



Girl Scouts in Rural Communities
Challenge & Change Program
2012-2013 Program Accomplishment Report
July 15, 2013

The mission of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is to build girls of courage, character and confidence who make the world a better place. Girl Scouts cultivates life skills, civic responsibility, leadership, social conscience, and self-worth in girls, by offering them a diverse range of opportunities to participate in innovative programs. Girls learn to understand themselves and their values, connect with and inspire others, and take action to make the world a better place. With 112 Girl Scout councils across the country, 2.3 million girl members, 890,000 adult volunteer members and a strong network of resources and collaborations, Girl Scouts is strongly positioned to engage girls to become the change makers of the future. Through the USDA/NIFA awards girls in rural communities have been developing expertise in building sustainable projects that have a long term positive impact on their communities.

Output Measures for 35 Challenge and Change Projects

During the reporting period 2,010 youth engaged in the [Challenge & Change Program](#) and contributed 45,047 hours for an estimated value of **\$968,956**. Adult volunteers (428) contributed a total of 13,265 volunteer hours for an estimated value of **\$289,044**; Girl Scout councils' salaried staff provided an in-kind contribution of their time to the grant in the amount of 3,024 hours with an estimated value of **\$68,505**. Youth and adult volunteer hours resulted in a **combined value of 1.25 million dollars**.

Eleven funded Girl Scout councils had 35 active projects that leveraged a combined total of **\$495,392** in community contributions to the program. These donations included:

- \$111,776 in cash, grants and other donations;
- the value of \$181,724 for building and project space;
- \$14,165 in transportation;
- \$48,183 for supplies;
- \$6,925 in food; and,
- \$132,620 in other contributions.

Councils reported that there were a total of 9,653 members of their communities who benefited from the projects. Councils also reported that 12,074 program contacts were developed. Highlights of this data show, the following:

- 131 new partnerships; 31 continuing partnerships
- 33 government partnerships; 117 NGO partnerships
- 1018 youth partnerships; 380 adult partnerships
- 156 continuing partnerships; 7 partnerships not continuing
- 1 partnership with a local 4-H office; 1 with local FFA
- 20 partnerships with GS troops
- USDA resources used locally: 5 RYD; 3 Economic Research Service

Youth Participatory Evaluations

Program participants in the three agencies funded by the USDA Rural Youth Development Grant (4-H, FFA and GSUSA) learned how to conduct research of their projects through a youth participatory evaluation process. Through this process, youth: (1) Identify complex, long-term community issues—or needs; (2) plan and implement community projects to address those needs; and, (3) Evaluate the impacts of community projects, paying explicit attention to building community capital. For more information, visit www.ruralityouth.org which offers resources that all youth and adults who want to lead change in their communities will find useful.

Project Descriptions and Awards

Following are four (4) sample projects for the reporting period from three states: Georgia (2 projects), Florida, and Pennsylvania. As the projects evolve significant depth in results is achieved. Two of these projects received awards from their communities.

- The *Green Teens*, Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia, was honored by the Statesboro Chapter of the American Red Cross at their **2014 Youth Heroes Breakfast**; and,
- The Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors awarded Troop 30699, Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania, the **2013 PSATS Youth Award** for their *Front Porch Planter* project which benefitted the residents of Brokenstraw Township and other municipalities in Warren County, PA.

Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia (Second Year of Project)

Through their *Green Teens* Challenge & Change project, a group of Hispanic girls are helping diabetics to learn healthier cooking and eating strategies while respecting their cultural traditions. There are 4,367 residents in Lyons. Approximately 31% of the families with children under 18 live below the poverty line, and 79.8% of the children qualify for free or reduced lunch. Hispanic families in Lyons are typically low income, primarily agricultural workers, living in crowded conditions in trailer communities.

The project began in 2011, when the girls partnered with the Southeast Georgia Communities Project (SEGCP), an agency that serves low-income Hispanic families, to reach the diabetics in the community. They learned that Hispanics have diabetes rates twice that of the general population, with Latino children having a 50% chance of developing diabetes in their lifetime.



Girl participates in harvesting vegetables that will be distributed to diabetics or used in cooking classes.

The girls planted a $\frac{1}{4}$ acre community garden distributing produce at no cost to diabetics, recorded Spanish language PSA's, developed a cooking show, and developed cooking lessons teaching Hispanic women how to prepare traditional Hispanic foods in healthier ways. They have now completed their 2nd year, and have harvested and distributed **1,085** pounds of vegetables this year – up 8.5% from last year – to diabetics along with **168** copies of healthy recipes they researched and created in partnership with a nutritionist from the University of Georgia. In addition to the mother/daughter cooking lessons, they have added a series of **8** nutrition workshops for diabetic women. They've sampled healthy foods and distributed recipes at health fairs and community events and launched **4** home gardens and collaborated with the Boys and Girls Club to offer Zumba lessons and fitness activities at no cost to the families.

The girls are seeing the results of their work with **63%** of the diabetics showing improvement in their HA1C levels, as well as a marked increase in behavior changes including food substitutions like substituting oil for the traditional lard, grilling chicken instead of frying, and serving vegetables at least 4 times a week. At least **83** community members, including **48** diagnosed diabetics have directly benefited. Girls have volunteered **1,802** hours this year to the project which translates to a value of **\$39,265** for their time. **12** adult volunteers have contributed **759** hours to the project with a value of **\$16,538** for their donated time. The project received **\$23,400** in in-kind resources from the community.

This is incredible. These girls are learning leadership skills they will never forget!
– Dahlia Guerrero, Board Member, Southeast Georgia Communities Project

Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia (New Project)

In Baxley, Georgia a group of Girl Scouts in high school have changed the social landscape in their community to be more inclusive of those who are "different." Baxley has population of 4,509. The median household income is \$24,896, with 67.6% of students qualifying for free or

reduced lunch. Approximately 32% of students 14-17 years old are considered disabled. This Challenge & Change project paired the HOSA (Health Occupations Student Association) students with the most profoundly disabled special needs students. The principal fully supported the project, allowing it to take place during school time.



Special needs student participates in a cooking demonstration along with students from the HOSA.

After meeting with the special needs teacher to get an understanding of her students' issues, **37** HOSA students met weekly with the disabled students.

Several have mental and cognitive ages of a 2-year-old to kindergarten level, some are non-verbal, some with severe cerebral palsy that cannot walk and have very limited

eye hand coordination. The HOSA students worked with them on cognitive and motor skills, cooked with them and taught them

about health and nutrition. They planted a garden together growing vegetables to encourage healthy eating and taught them skills that can be applied in their agricultural community. They

learned to adapt activities for those with intellectual and physical limitations, and took on the most challenging issue of all—social isolation—inviting these students to sit with them and their friends at lunch, accompanying them on field trips, and to eat in restaurants. The girls invited the two boys who were graduating seniors to the prom, and worked with the principal to create an award that these students could earn and participate in the annual honors assembly. School athletes became involved and helped them prepare for the Special Olympics. Special needs students even threw out the opening ball at two of the school's baseball games.

Because of this project my HