of focus included physical activity and healthy eating (37%), safety and violence prevention (37%), media (33%), Aboriginal culture (17%), and STEM (17%).

OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN A GIRLS' PROGRAM

Through several rating and open-ended questions, the alumnae survey explored the outcomes and benefits of participation in girls' programs from the perspective of the program alumnae as well as their perspective on how those outcomes had been maintained once they left the program.

RATINGS ON OUTCOMES

The girls' programs alumnae were asked to rate on a scale from 1 ('not at all') to 7 ('very much') the impact the program had on different protective factors and skill areas. Then they were asked to rate for each of the variables (using the same scale) to what extent the outcomes had been maintained or strengthened. The figure below outlines what proportion of respondents reported some change on the main protective factors of confidence, critical thinking, connectedness (community and peers) and school outcomes (attitude and
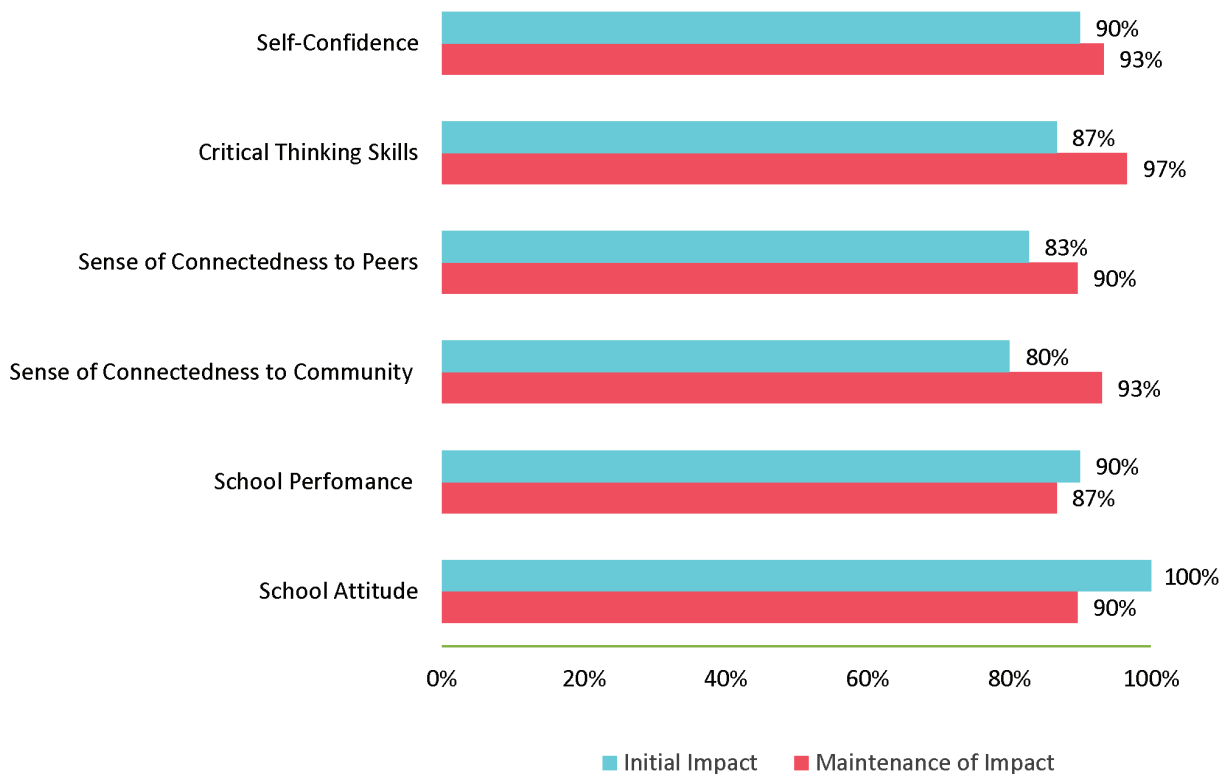
performance). That is, the alumnae gave a rating of at least a 4 ("somewhat") on the 7-point scale for both initial impacts and how that impact was maintained or strengthened since leaving the program.

Figure 35: Alumnae Ratings of Main Protective Factors[53]
**The majority of alumnae (80% to 100%) reported experiencing some positive change in each of the main**

53 Includes only those who answered at least 4 on the 7-point scale for both initial impact
   and the maintenance or strengthening of that impact after leaving the program.

protective factors as a result of their participation in a girls' program.

The majority (88% to 96%) also reported that those outcomes have been maintained or strengthened to a large extent since starting the program.

The average ratings for all items ranged from 4.9 (connected to the community) to 5.8 (positive attitude towards school). The results on school attitude and performance were particularly interesting because in the girls' survey results from the current funding cycle, the school outcomes were not the strongest changes observed in the main protective factors. Though, alumnae rated the impact on attitude towards school (5.8) higher than self-confidence (5.4) and, as seen above, **rated a positive change in school attitude as the greatest change.**
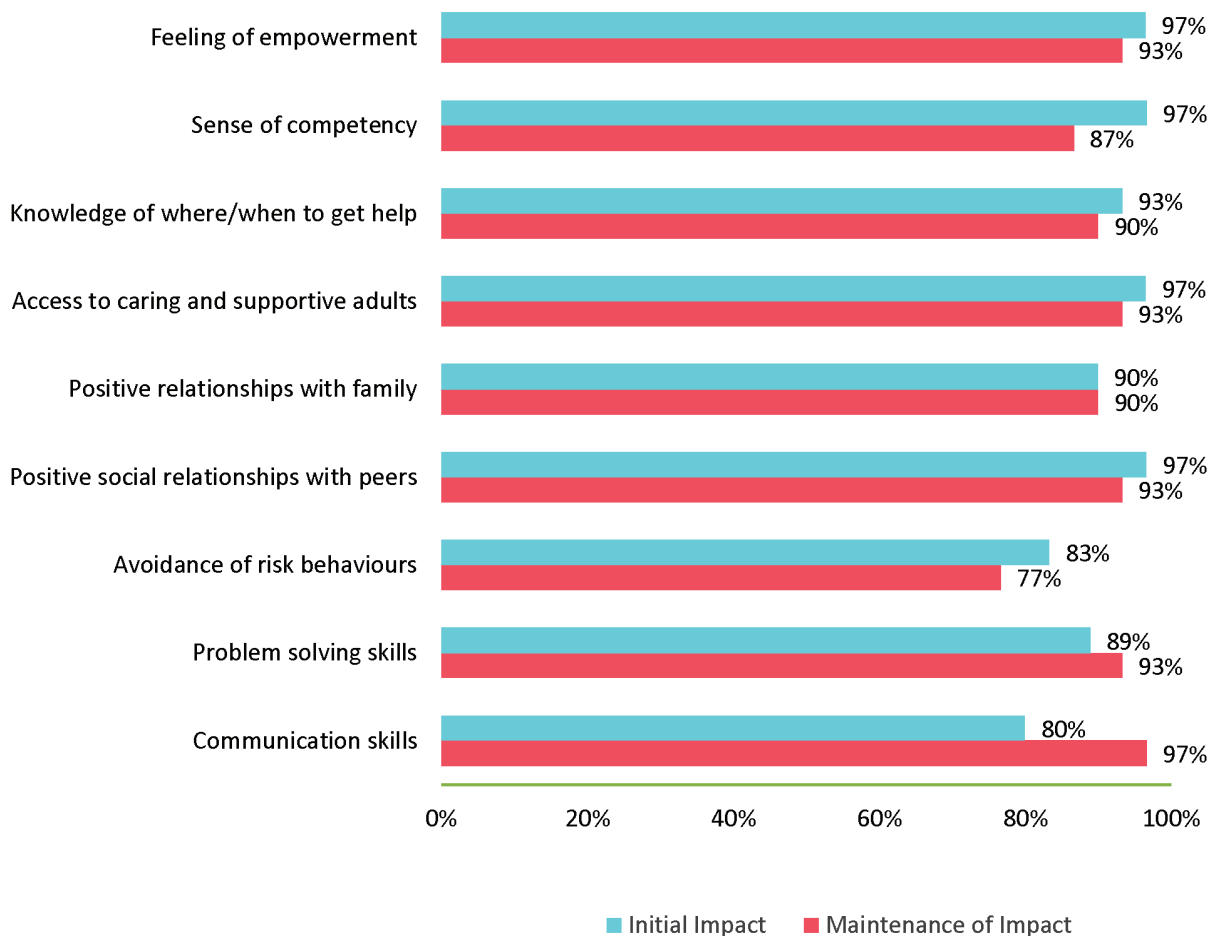
The figure below outlines the proportion of respondents who reported some change (at least a 4 – 'somewhat' on the 7-point scale) for the other protective factors and benefits for both the initial impacts of the program, as well as the how those impacts were maintained or strengthened post-program.

Figure 36: Alumnae Ratings of Other Protective Factors and Benefits[54]
As shown in the figure above, the results for a range of other protective factors and benefits were also positive: **between 80% to 90% of respondents experienced at least some positive change in these areas as a result of their participation in a girls program and 77% to 97% maintained or strengthened those positive changes post-program participation.**

For each of the protective factors and benefits, it is also worth noting that between 59% and 86% of the

54 Includes only those who answered at least 4 on the 7-point scale for both initial impact and the maintenance or strengthening of that impact after leaving the program.

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alumnae rated on the high end of the scale (between 5 and 7). **The highest average ratings for initial impacts were for a feeling of empowerment – particularly about being a girl (6.0), access to caring and supportive adults (5.8), positive attitude towards school (5.8), and positive relationships with peers (5.6).**

EXAMPLES OF OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

Respondents were asked to share one or two examples of changes they had experienced in the program. Over one-third of the examples related to how they had **gained confidence** in different areas. Numerous responses centered on body image; others centered on gaining confidence because of non-judgment, support, and learning new things.

"I was definitely not so confident about my body image, but the program helped to overcome that. I was also able to just be more comfortable in myself." (YWCA Toronto, age 18)

"I also was willing to look at media, magazines and ads and feel less insecure about myself." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, age 17)

Over one-fifth of the examples focused on **positive social relations and an increased sense of connectedness.**

"Being able to hang out with girls my age made me feel happy and like I had friends and the activities we participated in gave me a stronger sense of what a healthy positive relationship towards my family and friends is." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)

"It gave me the chance to make more friends and learn new things that I didn't know about myself." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, age 16)

"Joining the program helped me to step outside of my comfort zone. I was more outgoing and felt connected to a lot of the other girls there." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)

Numerous comments referred to gaining a **sense of empowerment** from the program.

"A feeling of empowerment particularly about being a girl because the topics we touch on and workshops we have (for example talking about the issues girls face in the media) make me want to change the way girls are viewed in today's society. The staff here make it well known that us girls have the power to do anything and as a group we are strong enough to change the world." (YWCA Toronto, age 16)

Several examples related to improvement in **communications skills.**

"I went from being very quiet because I was afraid that others would judge me to being more confident about voicing my opinions." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, age 17)

"...Communication skills because I talked to many different girls in the program and staff." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton, age 16)

Several alumnae also provided examples about how the program had a **positive impact on relationships with family.**

> *"I've also noticed that I grew closer with my family and supportive people around me because they'll always be there when I need someone to talk to or when I need help with certain things." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, age 16)*

Respondents were also asked in an open-ended question if there were other benefits (other than the ones they were asked to rate) that they gained from their participation in the girls program. Many of the examples reiterated gains in confidence, empowerment and connectedness. Numerous respondents, however, provided examples of how their involvement in the program had **broadened their world, helped them grow as a person, or provided new opportunities that they would not have otherwise had.**

> *"I was given opportunities I wouldn't have necessarily been given anywhere else." (YWCA Toronto, age 18)*

> *"I found that the girls programs have helped me grow as a person and made me help understand more things." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton, age 16)*

> *"I was able to learn about different careers I never realized existed." (SuperNOVA, age 16)*

Numerous respondents provided examples of outcomes related to the specific focus of their program (e.g., STEM, physical activity and healthy eating, leadership and empowerment, media).

> *"I feel I learnt some cool tricks like painting eggs as well as working with other girls." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, age 16)*

> *"This program has greatly influenced my passion for sciences. It was nothing but a positive experience." (SuperNOVA, age 16)*

> *"I learned a lot of different things, about sports, science, critical thinking, and I still retain that information today." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)*

Other benefits of participating in a girls program that were reported by alumnae included having positive role models, coming out of their shell and a more positive attitude towards girls' and women's roles.

> *"I was able to learn how to come out of my shell, because I was a very shy person. However, taking part of these programs made me able to talk to other people and learn how to open myself up. I also learned how important it is to be the best girl I can be and to not let anyone break me down." (YWCA Toronto, age 16)*

> *"They taught me not to be shy towards other people. Being a girl doesn't make you any different than boys." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)*

"As I got older I realized that all women, ladies, girls should be treated the same with no differences at all and that bullying is not cool at all because I used to be a bully and a victim of a bully." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, age 16)

MAINTENANCE OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

As was seen in the two figures presented above that outlined respondents' ratings of outcomes and how those outcomes had been maintained, most respondents reported at last some improvement in all areas (from 77% to 97% across outcomes). The average ratings were all quite high, ranging from 4.9 – avoidance of risk behaviours, to 6.2 – a sense of empowerment. **The four highest average ratings (that is the gains that were maintained the most) were for a feeling of empowerment (6.2), a sense of competency – feeling like you are good at some things (6.1), confidence (6.0) and access to caring and supportive adults (6.0).**

Respondents were asked to describe changes they experienced that had stayed with them. One of the most dominant themes in the responses **was a sense of confidence and empowerment, especially around being a girl or woman:**

"I have a better sense of competency and am willing to try more new things now even if I don't think that I am good at them. I feel empowered about being a girl and have given back to the program by volunteering." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, age 17)

"It made me so proud to be female, and to be an independent and strong young girl. It helped me meet a lot of people that have absolutely changed my life, and I learned so many life lessons from them. My communication and problem solving skills are what I believe have stayed with me the most." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)

"This program made me feel confident, strong, and all- around proud to be a girl." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton, age 19)

Some respondents provided examples of how they **were more willing to talk to others now about problems or to get help.** In some cases, the young women still had access to the adults that had supported them while in the program:

"This program has helped me realize that it is okay if you are different or if you have a problem and you want to talk about it with someone. We do not always have to turn to our parents or teachers at school for help. We can come to the YWCA and ask for resources – for example - Kids Help Phone." (YWCA Toronto, age 16)

"(It) taught me that if I'm having any problems, drugs and smoking, doing something to your body is not the answer, to talk to someone if you are feeling that way." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)

Examples of how the **school outcomes they experienced in the program had stayed with them** were also provided by some respondents:

"I am more confident in my classes in school, more likely to raise my hand and offer my opinion." (SuperNOVA, age 16)

"I have also experienced a more positive attitude and outlook toward school." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, age 15).

Several respondents also reported an **increased sense of connection or that improved relationships – either with their peers or family – had been maintained** since they stopped attending the girls' program.

"I get along with more people than I used to" (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton, age 16)

"I felt connected to my community and felt like I really belonged with the people of the community as well as my own friends." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, age 17)

"I still have a positive relationship with my family." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)

LEARNING THROUGH THE GIRLS' PROGRAMS

The respondents were asked to list the three main things they had learned through their experience in the girls' group. The most common themes in the responses included the following:

- **Self-esteem and confidence - reported by over 50% of the respondents**
- **Self-acceptance - reported by close to 50% of respondents**
- Well-being and how to be healthy - reported by close to 25% of respondents
- The importance of relationships - reported by about 17% of respondents
- Ideas related to safety (how to protect self, using internet safely) - reported by about 17% of respondents
- Empowerment (especially about being a girl/woman and related to being who they want to be) – reported by about 17% of respondents
- How to seek help and learning that they can get help if they need it – reported by about 17% of respondents
- Respect and acceptance of others – reported by about 17% of respondents
- About the strength and skills of women (girls can be strong, women can do as much as men) –reported by about 14% of respondents
- Courage/stepping outside comfort zone (try new things/take chances) - reported by about 14% of respondents
- Problem solving skills – reported by about 14% of respondents
- Leadership skills - reported by about 10% of respondents
- Teamwork - reported by about 10% of respondents
- About culture/Aboriginal life – reported by about 10% of respondents overall, but by 43% of those who were in the one program in the sample that had a focus on Aboriginal culture and teachings

Other less frequently cited learnings included: that math and science and science can be interesting, that your opinion counts/is valued, about positive body image, social skills, to be more open minded, to persevere and not give up, to think critically and to have fun.

IMPACT ON THE DIRECTION OF ONE'S LIFE

In order to gain an understanding of the magnitude of the impact girls programs have on participants, the survey respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("very much") to what extent

the program had positively affected the direction of their life. The average rating was 5.8. **Most of the**
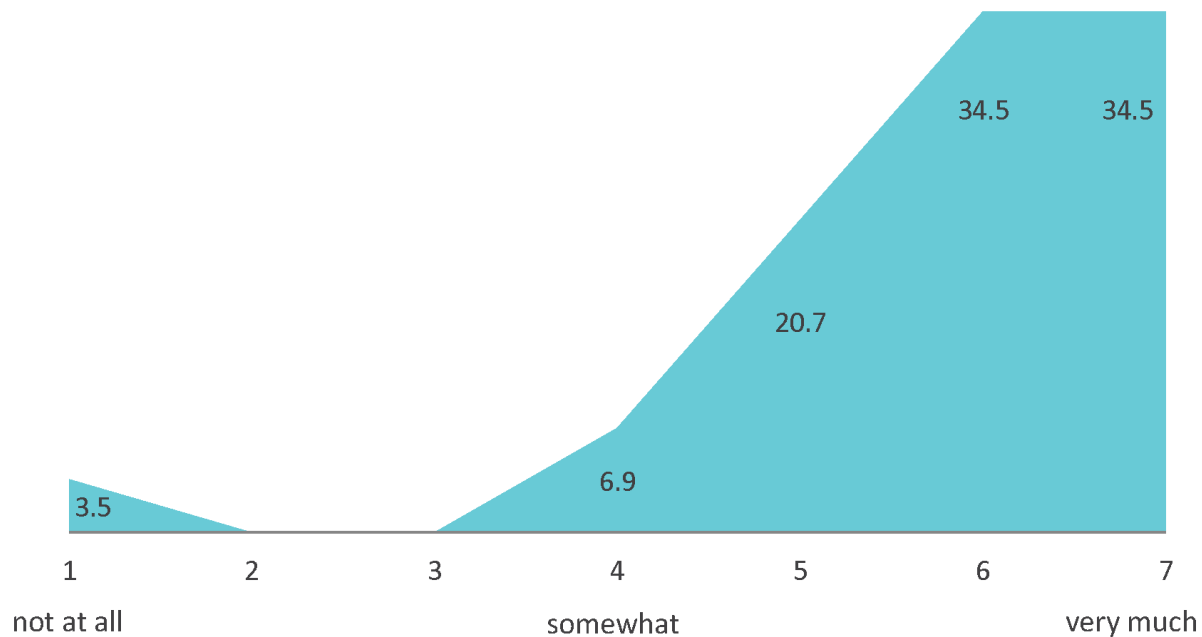
respondents (89%) rated on the high end of the scale (from 5 to 7), with 34.5% rating the impact on the
direction of their life a '7' or 'very much'. These results indicate that participation in a girls program can
have a profound effect for some girls who participate in girls programming between the ages of 9 to 13.

Figure 37: Alumnae's Ratings -- How Program Participation Positively Affected their Direction in Life
**When asked to explain how the program had changed the direction of their life, many of these
explanations described how participation in the program had helped them deal with problems such
as poor body image, low self-confidence and mental health issues.** Alumnae also described how they
changed their attitude, perspective, or the program helped them look at things in a different way. It helped
guide them through their transition to Canada as a newcomer, provided a sense of belonging, helped
them come out of their shell and be more outspoken. It also helped them become more open-minded and
provided an ongoing support as they go through/went through their teen years.

*"I was not happy with my body image, what I looked like etc. Being in this program helped me to
be more comfortable and happy with who I am. I love myself." (YWCA Toronto, age 18)*

*"I struggled with low self-esteem as a child that eventually spiralled into some mental illness.
This program helped me learn to love myself and had an extremely positive impact on my self-
esteem and confidence. It also helped develop my leadership skills, which have gotten me many
jobs and leadership positions that have become a huge part of my life." (Boys and Girls Clubs of
Hamilton, age 19)*

*"I joined the program when I was new to Canada and it impacted my first few months, where
I found there were people around me to guide me through and help get over me being a
newcomer." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, age 17)*

*"I wouldn't be so open-minded about taking my career into math/science/technology if it hadn't
been for Girls Inc. The program made me learn a lot of things about myself and my capability as
a girl, and now that I'm a woman I hold the skills I learned and the people I met really close to*

my heart." (Girls Inc. Of Northern Alberta, age 16)

"The one lady there had a major impact in my life and we still sometimes speak. She was always there to talk to me or find me help when my life felt downhill, always giving me positive advice and making me feel like a strong, independent woman...." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, age 19)

BECOMING MORE ENGAGED IN OTHER PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES

The alumnae were asked if their participation in the girls' program had led them to become more involved in other programs as a teen or young adult. A majority (63%) of respondents said 'yes'; the remainder said 'no'. Many of the respondents had become involved as a mentor/leader for the same organization that led the girls program they participated in or for a similar organization. Others reported becoming more involved in sports teams, school activities, youth groups as well as other community volunteer activities.

CONTINUED SUPPORT

For many of the girls program alumnae who responded to the survey, ongoing support from program staff for some time after their participation in the program ended was another benefit: 67% reported they were still in touch with program staff (40% continue to be a support to them and 27% stay in touch casually since leaving the program). The respondents were asked to describe the type of support that program staff either continue to provide to them or provided for a period of time after leaving the program. They described staff as being there when they need them, guiding them, helping them make decisions, and providing help and advice. Respondents also described how program staff helped them with school and social situations, directed them to new opportunities, and helped them 'think outside the box'. Some respondents described a great amount of support and described staff as very important in their lives.

"The staff here at YWCA Toronto have had a big impact on me so much that I continue to come back basically every day. They open me up to new opportunities I would not be able to access by myself. Also they are just so friendly, caring and very generous and there are not much places I feel supported like that." (YWCA Toronto, age 16)

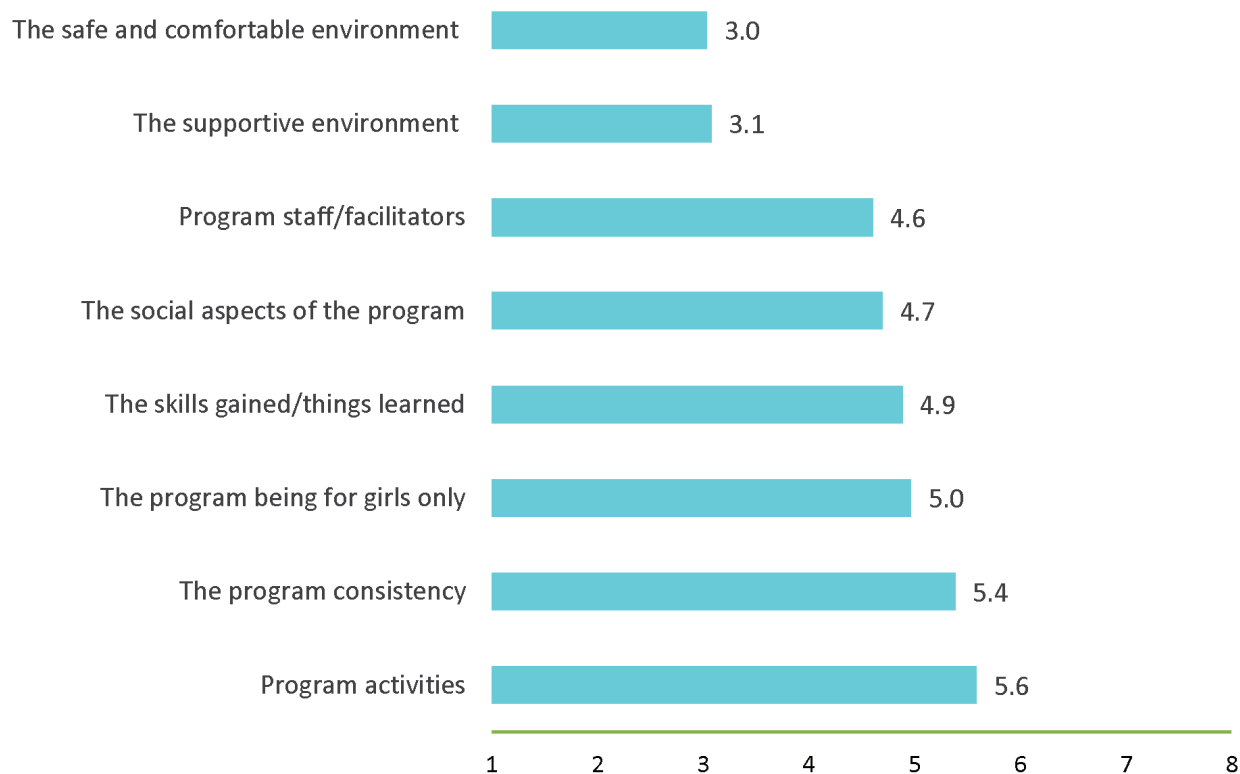*"They give me help on things I don't know what to do and they help guide me though things*

*I'm scared to do by myself they make me try new things and help me think outside of the box."
(Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre, age 16)*

*"They continue to support me to this day by supporting my decisions in my school and career
life." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, age 18)*

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

## MOST IMPORTANT PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Alumnae were asked to rank eight program elements from 1 to 8. The figure below outlines the elements
with the average rankings. Please note that the most favourable rankings have the lowest average since
respondents assigned a ranking of 1 to the most important in producing the program outcomes and 8 to
the least important. **Generally, as a group the respondents ranked the safe and comfortable environment
and the supportive environment as the two key elements in the program.** In fact, over 57% of respondents

Program Element	Average Ranking
The safe and comfortable environment	3.0
The supportive environment	3.1
Program staff/facilitators	4.6
The social aspects of the program	4.7
The skills gained/things learned	4.9
The program being for girls only	5.0
The program consistency	5.4
Program activities	5.6

ranked the safe and comfortable environment as either the first or second most important element, and over
46% rated the supportive environment as the first or second most important. When examining the individual
responses, however, it is important to note that respondents did vary in their ranking. Each element was
ranked as the top element by at least one respondent, indicating that most likely a combination of all
elements queried are important.

Figure 38: Alumnae's Rankings of Important Program Elements

The respondents were also asked in an open-ended question to report on what other aspects of the program beyond the elements outlined above, were important to them and the positive changes they may have experienced through the program. Some respondents repeated some of the elements above and reiterated their importance. Numerous respondents reported that it was the friendships that were made that were the key to the outcomes they experienced. The other responses were varied and included community outings, healthy snacks, learning about culture, and the topics discussed.
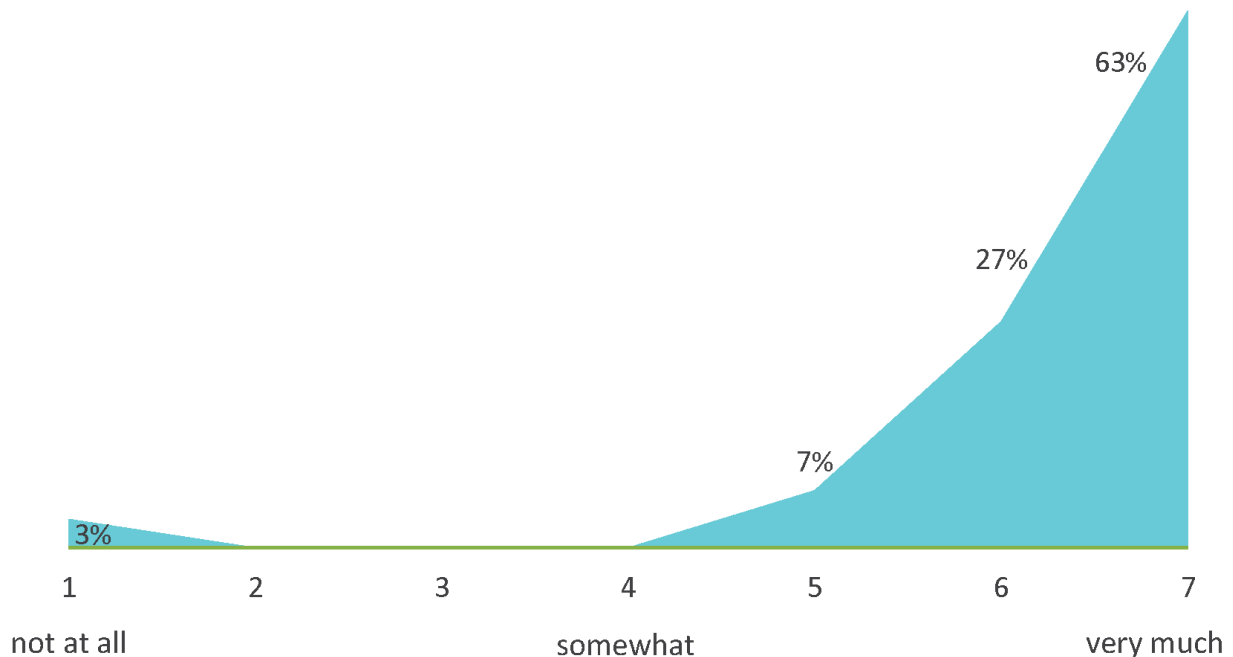
To explore further the importance of girls programming respondents were also asked to rate on a scale from 1 ('not at all') to 7 ('very much') the extent to which they thought it was important that the program had been only for girls. The average rating was very high – 6.4, with 90% of respondents rating it on the high end of the scale (a 6 or 7). Please see further results in the figure below.

Figure 39: Alumnae's Ratings of the Importance of the Program Being for Girls Only
Respondents were also asked to explain why they though it was important (or not) that the program was for girls only. Their responses were very similar to what the girls and parents of the current program participants have responded over the last four years and emphasized the following:

- Girls can support you because they understand what you are going through

- It is important for girls to learn how to communicate with each other

- Girls are more likely to act like themselves when they are with girls only

- Girls are more comfortable and feel safer to share when they are with girls only

- Can focus on topics relevant to girls

- Girls can relate better to each other

- Helps girls bond and understand each other

- Let you know you are not alone

"I think that it is important for young girls to interact with other girls their age. The media portrays females as catty, and malicious, and there is always "girl drama" on TV shows for young girls. It is important for girls to learn to communicate with each other and realize that we are not supposed to hate each other. It is important for young girls to bond over something other than boys. Also, having a girl's only program provides many girls with the confidence to look silly and try new things, which is not usual to see when a boy is around." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton, age 19)

"I feel that it's important that girls have a separate space from boys if they need it. Not because boys and girls are completely different and girls shouldn't be around boys for all periods for the day but more a support for women who can feel like a minority and a safe space where girls can comfortable talk without the pressure of boys our society has brought upon us." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC, age 16)

"It's teaching you that you are not the only girl in the world and other girls can help you, you don't have to compare yourselves to them and they are your friends not enemies." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta, age 16)

SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

The results of the survey with program alumnae are somewhat limited because of the small sample of respondents. The results however are quite consistent with what we have learned though the current program participants and their parents, providing further evidence of the benefits of girls programming. The results also provide some evidence that participating in a girls program can continue to benefit girls into their teen and young adult years as it did for the alumnae survey respondents.

The alumnae rated the outcomes for all protective factors quite highly. A sense of empowerment was the program outcome that received the highest rating'. While as sense of empowerment was not an item included in the current participants' survey, much of the qualitative data did indicate that girls do feel empowered as a result of their participation in the program. According to the alumnae this sense of empowerment is the outcome that is most maintained after participation in a girls program.

The second highest rating was given to access to caring and supportive adults. Many of the alumnae were still in touch with the staff from the program they participated in and continued to get support. While this is definitely not the case for all girls, it is interesting to note that some girls continue to gain support from the adults involved in the girls programs for years after their participation.

An interesting result in the outcome ratings are the high ratings given to the school outcomes. In fact, according to the results, attitude towards school was more affected by participation in the girls program

than confidence was and rated third overall for all the outcomes queried. These results are not completely consistent with the girls' survey where school outcomes while positive, were not the highest of all the protective factor outcomes. It is possible that school outcomes are more evident to participants after some time has passed and they have time to reflect. These results do provide further evidence that the programs do impact school attitude and performance in addition to other protective factors.

The examples provided by the alumnae of changes they had experienced clearly illustrate the positive ratings on all the outcomes, with many respondents providing examples of increased confidence, positive social relations and an increased sense of connectedness. Other examples spoke to a sense of empowerment, improved relationships with family, and communication skills. Beyond the protective factor measures, alumnae provided examples of how their involvement in the program had broadened their world, helped them grow as a person, or provided new opportunities that they would not have otherwise had. They also reported gaining specific outcomes related to the focus of their program (e.g., STEM, Media).

According to the alumnae survey respondents, the benefits of program participation are maintained even after leaving the program. Most respondents reported that they had maintained the gains they had made through the program. Here again the highest rating was given to a sense of empowerment. A sense of competency, confidence and access to caring and supportive adults were also rated amongst the outcomes most maintained since leaving the program. When asked to describe the changes that had stayed with them since leaving the program, one of the most dominant themes in the responses was a sense of confidence and empowerment, especially around being a girl or woman.

The alumnae survey results indicate as well that overall, the programs could have a very positive impact on the direction of girls' lives by helping them at a young age to deal with issues and challenges they might be experiencing. Close to 90% of the respondents rated the program impact on the direction of their lives on the high end of the scale. In an open-ended question, many respondents explained how the program had changed the direction of their life by helping them deal with issues such as poor body image, low self-confidence and mental health issues.

The alumnae ranked the safe and comfortable environment and the supportive environment as the two key elements in the program. These elements clearly resonate with participants several years after leaving the program, reinforcing the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment in all girls programming. It is important to note, however, that respondents did vary in their ranking, indicating that most likely a combination of all elements queried are important

CHAPTER **7**

THE BIGGER PICTURE—THE IMPORTANCE of THE GIRLS' FUND

The results of the alumnae survey provide more evidence for the importance of girls-only programming. Approximately 90% of respondents rated the importance of the program being girls-only on the highest end of the scale. Their explanations were consistent with what current program participants and their parents said, emphasizing the comfort and shared understanding that occur in girls- only groups which allows girls an opportunity to feel safe, open up, gain self-awareness and feel more connected.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we explore the effect and outcomes of the Girls' Fund beyond enhancement of the protective factors in girls aged 9-13. Specifically, this chapter describes the results related to two objectives of the evaluation:

- To determine the fund's impact on grantee organizations.
- To provide information that can be used in building a case for the importance of girls' programming, group mentoring, and identifying the policy issues that are presenting barriers for girls.

Some of the results presented in this section are based on data from the site visits described in previous chapters (mostly staff interviews and focus groups, but also focus groups with parents). Further data was obtained in Year 4 through questions from the parents' and girls' surveys, as well as focus groups with staff conducted by telephone in the spring of 2016.

IMPACT OF THE GIRLS' FUND ON FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

As has already been documented in this report, ratings from the participants throughout the four years of the current cycle of the Girls' Fund indicate that girls are seeing improved relationships with their families as a result of their participation in the program. The alumnae also reported more positive relationships with their families. More detailed information on the potential impact of the programs on the families of the participants was collected through open-ended questions in the parent and staff focus groups and the results are outlined below.

THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Parents reported on several different ways in which their daughters' participation had affected their family. **Many parents spoke of how since participating in the program, their daughter was much more open and communicative and this had improved their relationship with her.** Several parents mentioned that their daughter had improved relationships with siblings and that they were more sensitive and caring with their family. Many parents also mentioned that their daughters were much more assertive, increasingly standing up for themselves within the family. Several parents also talked about how the program helped to reinforce the lessons and values they taught their daughter at home. Further, a few comments focused on how the program provided their daughters with additional supports where the family fell short due to issues such as poverty, a lack of time, or parents being busy caring for other children.

> *"I would say… we did have discussions, but not on a depth level, the way they are now… Yesterday in the garage her and I just had a conversation about one of her friends and it went deep. As before, it would have been 'my friend blah blah blah,' and then it would have been done. I would have had to probe and ask questions. Now, she's literally like opening her mouth and telling the entire story…" (Boys and Girls Club of London)*

"So I wanted her to get involved in something away from me so she can see that without me she is okay, and this is why I started to look into the Y program. It's really been wonderful. Not only does it give me a little bit of space from Jasmine, it gives Jasmine much needed space from me. And she loves it. She loves to be around the people. So it has really been good for our family. So in my relationship now, she is much more open...." (YWCA Cambridge)

The parents also reported learning about the things their daughters were learning in the program. These included areas such as media and positive body image, for example about photoshopping and stereotypes. Parents also mentioned learning facts about science from their daughters who were in STEM programs, and a newcomer/immigrant parent mentioned learning things about Canadian culture and other things about their new home from their daughters. A few parents also talked about how their daughters brought home what they had learned through the program and shared it with the whole family.

"Well, I can tell you I am not allowed to say I'm fat, I am not allowed to go on about going on a diet because you are perfect just the way you are!" (YWCA Yellowknife)

"Quand j'ai appris le programme, j'ai dit et voilà, ça, c'est vraiment intéressent, c'est une occasion à favoriser l'intégration. Et ça m'a beaucoup aidé, et elles (ses filles) m'apprennent aussi beaucoup de choses, quand elles viennent et il y a des affaires que je ne comprends pas et j'ai l'air mal, et elles me disent, mais c'est comme ça maman. C'est vraiment bien." [English translation: "When I learnt about the program I said here, this is really interesting, it's an opportunity to help with integration and it helped me a lot. And they also teach me (her daughters) a lot of things, when they come and there are things I don't understand and I'm having a hard time, they tell me, but it's like this mom. It's really great."] (Action Jeunesse)

THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

Staff from close to three quarters of the organizations discussed specific ways their program had helped the families of the girls who attended. In many of the site visit focus groups, staff spoke at length about the way families and often more specifically mothers, had been affected by the program and the changes in the girls. These themes were also repeated in the Year 4 focus groups.

The majority of the discussions focused on how many of the benefits the girls experienced were transferred directly to their families. Some of the most frequent comments related to how the supports provided to the girls (e.g., free program, food, and transportation) helped families struggling with poverty. Other frequent comments related to how parents had increased interest and curiosity in what the girls were learning and were interested in learning more themselves, and how connecting the girls to community services benefited the parents as well.

Additionally, many staff commented on how the positive things the girls were learning regarding behaviours and attitudes had also influenced the parents. A few staff reported that the girls' increased knowledge about healthy relationships and respect had helped their relationships with their parents and siblings. Some staff also reported that participation in the program allowed parents peace of mind as to their daughters' safety, allowed them some time to themselves (especially single parents), and provided an 'in' for the parents to access other programs within the organization.

Staff from a few organizations, particularly those with an Aboriginal focus and/or in marginalized communities discussed in depth the direct ways in which they support families and girls in unison, and many of the ways the girls' groups cross over with elements of their organizations that involve the parents or mothers. This ranged from group cultural activities, mother-daughter direct support events, family counselling and financial/food support directly to the family. Staff from these organizations stated that the girls' group was a way to get the parents and families comfortable with the staff and larger organization and often a way to get parents involved in the larger community in general.

"They bring that back home to their families, because I remember one girl telling me, grandpa brought his beer into the room with my drum and she told him, 'you have to take that beer out of here'" So they're bringing that home." (Ininew Friendship Centre)

"...The mothers and the families that I deal with, for the most part are really, deeply grateful, for the girls to have a safe place to come to and be themselves and connect to others where sometimes their schools are unsafe, their communities are unsafe, and others are trying to just get by, they really appreciate that it's free because otherwise they wouldn't be able to afford it. And I think they just are really deeply grateful also understanding that there's other adult women who really care for their daughters, that's really important, that they you know, in a world that frequently is hostile to people at the bottom of the rung, the fact that they know that there's a place where their girls come to regularly, have a good time and that they are loved and cared for by strong women I think is a really big deal." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

Beyond the family, staff from most organizations commented on the impacts the girls program has had, or will potentially have, on their larger community. Responses regarding 'community' included geographic neighbourhood, town, region, ethnic or cultural group, individual school or school board, and Indigenous community.

One of the most dominant themes was that **the programs addressed a need in the community for services for young girls and youth engagement, particularly in disadvantaged communities.** The programs also benefitted poorer communities in that they provided a community program available at little to no cost for families. **In all types of communities, staff mentioned the program addressed an already present need for girls-only programming, and in many instances, the existence of the program in a community had also had the effect of increasing the demand for girls-only programming** (discussed later in this chapter as well). Additionally, in some cases, the existence of the girls' programs had become an inspiration for other community groups and organizations to provide similar programs or funding to expand the reach of their program.

Another dominant theme was that the girls programs helped improve the lives and futures of the girls who attend, and that these girls will go on to become strong and empowered female leaders in their communities. This was particularly mentioned in Aboriginal or racialized communities. In many STEM programs, this comment was extended from leadership in the general community to the potential for their programs to shift STEM communities as well.

Many community organizations were able to provide evidence of this leadership already happening, as many past participants from their girls' programs have remained active volunteers within the organization and sometimes

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even the girls' group itself (e.g. as mentors). Staff from a few programs also mentioned active community work their girls groups had participated in, such as environmental campaigns or other social justice ventures.

In some of the programs that take place within schools, the staff mentioned the positive impact the philosophy and approach of the girls' program has had on the school staff, as well as increasing awareness within the schools about the issues girls face and their need for support.

Staff from many Indigenous organizations highlighted further impacts these programs had on their communities. They explained that the girls' groups provided an additional communal or meeting place within their community, explaining that these meeting places are essential to their culture, the health of their communities, and reconciliation within the community. **The programs provided girls and their families an additional link to their Nation, as well as an additional link from the Nation to individual families and youth.** This connection was stressed to be particularly important for the girls and young people themselves so that they could see how their community is connected in various ways, in line with the ways of traditional Indigenous communities.

Staff from programs situated within communities with large immigrant populations also reported impacts above and beyond those seen in other communities. **The program was able to provide a connection for many girls to their community and to supports, to counteract some of the potential social isolation of families caused by language or cultural barriers.**

"...If they feel confident about who they are, if they continue school, if they learn to make some good decisions, if they learn to have healthy partners and participate in healthy relationships then of course all those little dots together create a healthier and a better community for everybody." (Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation)

"I think it's good if the community knows these programs are going on. It's a sense of hope. People are negative, as we know, there is always the stereotypical way of thinking, so negative on our people. I am always so uplifted when I say, 'You know what, there are all these great things that are happening, and we're really trying.'.... And people go, 'Oh, really?' 'Well that's really good to hear.' We are actually moving."(Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"I think certainly the CAS has been a very strong link, and I think there's not a lot out there for young girls before they kind of get into really serious trouble. I don't see the schools really addressing emotional issues and anger management- like wow, anger right off the roof. And so no one is out there helping these girls before they get into serious trouble. So I think that a really big part of this program is getting very vulnerable girls and getting them before they go off the edge. A support group and all of that is really, really important." (Boys and Girls Clubs of London)

IMPACT OF THE GIRLS' FUND ON GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS

In the staff site visit interviews and the Year 4 telephone staff group interviews, staff commented on the support that they had received from the Canadian Women's Foundation and the impact that the Girls' Fund grant had on their organization. **A prominent theme in the discussions was that funding through the Canadian Women's Foundation goes beyond the funding received through other funders because of the support and resources provided.** Staff reported on the usefulness of the webinars, mentoring round table, and grantee meetings. They thought these were all excellent sources of information that supported staff development and provided useful information that they could incorporate into their programs. They also commented on the sharing that happened between grantees and how helpful this was in providing support and helping them feel connected to others doing similar work across the country.

"Sometimes day to day you're sitting in your office, you're planning, you're doing your

programming and you think you're the only one that's doing it, and you get to these training sessions and these conferences and you see this room full of people that have the same passion as you have, and they are working for girls, and in their community to give them strength and a voice, and it's just so heartening to know that there is such a huge army of people working towards the same goal. It's fabulous." (Sturgeon Lake Central School)

Another prominent theme in the discussions about the impact of the Girls' Fund Grant was that **the grant had helped their organization grow.** The examples that staff provided were varied and included the following:

- Helped them adapt a gendered lens for all the work they do in the organization.
- Having four-year funding allowed them to build a solid program.
- Helped them close gap on a group they had no programs for.
- Helped them build on other programs.
- The introduction of mentorship had contributed to an increased sense of commitment to continue mentoring in the organization.
- Allowed their organization to move from drop-in to longer term programs where they established relationships with the community.
- Allowed them to do more prevention work.
- Receiving funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation provided credibility to their organization and allowed them to get funding from other funders.
- Secured four-year funding helped reduce the stress of fundraising so they could focus on the girls.
- Youth programs became more visible in the organization.
- Helped strengthen their community partnerships which brought new opportunities.

The staff also discussed how the Girls' Fund grant had increased interest in girls' programing in their organization and community and provided the following examples of how this had happened:

- Girls programming had become more solid in the organization.
- They had seen an increased interest for girls programming in the community, including school-based programs, with some organizations reporting to be filled to capacity or to have waiting lists now for their program.
- Put a focus on girls programming and the importance of it – especially since there is not much girls programing available.
- After numerous years of running girls programs, they now spend less time convincing people now about the importance of girls' programming – "they get it now".
- Provides a platform to speak about issues that girls in their community face.

   "So girls programming has become something that as an organization we've seen as valuable obviously and grown to see even more value in and now it's something we share with others in our communities. So there's definitely been an increase and interest in understanding and resources

being allotted to our continued work with girls. I think that within our community I've seen emerging committees and other people wanting to do this type of work and understanding the need for it and our girls are really driving that in voicing how much they appreciate and get out of having these opportunities. So, I think that the interest has definitely grown and it's something that's here to stay, it's not something that's fading out." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

Finally, there **were numerous comments from staff through the interviews on the Canadian Women's Foundation's program evaluation and how it had benefited their organization.** Staff from numerous organizations reported that the evaluation feedback sharing of results had helped them build changes into their programs. They also reported that it helped keep them on track and to reflect on programming. A couple of organizations reported that they continued using the Letters to My Little Sister tool to get ongoing feedback from and inspire personal reflection in the girls. One organization also reported that they had never thought of soliciting feedback from parents and had since incorporated parent surveys into other programs in their organization.

BEYOND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

During the Year 4 telephone focus groups, staff talked about the impact of the Girls' Fund and how it connected girls and organizations across the country. As mentioned previously, staff appreciated the connections they make through the Girls' Fund and hearing and learning from others doing the same work. Through the evaluation process (the survey, site visits) staff and the evaluation team sometimes incorporated explaining to the girls that they are one of hundreds of girls across the country that are completing the surveys and participating in similar programs. Staff observed that this had a positive impact on many girls, creating a feeling of being part of something bigger than oneself and a stronger sense of being proud of being a girl. Staff also discussed how having similar programs across the country was creating a community of girls who are becoming more self-aware, exposed to more opportunities, seeing themselves more a part of a larger world, and empowered to make societal changes that will benefit women as a whole.

"When I share the experience about that there's other groups that are funded with this Girls' Fund through the Canadian Women's Foundation the girls get excited about that because they feel like they're part of a really neat and unique group of young women, part of Girls' Fund and its pretty neat to hear how they get excited." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John Inc.)

"...In general we believe the girls have been provided with the opportunity to unite and become more self-aware of the community, their personal contribution to society have also evolved and gained a greater understanding of all the complexities that girls face as a whole. Specifically related to some of the underrepresentation of indigenous girls and some active movements, leadership roles and we have just noted that girls need to see themselves in the world. Need to see themselves in these positions..." (Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc.)

"I think that it's a huge impact that has somewhat of a domino effect and that the impact

involved the integration of girls as strong members of society at a younger age through empowering them with the self-confidence they need to feel capable of making genuine social change. We're equipping our girls with tools to address issues of gender that they live through every day and … they [will] be sharing this with their friends and families and that these girls are just aspiring change makers. The impact is huge." (Y des Femmes de Montreal)

EFFECT ON GIRLS' FUTURES AND THEIR DREAMS

In the Year 4 surveys both girls and parents were asked about the impact of the program on how girls think about their future. While the evaluation results clearly indicate that participating in a girls program strengthens protective factors and provides other benefits, we wanted to explore further how girls and parents see the impact of the girls programs on girls' futures or how they dream or think about their futures.

THE GIRLS' PERSPECTIVE

When asked if the program had had an impact on their future, 55% of girls reported that their participation in the program had a positive impact on their futures. The explanations or examples they provided suggested several ways in which the programs can have an impact on how girls see their futures.

Empowerment, Inspiration, and Confidence: One of the primary themes that emerged in the data was that through their participation in the programs girls feel empowered, inspired and gain confidence which in turn affects how they think about their futures in a positive way.

"It has made me feel as a girl that I will grow to be a confident and successful woman." (Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"Being in program made me feel better about when I am older and what I am going to do and it helped me feel confident about what I want to be." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

"Being in this program made me think I shouldn't give up on my dreams and should focus in school." (Community Action Resource Centre)

"Before being in this program I thought that only boys or special people could go to medical school or do those types of things. Being in the program has taught me that if I want to do something, I can do it." (YWCA Muskoka)

More Hope: Related to the theme of empowerment, many girls talked about how the program had given them hope and more options for their futures.

"Before the program I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and I thought I was not important. This program made me feel that I was actually wanted somewhere. It helped put myself back on my feet." (Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Saint John Inc.)

"Yes it has because I think about the amazing things I can do for the world and also how amazing the world is." (Actua; Lakehead University)

"Being here has gave me so much hope and confidence. I feel like no one can stop me." (YWCA Toronto)

Learned that Women are Strong and Can Reach their Potential: A very prominent theme in the data was that through the programs, girls had learned that women are strong and could do more than they had thought they could.

"Before this program I told myself I shouldn't have any hope becoming a doctor but since I've been in this program, I've learned that men aren't the only people who can save the world." (YWCA Muskoka)

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"I have learned how girls aren't represented in a good way and how many people think girls can't be leaders but I want to challenge that and being a girl shouldn't stop me from doing it!" (North York Community House)

"Girls club made me realize that I could do whatever I want to when I'm older because girls have the ability to do anything or even reach their full potential." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

Expanded Ideas About Job Opportunities: Numerous girls, most of them from the STEM programs reported that participation in the programs had expanded their ideas about future jobs.

"I didn't think about being an engineer before." (Actua; University of Lethbridge)

"It made me understand more of my options and possibilities." (YWCA Lethbridge)

THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

The parents were also asked to report on any way they believed the program had resulted in their daughters thinking any differently about their futures. **Many of their responses were similar to those provided by their daughters.** For example, many parents also provided examples about how their daughters now felt more empowered to do what they wanted to do in the future. Many also reported that their daughters were more aware of the possibilities of what they could do with their future, with most of these comments relating to how learning about STEM programs has broadened their knowledge of different options for careers. The parents also talked about how the programs had given their daughters a boost of confidence so that they could pursue their dreams or goals.

" La plus grande confiance eu elle fera eu certaine qu'elle se sentira capable d'accomplir ses rêves." [English translation: "The bigger confidence she has will make certain that she'll feel capable of accomplishing her dreams." (Y des Femmes de Montréal)

"I think it has given her a boost of confidence to keep going for her dreams and goals." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)

"Elle a plus certaine en elle, elle voit plus de possibilité et veut faire plus de choses." [English translation: "She's more sure of herself, she sees more possibilities and she wants to do more things."] (Action Jeunesse)

"Now she feels she can conquer the world; a few months ago she was afraid of moving to Canada and just wanted to go back to Brazil, now she told me we could move to any country because she is now confident she can handle everything." (Sarnia-Lambton Rebound)

The parents also provided the following examples of ways in which the program had an impact on how their daughters thought about their futures:

- Helped her recognize her strengths and become more self-aware
- More positive thoughts about who she is and what she can do
- More open with her feelings/what she wants
- Now willing to try new things/more open-minded
- Proud of being Aboriginal/better understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal woman
- Influenced by positive role models in program
- Had never thought about her future and with program she has started to think about it
- Learned she could be herself which helps her think about the future

- Less shy and getting more involved
- Talks more about wanting to pursue post-secondary education
- More focused
- More sure of/talks more about her future

> *"I think she is proud of being Aboriginal and knows she can achieve any goal she wants if she works hard." (Ka Ni Kanichihk)*

> *"I think this program has helped my daughter accept herself, and appreciate her strengths and talents. This will definitely help her in the future because she will have a strong sense of who she is and what goals suit her. It will also help safeguard her against toxic abusive relationships." (YWCA Muskoka)*

> *"Sometimes I think she has been given a larger more open look about where she can and how far she can go in life." (Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation)*

CHALLENGES GIRLS FACE: THE STAFF PERSPECTIVE

While in many ways girls in Canada are in a better place than girls in developing countries, they continue to face many issues and challenges that threaten their current well-being and limit their future potential (Girls Action Foundation, 2013). To explore further some of the issues that girls across Canada face and how the Girls' Fund might be helping organizations address some of these issues, questions were incorporated into the staff interviews during the site visits and the staff focus groups conducted in Year 4 of the evaluation. Further information on issues and challenges were mentioned by staff in responses to other questions asked in focus groups.

The results presented here are summarized by theme, but it is important to note that many of the issues intersect. To provide a clear summary of the underlying issues and challenges staff see girls in their communities facing, we tried to separate each issue/challenge.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO FAMILY/HOME LIFE

By far the challenge most discussed by staff across organizations related to the home and family lives of girls, reported as a challenge in their programs by close to three quarters of the organizations. These issues and challenges were mentioned by staff in all four years, in both site visit focus groups and the Year 4 telephone focus groups. Across a diverse range of programs, many staff mentioned girls being exposed to alcoholism, other substance abuse, family violence and other unsafe environments. Staff also reported unpleasant home environments due to unsupportive adults, the conservative culture of the parents, parental absenteeism, and other issues. Another significant issue mentioned were the challenges faced by girls involved with the foster care system. A few other staff mentioned how some of the girls in their program had bad relationships with their family, in particular their mothers, and how this negatively affected their lives.

> *"Our primary clients are immigrant girls and some of the issues that we're recently brought up we see pretty much most of them and in terms of the parent perspective we feel that when the immigrant families arrive here the primary focus the parents have is of course on the bread and butter. They really have a hard time recognizing the challenges that the girls are going through so I think that is one of the very common issues we see." (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)*

> *"...Lacking support at home and just the parents working shift work ....So kids are getting not only their selves but their younger siblings ready for school in the morning and ... then they just don't*

have any push to come (to group). So that's another barrier too, is lacking the support at home."
(Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Centre)

"A lot of these girls, even if they don't know they have been traumatized, they have seen violence in the home at a young age. They've seen their Moms and what they have had to deal with." (Tsleil Waututh Nation/Musqueam First Nation)

BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC/CAREER ACHIEVEMENT

Issues related to barriers to academic or career achievement were reported by staff in about two thirds of the organizations.[55] The three biggest barriers to school/career success mentioned were issues related to sexism in schools and media around girls' success in school, issues related to lack of support or academic encouragement/lack of positive attitudes at home, and issues related to school in general. The first was particularly mentioned by STEM programs in terms of academic barriers to girls but also by a number of programs with a high concentration of immigrant/newcomer girls in terms of cultural expectations around academic success. Many other programs referred to a lack of support in general around academic success and a lack of specifically good role modelling at home around school (mentioned by at least 6 organizations). Other specific issues mentioned with relation to academic success included lack of access to post-secondary education, lack of mental health supports in schools, lack of teacher support for girls, overcrowding in schools, and a general lack of services and supports.

"… a lot of them are coming from families where they would be the first generation to enter post-secondary or even completing secondary school. So for some of them it's they're not getting the support at home to attend and... school achievement isn't something that's necessarily supported or promoted in their communities or in their families... that tends to be a barrier. The, you can't be what you can't see kind of stuff. Also behaviour so some of our girls get suspended for fighting at school which then contributes to them being even further behind in school." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

"I just want to add that some of the girls in our neighbourhood, they still are feeling I guess less confident around the boys in their class. So they just seem to always compare themselves to the boys and I think some of them have that engrained in them from their homes as well. So the idea of 'boys go to university and girls stay home' is still big idea in our community." (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)

POVERTY

Poverty was mentioned as an issue girls face by staff from more than half of the organizations. Staff spoke at length about this issue and emphasized strongly how poverty led directly to many of the other issues girls in their programs face, including their challenges in school, barriers to services, mental health issues, family/home life issues, hunger, physical and social isolation, lack of access to technology, and numerous others. Many staff described extreme instances of poverty, including girls experiencing homelessness, in and out of foster care services, and girls dropping the program in order to support parents working several jobs or battling addictions.

"…A main issue they're dealing with is poverty, but this year we've really found that food access is especially difficult for them so the girls are coming in starving and talking more about the fridge being empty." (YWCA Toronto)

"In the girls that I deal with … many … are in institutional care. I think poverty is a huge issue and …nobody actually wants to talk about the issue of poverty…. People don't want to talk about it for fear of stigmatization. So you end up with a whole demographic who are being affected by

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[55] There was some probing on this issue in the Year 4 telephone focus groups which might account for the higher number. However, in the site visit interviews without probing it was still mentioned by over 20% of organizations.

not enough money and nobody really wanting to talk about the issue or address it head on. I see poverty in the fact that they don't have enough food, so I have got girls worrying about how much food the family has. I have got girls who don't have access to what we usually consider to be routine. They don't have access to computers, or the internet, they don't have phones." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

BULLYING AND UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

About one-half of the organizations discussed issues the girls in their programs face related to bullying and unhealthy relationships. Much of the focus of the discussions was on online social media bullying. Although bullying was mentioned frequently, many of the staff emphasized girls' unhealthy relationships with each other as the main problem, with girls being mean to each other, aggressive, and unsupportive.

"Also around participation in sport and recreation tends to be confidence around body image and what that means and all of that tied into social media and girls being called names and calling each other names on social media. Ugly is a word that is often used." (Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton)

"And a lot of bullying. We hear a lot of girls, so there are a few girls that have transitioned through various schools already because of bullying. I would say that's another popular barrier." (YWCA Cambridge)

"A lot of social media issues, so bullying online as well as getting into sticky situations with regards to personal information or images they've shared and then feeling almost blackmailed by it." (YWCA Toronto)

MENTAL HEALTH/ANXIETY/BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES

Mental health and behavioural issues were mentioned by staff from close to half of the programs. The biggest focus in the discussions was on the large number of girls in some programs who are experiencing stress and anxiety mostly, but also depression. Some staff emphasized the extent and severity to which this issue affects the girls in their program and some stated that they believed it was the biggest barrier facing girls in their community. Staff from a few Indigenous organizations highlighted that the mental health issues girls in their program experienced were a result of intergenerational trauma and dealing with their parents'/guardians' mental health issues. A few staff also mentioned severe behavioural issues or learning/cognitive disabilities girls have as another barrier or issue that they face.

"...We do see that and really with the increase in anxiety in the younger age and trying to find those coping skills. What we're also seeing on our end too is the increase in medication that the children are taking. For anxiety and it starting to become younger and younger and with that too we find the stability in the parents whether they're not giving it to their child on a regular basis so there's a lot of ups and downs to it and with that we do find that we do experience issues in our consistent attendance of the young girls coming to the program." (Boys and Girls Clubs of South Coast BC)

THE MEDIA

Staff in about one-third of the programs reported that the girls in their programs faced challenges due to the media and its effects on girls. The biggest issue raised by staff was that girls struggle a great deal in using social media, and that the program staff often have to intervene and hold discussions with girls about appropriate online behaviour, consequences of actions online, cyber bullying, internet safety, and in general

help girls to build self-esteem that has been affected by what they see on social media. The staff discussed being baffled by how young girls are when social media starts to affect their lives, and how all-encompassing it is, affecting every aspect of girls' lives, but also how little they know of the dangers and potential consequences of misuse. Some staff extended the effects of social media, saying that social media and mainstream media leads girls to become hyper-sexualized, creating yet another issue facing their girls.

Another predominant theme in the staff discussions related to media was about the effects of the negative stereotypes girls encounter in popular media, especially stereotypes of women. Staff mentioned that in the groups they often deconstructed views of beauty and representations of beauty in the media, especially in Indigenous sites or sites with large concentrations of racialized girls, with these girls not often seeing their faces represented as beautiful in the media. Another STEM site mentioned addressing negative stereotypes about women in science and deconstructing popular views of what a female scientist does and does not look like.

A few staff also mentioned that in today's world where all media is online and accessible everywhere, girls are exposed to global events on a more extensive scale, and they have dealt with, sometimes to very positive ends, specific national or international tragedies within the girls' group (ex. Amanda Todd's suicide being widely discussed among the girls, staff using it as a tool to discuss social media, cyber-bullying etc.).

"And then we also deconstruct the media that they do consume and that does influence them, like twitter or an Instagram post or a tweet. We deconstruct what that means and what that means to them in their lives and how that might influence them or girls like them. Then we also create our own media, so in addition to digital storytelling we create zines...Magazines are not the most representative of the girls in our program, they don't represent girls, period. So what we do is we create our own and put our own pictures in there, they aren't selling anything, we're selling ideas and sending messages of encouragement or empowerment." (North York Community House)

"And in regards to the first comment about cyberbullying, there's a lot of that here too.... And not understanding how to use it safely, not understanding the loss of privacy. I consider that part of a much larger issue, which is the unrelenting pressure of hyper-sexualisation culture. And what we're doing to women, young girls who have to grow up too quickly and you know get thrown into a culture of sexualisation by the time they're in grade 6." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

BARRIERS/LACK OF ACCESS TO SERVICES

Staff in about one-third of the programs talked about barriers to services and lack of services as an issue or challenge the girls in their program faced. This issue was mentioned mostly by staff working in isolated communities, mostly Aboriginal, but also other rural groups. Staff talked about issues related to distance to services, lack or transportation, or simply a lack of services available to the girls.

"Then another group of issues ties into that too is being quite remote, not having access to a lot of these services that other people that live in the cities would have access to." (Canadian Red Cross with the Blood Tribe/Kainai First Nation)

OTHER ISSUES

There were numerous challenges and issues the girls face that were mentioned less frequently than those outlined above, yet still discussed by at least several staff. Many of these issues are related to or a consequence of some of the other issues discussed. These included: low confidence, poor body image, peer pressure, sexism, racism, social isolation, and family violence.

HOW PROGRAMS APPROACH THE CHALLENGES AND ISSUES GIRLS FACE

The evaluation results have already documented how programs strengthen protective factors, give girls a voice and provide other benefits that will help deal with many of the challenges that girls across Canada face. Staff support girls by implementing the girls programming best practices, especially creating a safe space for girls where they become more confident and strengthen their resilience. In addition to these best practices, staff discussed other ways in which they helped address some of the issues such as poverty; lack of access to education, careers, and to services; bullying/unhealthy relationships; and media and mental health issues. Some of these practices are outlined below:

- Providing strong and nurturing role models (staff, mentors, women working in STEM, Elders)
- Providing different perspectives that helped empower the girls
- Connecting girls and their families to other organizations and resources (e.g., the local university or other programs in the organization)
- Providing help and support with problem solving around relationship issues
- Referring to other services when more support was needed
- Engaging the girls in discussions and activities to build critical thinking around media (both media focused and other programs did this)
- Engaging the girls in discussion and activities to gain awareness and skills to deal with unhealthy relationships and bullying
- Working with girls to develop group rules that encouraged connectedness and took a strong stance against bullying and non-supportive or mean behaviour towards other girls in the group
- Working with girls to learn to speak up and advocate about issues that affected them (e.g. to speak up against bullying, girls writing letter to the media)
- Helping ease some of the financial challenges by providing safe free programming, providing healthy snacks or dinner and transportation, as well as working with food banks or other organizations and connecting the girls and their families to these services
- Educating girls about negative stereotypes, cyber-bullying, and internet safety.

HOW PROGRAMS APPROACH ISSUES FACED BY ABORIGINAL GIRLS

Indigenous girls face all of the same issues that other girls across the country face, as well as numerous additional issues. While there are other groups of girls who face multiple issues (e.g., rural and racialized), the results of this evaluation process included much data related to programs with a First Nations, Inuit or Métis

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focus and about unique issues girls in Indigenous programs might face. At least one quarter of the programs funded in the 2012-2016 cycle of the Girls' Fund focused exclusively or predominantly on Indigenous girls and used a focus on Aboriginal culture and teachings as one of their primary program approaches. For this reason, we are highlighting here what we learned about some of the unique challenges and issues faced by these girls across the programs and how the cultural approach helps deal with these challenges.

Staff from programs with an Aboriginal focus talked about poverty, mental health issues, school drop-out, difficult family situations and many other issues that girls in their communities' face. They also talked about racism, historical trauma transmission caused by residential schools and other long-standing issues that their communities face due to colonial practices. The girls in these Indigenous oriented programs also face a lack of positive role models and a lack of pride in their culture and who they are. Further, most of these programs are situated in rural areas, First Nations reserves or poorer urban areas, thus resulting in issues related to lack of services, transportation and inequitable funding.

In addition to all of the approaches that programs use that were described earlier, the programs that work with Indigenous girls often use a cultural approach that includes integrating traditional teachings, hands-on activities that help girls re-connect with their culture, creating bonds among girls and role models based on self-identity, integrating Aboriginal practices and processes into the groups, challenging stereotypes about Indigenous people and helping girls think critically about these stereotypes. These approaches have been demonstrated in other sections of the report to have positive outcomes on the girls. As girls learn about their culture, become connected to it and connect their family to it, they in turn feel more connected, gain confidence and pride in themselves. The culture also provides a different way of living and provides structure, direction, and a sense of purpose. The programs with an Aboriginal focus also reported more of a community impact than other programs - the cultural focus has an impact not only on the girls, but also their families and the community.

Staff provided details on what a cultural approach means at an operational level for the organizations and specifically for the programs. Some of the specific practices included the following:

- Sitting together, having a meal and sharing

- Learning skills such as making drums, beading and making moccasins

- Learning and participating in traditional dancing and singing

- Picking berries, sweet grass, sage and other traditional foods and medicines

- Incorporating cultural teachings about women's strong roles

- Hosting and/or participating in cultural ceremonies and celebrations such as coming of age and pow wows

- Providing role models (e.g. Girls observing Aboriginal staff working together or bringing in other resource people– demonstrating leadership)

- Involving parents in events, building connections with them and helping them regain their culture

- Exploring stereotypes and ideas about beauty and developing critical thinking skills that help girls challenge stereotypes of Indigenous people they have learned.

  "...Even just going out to pick berries and sweet grass and sage, all of those are teachings, the cooking, we're always incorporating the cultural part. Even just teaching them as women, our spirits are strong and where we walk in our paths, just teaching those beliefs. I try to incorporate that into the program each time we meet." (Ininew Friendship Centre)

"…They are kind of ambassadors for their culture when people come in and there is a community meeting or something. The girls' group will get up and sing their song that they have been practicing and do their drumming. So they are not just doing it for themselves, they are also doing it to share their culture with others." (Kwadacha Education Society)

THE IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS' PROGRAMMING – PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

During the site visits we observed that the programs were really important to the girls. They did not need to tell us; we could see through their behaviour – their excitement to arrive at the program, their closeness to the other participants and the staff, and the way they owned the space. Further, it is clear from the evaluation results that the programs funded through the Canadian Women's Foundation's Girls' Fund have many benefits and positive outcomes for the girl participants and help mitigate and even prevent some of the challenges that girls in their communities face. To explore the benefits of the programs further from the girls' perspectives, we asked them in interviews to tell us why the programs were important to them. In some site visits, girls also described why the program was important to them during an ice-breaker/team building activity called "The Web of Strength." [56] The responses from the interviews, as well as the Web of Strength activity, were reviewed and similar responses were coded into categories. The results revealed the following eight main reasons why girls think that girls groups are important:

A LOT OF USEFUL LEARNING HAPPENS IN THE GROUPS

The girls' responses on the importance of the programs included many comments about how they do lots of new things and learn about different topics within the group (e.g. Aboriginal culture and media). Numerous girls also commented on how this learning was unique and that they do not learn about the things they learn in the groups anywhere else.

"I think it's very good because they give you this program - it's made mostly for Aboriginal girls or people that want to live in the Aboriginal cultures. So if you were to educate the children, they would be able to learn more stuff and be more supporting of their cultures…And they make it fun for you so you get really engaged in stuff. It's just fun and you learn." (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

GIRLS GAIN SELF-AWARENESS AND CAN BE WHO THEY REALLY ARE

Many of the girls' comments reflect that the programs are important because girls feel free to be who they really are. Girls said that while in the group you can show the 'real you' and be yourself. They reported the supportive environment in the group is what helps them to express themselves openly and freely and thus to learn who they really are.

"I think girls groups are important because girls express who they are and let out their better person." (YWCA Muskoka)

PREVENTION OF ISSUES GIRLS MAY FACE

When asked about why girls programs are important, many girls made general comments about how the program helps girls when they have issues or how the group is important because girls need help. Some girls also reported on serious issues in their communities – for example, bullying, abuse, cutting, suicide, missing girls, and gangs – and how they believed the girls' groups were helping to prevent girls from experiencing those issues.

"If we didn't have this we would hang out with gangs probably and by the time we were 15 we would probably be missing. A lot of girls at the age of 15 are going missing. On the border over

56 The Web of Strength is a qualitative data collection exercise to close or begin a session that visualizes the importance of individual strengths. In our version of the Web of Strength, all of the girls gathered in a circle, including the facilitator who had a ball of rope. The facilitators opened the exercise by sharing their names, a little bit about themselves, and a reason why they thought girls' group were important. They then tossed the rope to a girl across the circle and she did the same thing, introducing herself and describing why she felt girls groups mattered. In the end, the group had a web, with each girl holding onto the rope. The facilitator explained that the web helped visualize the strength that the group as a whole has; and the importance each girl in the group plays in the group process and how much they belong there at that moment. The exercise helps a group realize the importance of each member's contribution while providing qualitative data on why girl participants felt girls' groups were important to them.

here, there is a girl who went missing and she is 14." (Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc.)

"We learn about, well you know how many girls cut? How many girls that almost try to kill themselves? Girl Space can help them with that, girls only group can help you with suicide thoughts, cutting and everything and help you with problems ...." (YWCA Yellowknife)

THE PROGRAMS PROVIDE A SAFE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT ISSUES, TO SHARE OPENLY

Girls across programs reported that the groups were important to them because it gave them a safe place to talk openly with other girls. Girls described how they get to discuss the issues that are important to them without being judged. Some girls specifically mentioned that they could talk about issues such as suicide or issues happening in the family, and that their lives had changed because the program had helped them communicate and make friends.

"Because lots of girls don't like sharing their feelings with people because they think that they will get judged about what they're saying and it (the group) will help girls' self-esteem, their confidence and help them speak what they want to say." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

"I think girls groups are important because you can express your feelings to someone that has been through the same situation as you." (YWCA Muskoka)

THE GROUPS HELP GIRLS FEEL LIKE THEY BELONG

Many girls reported that the girls' groups are important to them because they helped them feel like they belong. Girls reported numerous ways in which they felt more connected, or as though they belonged in the groups, including the following: shy girls can participate; they meet new friends outside of their regular circle; they feel understood in the group; if they are new to Canada they get to know others; they feel safer; and they have people they trust in the groups.

"Because some girls are really lonely and this is a place where they can go and be comfortable and belong." (North York Community House)

"I think just a girls group is a good thing because if people, like girls, are feeling like no one understands them there are people around them who understand." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

THE GROUPS INCREASE RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE AND WORTH OF GIRLS

Many girls reported that the programs are valuable because they give the clear message that girls are important. They offer this message to the girls involved, but also to others outside of the group. For example, in STEM programs girls reported that the group had helped them see they can be scientists, doctors or mathematicians and contribute to these fields. In other programs, girls reported that they felt affirmed as a girl because: they are heard in the group; having a girls group shows they matter; they have learned that it's good to be a girl; or they have learned about the importance of girls and girls' rights.

"...For girls to forget things that people say about them....just know that it's good to be a girl sometimes...Maybe even better than being a boy." (Girls Inc. of Northern Alberta)

"...It's really important to me because before I started Girl Space, I didn't know anything. I didn't know there were certain rights for girls, I mean I know girls are important but I didn't know how important they were. I learned so much at this thing. My self-esteem has been higher because of

this; it's helped me a lot." (YWCA Yellowknife)

"I think that I would tell them that it's important that girls have a girl's only program because it's important that girls know that they're special. Because sometimes girls don't know that and we have to tell them that they are special." (YWCA Cambridge)

GIRLS GAIN CONFIDENCE

Many girls reported that the girls groups are important because girls gain confidence through the groups. Girls from the program shared that while in the groups, they received positive reinforcement and proved they could do things that others did not think they could do or they themselves did not know they were capable of achieving. Girls sometimes described this confidence as strength, reporting that they got stronger or gained courage as a result of the group.

"Gives girls the courage to step up and do something they otherwise might not do." (YWCA Muskoka)

"I would say because lots of girls don't really feel good about themselves and how they are not good at something but if they had this girls group they can do activities and then if they find themselves really good at the activities maybe they will feel better about themselves." (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)

"I think girls groups are good because they bring out the confidence in most girls to show their voice and let them be heard." (Boys and Girls Club of London)

INCREASES GIRLS' OPPORTUNITIES

When asked why the girls' programs are important, many of the responses reflected that girls programming is important because it increases girls' opportunities in numerous ways. Girls had the opportunity to do things in the groups that they would not get a chance to do elsewhere (e.g., field trips and joining a program because religious or cultural restrictions do not allow them to join mixed gender programs). Girls could also be more focused without boys; they could participate even if they were lower income, and generally as seen in the other themes described above, the programs broadened girls' possibilities in many ways such as helping them to see they can pursue a career in science, by making friends, or by preventing serious issues that would negatively affect their well-being.

"I think it's important because not a lot of girls are in science related jobs and girls might not know or be interested in it if it is just in science class. It's helpful to go to these things and learn about all this stuff to see all the possibilities that you can have in life." (SuperNOVA)

"I would probably say that it's crucial that girls have an outlet and somewhere to go where they

can get support for what they want to do. That they can get away from those people that are boys that say 'you can't do that, you're a girl' or 'you broke a nail you should be crying because you're a girl' they get to get away from that and see other girls who have the same dreams and the same ideas as them and get to be around that." (Actua; University of Lethbridge)

SUMMARY AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

This chapter presents information that further demonstrates the importance of the Girls' Fund. While the evaluation results have indicated benefits and improved outcomes for girls who participate in the Girls' Fund programs, the information in this chapter has shown the girls programming is important to the girls, their families and their communities and it helps address issues faced by girls across Canada. The Girls' Fund also helps many organizations strengthen their ability to support girls and helps make the importance of girls programming visible in communities across Canada.

Self-ratings from the girls and alumnae indicated that the Girls' Fund programs might be having an impact on the family, in addition to the direct impact they have on the girl participants. Evidence from the parents and staff focus groups provided more details on the nature of the further reach of the program's impacts. Some examples provided by staff and parents included: improved communication between girls and parents; girls' increased sense of agency within the family; the programs providing support for the girls when the family was economically disadvantaged or faced other challenges; and the learnings the girls were bringing home (e.g., about positive body image) also affecting the parents attitudes and behaviours. In some organizations, especially those in Aboriginal communities, the organizations work in unison with the girls and parents. Thus, getting a girl involved in a program eventually becomes a way to benefit the mothers and other family members.

The girls programs also benefit the broader communities. These programs address a need in the community for services or programs for young girls and youth engagement, particularly in disadvantaged communities where they also provide a community program available at little or no cost for families. Staff also reported that the girls programs addressed an already present need for girls-only programming, and in many instances, the existence of the program in a community had also had the effect of increasing the demand for girls-only programming. Staff, especially those from Aboriginal programs or small communities believed that the Girls' Fund's impact in their community will also be seen in years to come when the participants go on to become strong and empowered female leaders in their communities. In many ways this leadership is already happening as many past participants from the girls' programs have remained active volunteers within the organization and sometimes the girls' group itself (e.g., as mentors). Staff from many Aboriginal organizations and from programs serving immigrant populations highlighted several additional impacts these programs had on their communities.

The organizations running the girls' programs also benefit from the Girls' Fund, not just through the funding to run the program but also through the support and resources provided by the Canadian Women's Foundation. The webinars and other meetings helped organizations with staff development and enhanced their programs, and helped them feel connected to others doing similar work.

When asked if the program had had on impact on their future, 55% of girls reported that their participation in the program had a positive impact on their future. The results indicate that this happened in numerous ways. Girls futures are affected because they feel empowered, inspired, more confident and gain hope. They also learn that women are strong, can reach their potential and they expand their ideas about job opportunities.

The staff working for the Girls' Fund programs articulated the challenges and issues they see facing the girls in their programs. These main intersecting issues reported by staff included complex, challenging home lives; poverty and its many consequences; unhealthy relationships and bullying; mental health issues; Issues related to barriers to academic or career achievement; the negative effect of the media; both mainstream and social media; and barriers to services/lack of services. Other less frequently mentioned challenges included: low confidence; poor body image; peer pressure; sexism; racism; social isolation; and family violence.

The girls' programs help address these issues faced by girls in Canada. In addition to strengthening protective factors and utilizing program best practices, the programs are: providing strong role models; connecting girls and their families to community resources; engaging girls in discussions and activities, to build critical thinking related to media and to gain awareness and skills to deal with unhealthy relationships and bullying; and easing some of the financial challenges in numerous ways. Girls programs also provide a strong voice for girls, making it clear to girls and others in their community that girls are important and that they matter.

Indigenous girls face additional and unique issues that were evident in the evaluation data. At least one quarter of the programs funded in the 2012-2016 cycle of the Girls' Fund focused exclusively or predominantly on Indigenous girls. These programs play a critical role in their communities, supporting girls and their families. In addition to poverty, mental health issues, school drop-out, challenging family situations, Indigenous girls face racism, historical trauma transmission caused by residential schools and other long-standing issues that are the results of colonial practices. The girls in these Indigenous programs also face a lack of positive role models and a lack of pride in their culture and who they are. The programs that work with Indigenous girls use a cultural approach that includes integrating traditional teachings, hands-on activities that help girls re-connect with their culture, creating bonds among girls and role models based on self-identity, integrating Aboriginal practices and processes into the groups, challenging stereotypes about Indigenous people and helping girls think critically about these stereotypes. These approaches have been demonstrated in other sections of the report to have positive outcomes on the girls. As girls learn about their culture, become connected to it and connect their family to it, they in turn feel more connected, gain confidence and pride in themselves. Regaining their culture is also a way of living and provides structure, direction, and a sense of purpose. The programs with an Aboriginal focus also reported more of a community impact than other programs - the cultural focus has an impact on the girls, their families and the community.

While we have documented the importance of girls programming through evaluation results that show strong outcomes and through the perspective of parents and staff,, nothing is more important than the testimony of the girls themselves. During the site visits we observed that the programs were incredibly important to the girls. They did not need to tell us; we could see through their behaviour – their excitement to arrive at the program, their closeness to the other participants and the staff, and the way they owned the space. The

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data from the girls' interviews and other research activities strongly validates these observations. An analysis of the data revealed eight main reasons why girls think that girls groups are important. Girls think that a lot of useful learning happens in the groups, that girls gain self-awareness and can be who they really are, they gain confidence, that the groups help prevent issues girls may face, and that they increase girls' opportunities. Girls also think that the programs provide a safe space to talk about issues and to share openly, they help girls feel like they belong, and they increase recognition of the importance and worth of girls.

THE CONTEXT

In 2006, the Canadian Women's Foundation (the Foundation) launched the Girls' Fund. Since that time, the Girls' Fund has empowered girls ages 9-13 by engaging their body, mind, and spirit. The Fund has invested in a variety of different programs with varied approaches including physical activity and healthy eating, science and technology, Aboriginal culture, media, and leadership and empowerment – provided in a supportive all-girl environment. The results from independent evaluation research was quite positive in both the pilot, 2006-2009 (Hayward, Nelson, & Loomis), and from the subsequent funding cycle, 2009-2012 (Hayward, Alcalde, Loomis & Hodgson).

Building on the success of the previous six years, the Girls' Fund continued to evolve and in the 2012-2016 funding cycle, awarded grants to 32 organizations across the country. Grants were awarded, as with the previous funding cycles, for girls programs and networks, as well as for a newly introduced stream of grants – enhanced group mentoring. Seventeen of the organizations that received funding for a girls program also received funding to create intentional, effective and sustainable group mentoring initiatives to increase the positive impact of the core girls programming. In the fourth year of the funding cycle an additional four programs received funds to implement mentoring programs only.

This report summarizes the results of the evaluation of the 2012-2016 funding cycle of the Girls' Fund. The evaluation was extensive: both qualitative and quantitative data was collected over four years on process and outcomes from girl participants, parents, mentors, staff, and program alumnae. The results across all the groups, diverse methodologies, and years, show consistency that provides further evidence that programs funded by the Girls' Fund are having a significant impact on girls' lives and their development. Through these programs girls build confidence, learn to think critically, forge positive connections to others, and develop new skills. The impact of these programs, and the skills girls develop while participating, are helping to build resilience in girls as they make the transition into adolescence.

WHAT WE LEARNED

During the four years of the evaluation we explored the outcomes girls experience through their participation in girls programming (both the regular group and enhanced mentoring), the extent to which best practices are present in girls programming, and how best practices and other program elements are related to outcomes. During the four years, some clear themes and messages emerged.

GIRLS' OUTCOMES

The results across the research components (annual surveys and site visits) and from different stakeholders (girls, parents, staff, alumnae) indicate clearly that programs funded by the Girls' Fund are having a significant impact on girls' lives and their development. Across the four years, the results of the self-ratings in the girls'

surveys and open-ended qualitative descriptions from girls' interviews and participatory research activities, showed consistently that for a majority of girls the programs are resulting in positive outcomes, specifically improvement in areas that research has demonstrated to be key protective factors. The results from the girls were triangulated (tested against others) with results from the parent ratings/comments and through open-ended responses and ratings from staff. In addition, in Year 4 a survey was conducted with program alumnae. While the alumnae were difficult to access, resulting in a limited sample, the results from those that did respond are quite consistent with those from current participants and their parents.

As in previous cycles of the Girls' Fund, some of the notable outcomes for program participants from funded organizations across the country included improvements in self-confidence, a sense of belonging or connectedness, and enhanced critical thinking skills. Additionally, attitudes toward school and/or school performance were also positively influenced for some girls. In the annual surveys, questions about these four factors were asked in all programs because these protective factors are identified in the literature, as ones that contribute significantly to building resilience in girls. The results from the alumnae also indicate that the positive effects of the program can continue into later years.

The qualitative data confirms the results of the surveys and provides insights into what the outcomes look like and how they develop. As seen in the charts outlining the paths to the protective factors (see Chapter 3) and in the outcomes diagram (see Chapter 2, Figure 1) the program outcomes, activities, and best practices are all inter-related. For example, by learning that they are important and unique through messages they receive in the program, girls can feel more connected, and feeling more connected helps girls to feel more confident. Numerous activities and program practices also led to more than one outcome for girls. For example, many programs focus on developing the girls' communication skills. Through many of the programs, girls learned more about being a good communicator: listening skills, articulating their thoughts and feelings, expressing themselves. This skill development also contributed to them feeling more confident in general, and in their interactions with others, which also boosts their connectedness. The results also indicated that focus on this type of skill development can help girls with school if they learn to communicate their thoughts and feelings more effectively.

The paths clearly show that many of the protective factors and program practices feed directly into confidence. It is not surprising then that it is in this area that we saw the most pronounced change in the girls. The program specific outcomes, as well as other skills, feelings of connectedness, and the presence of best practices all help girls feel more confident.

While the girls rated school outcomes a little lower than other outcomes, these results might not be indicative of what is really happening. The positive impacts on school outcomes were directly linked to other outcomes such as improved self-confidence, skill development, and connectedness. It may well be that confidence, skill development, and connectedness are shorter or mid-term outcomes, while school engagement may be a longer-term goal and, therefore, impacts may not be as immediate. This outcome may also be more difficult to measure since it is outside of the group context. The respondents to the alumnae survey actually rated school outcomes very highly, reporting the most impact in attitude towards school among all the outcomes investigated. In addition, the parents' results showed higher after-program ratings on school outcomes than the girls' survey results, suggesting that parents may have seen more of an impact than the girls themselves reported.

The results of the evaluation also clearly showed positive differences in the survey ratings for a number of other protective factors that were explored in many, but not all, of the programs (i.e., programs chose which other protective factors they included in their surveys, based upon their program goals and objectives).

Similar to the findings detailed above, the results showed that girls are gaining skills and other positive outcomes related to the specific focus of their programs. For example, girls in programs with an Aboriginal culture focus reported improvements in their knowledge of Aboriginal culture and teachings as well as feeling better about being an Aboriginal girl. Similarly, girls in programs that focused on STEM, media literacy, physical activity and healthy eating, and leadership and empowerment, all showed positive outcomes in numerous areas that had a positive effect on their development. The alumnae survey also showed that when reflecting back alumnae rate the overall sense of empowerment, as well as general impact of the program on their lives quite highly.

BEST PRACTICES AND CRITICAL COMPONENTS

The evaluation results across the four years of this funding phase demonstrated that the girls' programs were a positive experience for the girls. The best practices ratings from girls and staff were quite high. Programs did an excellent job of incorporating the best practices and ensuring that programs were safe, comfortable, holistic, girl-directed or girl-involved, and that they were provided in a girls-only space. While staff reported experiencing challenges in implementing some of the best practices, the results show that they were able, for the most part, to overcome or deal with these challenges.

Analysis of the survey results showed consistently over the four years that there are four best practices that had the most impact on outcomes: an emotionally safe environment, a positive environment, holistic/varied programming and staff that helped girls feel comfortable to share and express themselves. There were also three relationship items that had the strongest association with positive outcomes: "Instructors make me feel good about myself"; "I learned from the instructors"; and, "I look up to the instructors". These results are consistent with the results of the qualitative data and results from parents and staff. Repeatedly across programs and the various research activities, girls, parents and staff discussed the major strength of the programs as the safe space created for girls. Safety and a safe environment was, in fact, a very prominent theme throughout all the qualitative data.

The program facilitators and mentors and their strengths as positive role models to the girls were also mentioned by girls and parents throughout the evaluation results. In fact, one of the ways that the comfortable environment was created was through the development of positive relationships between the girls and facilitators (or mentors) and amongst the girls themselves. These relationships, combined with positive program rules and explicit boundaries, created a safe space where girls could open up. They also helped girls see they were not alone in the issues they faced.

The girls also frequently mentioned the activities they liked or valued most as well as in their recommendations: diversity was important to them. Thus it seems that programs need to ensure that staff or mentors are able to create a safe and positive environment and, regardless of the focus of the program, that the activities are varied and keep girls engaged.

Over the four years of the evaluation, the effect of program factors on outcomes (e.g., program approach, program length, age of girls) has shown inconsistent results. This is not to say that program approach and ideology do not matter; rather, each program approach has its merits and is responding to the needs of each particular community it serves. When we looked at the organizations that had the best outcomes, many of them also had the highest ratings on best practices and on the relationship items. Thus it appears that it is best practices as discussed above that are most important to program outcomes rather than program approach, program length, or age of girls.

ENHANCED GROUP MENTORING

While the evaluation results discussed above indicate that strong outcomes are seen in girls' groups in general, the evaluation of the group mentoring programs suggests outcomes might be further enhanced through the mentoring program. As will be discussed later, teasing out the difference between the outcomes for the girls in mentoring (these are programs that included formally matching mentors with small groups of

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3-4 girls) and those who only attended a girls group was difficult. The quality of the programs was not the same across the board and reporting attendance for programs who have girls both in mentoring and girls' program was more complicated. It is possible that some girls in both programs were not recorded accurately in the attendance forms. In addition, some girls' programs have volunteers or multiple facilitators that often have similar roles to mentors, further complicating the analyses. Despite this, differences were found between the two groups (girls' group and the mentoring group). For example, girls in mentoring programs showed a larger magnitude of change in almost all of the protective factors than did girls in the regular girls group. There was also a larger proportion of girls in mentoring, compared to girls in the regular groups alone, who reported positive changes in self-confidence, connectedness, school engagement and for resilience overall.

The stronger outcomes for girls indicate that there might be additional benefits to running girls' groups with a group mentoring model. A further benefit is that the mentors themselves experience positive outcomes. The teen mentors, compared to adult mentors, tended to gain more in relation to skills, though they also felt more connected to others and experienced similar outcomes to the girls. For the adult mentors the strongest outcomes were related to giving back, learning how to work with girls, and feeling connected to their community, though some reported high ratings in skills acquisition as well. Outcomes varied somewhat from program to program and most likely depended on who the mentors were and their reason for becoming involved in the program.

The qualitative results linked girls' positive outcomes to the mentors - particularly the relationships that the girls had with their mentors. Girls reported gaining confidence, speaking up more, as well as benefiting in other ways. They believed these positive changes were because they had a role model from whom they learned and/or somebody to open up to in a safe and trusting environment. As seen earlier, this safe and comfortable environment was one of the key links to enhanced outcomes. Girls received more attention in the mentoring groups than they did in the regular girls groups and they felt comfortable in the smaller group settings. Girls learned from their mentors and gained additional support in this environment. Girls also sometimes reported that they had more fun in the mentoring groups, especially in programs with teen mentors.

The staff were very positive about the mentoring programs, with some stating that they were now more committed to mentoring across the organization. They reported on the outcomes of mentoring and the extended reach it provided. They appreciated the resources provided by the Foundation and it appeared that the programs' implementation went more smoothly with each passing year of the funding cycle. There were challenges, however, in implementing the mentoring programs. The staff were ultimately still involved in running the programs and now also had to also ensure they supported mentors, provided training and ongoing support. It took more work and perseverance to recruit the right mentors, and work to support mentors, and ensure consistency and ongoing commitment.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GIRLS' FUND

This evaluation data provides much evidence that the programs are important to the girls, their families and their communities. The program outcomes go beyond the individual and the results show that in some situations the programs are having positive impacts on families as well as the communities' where the girls live. The Girls' Fund also has also made the importance of girls and girls programming more prominent within organizations and communities. It has given a voice to the issues girls face.

The girls programs also help support girls with some of the general issues they face such as mental health, poverty, and access to services. Not only do the programs build resilience, but by being involved in a program the girls gained access to more supportive adults and increased their access to other resources.

The different program approaches address additional barriers and issues girls face. For example, Aboriginal cultural programing helped girls learn about their culture and be proud of their roles as Indigenous women. Media programs helped girls de-construct the media, teaching them how to think critically about what they were exposed to and how to safely navigate social media. STEM programs opened girls up to the possibility

of pursuing a STEM career, providing female role models and re-framing the role women can play in STEM.

Another unique role the Girls' Fund played was the support it provided the organizations that received funds. The Fund supported programs with capacity building and helped programs deal with challenges they encountered. It also connected organizations across Canada that provide girls programming. This role was critical in ensuring a voice for girls programming and that quality programs were being delivered across the country. The funding helped some organizations with limited resources to become more sustainable, allowing them to provide programs to a group in their community that needed it. In some sites, it also allowed an organization to provide holistic programming to mothers and their daughters. Many of these organizations are small, but they were trying to reach out into areas that were limited in services.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Overall, the evaluation of the current funding cycle of the Girls' Fund worked well and produced interesting and strong results. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the surveys completed by the girls, parents and staff were not without limitations. We relied on self-reports which has some weaknesses. Additionally, the measures used in this process were developed specifically for this evaluation and as such have not been extensively tested or standardized. This method was intentionally employed, since a more rigorous design and measures would have been much more burdensome to evaluation participants. For example, to include standardized measures to assess the protective factors would have made for an overly long survey – longer than girls at this age would be able to complete. We already pushed the limits as far as survey length. As discussed in the report, we varied the type of surveys we used over the past four years and learned through this experience that a retrospective post-test worked best for girls at this age. It was less onerous for participants, and allowed them to reflect upon changes they believed had occurred because of the program. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that girls and parents may have over-inflated the results they reported on this type of survey.

The quantitative survey data collected in this phase of the evaluation was enriched by the addition of program site visits by members of the evaluation team. The site visits facilitated the collection of richer data through face-to-face interviews with the girls, focus groups with parents, mentors (where applicable) and staff, as well as action research projects with the girls. The site visits allowed the evaluation team to draw links that may not have emerged through just reading transcripts. We observed very consistent results from the site visits across the three years. Thus, regardless of the limitations to the annual surveys, the results from the enriched site visit data collection through interviews, focus groups and action research activities do reflect a definite impact on the protective factors. In the three years, across the 26 programs that were visited, staff, parents, and girls provided countless examples and explanations of how they were feeling more confident, more connected, were thinking more critically, as well as many other impacts the programs were having on the girls. The qualitative data also confirms results in the surveys about best practices and provided more detail that had allowed us to draw conclusions about critical components and how they affected outcomes.

During the site visits, the evaluation team built and strengthened relationships with grantees, and from comments made, appeared to have increased staff's interest in the evaluation process and its value. The time with program staff during the staff focus group was not only helpful to the evaluation process, but also provided an opportunity for staff to reflect on their programs. The time spent with the girls, mentors and parents was not only useful to the research process but also provided an opportunity for girls and parents to come together and talk about their experiences. Many stories were indeed touching and provided a clear picture that helped guide our data analyses. The girls and parents seemed to enjoy the site visits and often took the time to thank the evaluation team personally for the opportunity.

One of the limitations that was noted over the three years was the difficulty in collecting data in a short period of time about the experiences of a program over one or more years. While we asked retrospectively about the full year, we visited programs at only one point in time and were not able to see the progression of

the program over the three years. We saw at times how an incident that occurred before or during the site visit affected the process or outcomes of the site visit (for example an interpersonal conflict with the girls, a death in the community, or a winter storm). The site visit process could have been improved with a case study approach with ongoing data collection throughout the year. While this approach is more logistically difficult to implement, there are some research activities that could be incorporated on a regular basis - for example regular telephone or online focus groups with staff or a group project with girls that is done throughout the year and led by staff with the support of the evaluation team. This approach would help provide a clearer understanding of how programs grow and develop, how outcomes are facilitated, and how external factors or changes in the program affect outcomes for the girls. This case study approach would also allow for more direct analyses of the individual aspects of the programs. Incorporating a case study approach that culminates in a site visit should be a consideration for future phases of the evaluation.

One of the biggest challenges in evaluating the mentoring component was in separating out the enhanced outcomes that girls experience since many attended both a regular girls group and a mentoring group. The great variability in approaches, intensity, and quality of programming in the mentoring component also made it difficult to draw conclusions. Despite these challenges, we were able to draw conclusions because of the multiple methods, the vast amount of data collected, and the triangulation of the data by querying girls, mentors and staff. Further research is needed, however, to better understand the enhanced capabilities of mentoring programs as well as what key components (e.g. type of mentor, hours they meet, the training received by the mentor) create these enhanced outcomes.

With respect to specific program content and how that may affect outcomes – we did not address this systematically in the current evaluation. That would have required a different type of evaluation – more of a case study approach. Our evaluation was designed to address general outcomes across all programs. Therefore, there was no quantitative data collected on specific activities conducted with the girls and the impact those activities might have had on outcomes. However, the qualitative data does suggest that some programming elements in particular resonated with the girls and had a strong impact. These programming elements included raising girls' awareness of the media, and the impact that media had on their lives, and activities and discussion that focused on cultural identity. One possible direction for future research could be to assess more closely how individual program foci, strategies, and activities affect overall outcomes for girls.

The final component of the outcome evaluation was the long-term impact study. The response rate to the survey was disappointing. Staff across numerous programs reached out to former participants but they did not get the response rate we had hoped for. The 30 respondents, however, were from across programs and results were fairly consistent across programs, and with what we learned from the current participants. Further research on the long-term impacts including detailed interviews of alumnae would be interesting and provide more information. Another approach would be to follow a group of girls that start the program for several years after they age out of the program.

Based on the learnings from this phase of the evaluation, there are numerous things the Foundation should consider as it continues to play a key role in supporting girls across Canada:

- The site visits conducted in this evaluation were a positive experience for grantees. While the site visits were conducted by the Evaluation team, they helped strengthen the relationships between the programs and the Canadian Women's Foundation. They allowed for honest dialogue between the grantees and the Foundation (via the Evaluation Team). While evaluation site visits might not always be possible, incorporating site visits into the support provided by the Foundation would continue to strengthen relationships and build capacity within grantee organizations and also provide a sense of connection to a larger movement promoting the importance of girls and girls programming.

- The girls' stories heard through the site visits are compelling and show the strength of girls programming. Many girls were truly transformed by the program. The Foundation should continue to

use the girls' voices to promote their work and engage others in deeper dialogue about the needs of girls and how girls programming and other initiatives can help meet some of those needs.

- The organizations involved in the mentoring component had different interpretations of mentoring and how to implement mentoring programs. This diversity and variation was a strength because it allowed programs to tailor the role of the mentor within a cultural context – that is, the mentorship role (who the mentors were, what they did with girls, what activities they did with the girls) was tailored to the specific girls with whom the program was working. The clear result was that when mentors were well trained and were consistent, girls benefitted greatly from that enhanced piece of girls programming. Also, mentoring was a new concept to many organizations and the support provided by the Foundation was critical to their success. The Foundation should continue to be flexible with programs and support them through webinars and other opportunities to problem solve around issues, and continue to gain the capacity they need to deliver these programs.

- The evaluation results showed that all of the approaches to girls programming in this phase (e.g., STEM, Media, Leadership and Empowerment, Aboriginal Culture, Physical Activity and Healthy Eating) have their merits in meeting diverse needs and strengthening resilience in diverse girls. The Foundation should continue to ensure that programs funded across the country are diverse in their approaches.

- The evaluation results have demonstrated the critical importance of best practices, especially the creation of a safe and supportive space. As new programs are funded the Foundation should continue to provide support and resources to ensure that organizations are able to implement best practices as effectively as possible within the programs and to train and ensure consistency in program facilitators.

- The results of the alumnae survey provided some evidence that programs for girls can result in impacts that continue into the teenage years and adulthood. The alumnae, in fact, rated the impact of the program on their lives quite highly. Because of the small sample and limitations of the methodology and sampling process, the data is limited. A longitudinal study where data is collected from a group of girls for a period of time following completion of the program and/or the inclusion of interviews with program alumnae would provide more detailed and conclusive research on the long-term impacts of the programs.

- Due to the differences and variability across programs, the influence of certain program variables (such as program content) was difficult to tease out. A case study approach or more detailed evaluation of a select group of programs (perhaps 1-2) within each program approach would allow for further exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of each program approach and the effects of different program content.

"This program helped me learn to love myself and had an extremely positive impact on my self-esteem and confidence. It also helped develop my leadership skills, which have gotten me many jobs and leadership positions that have become a huge part of my life."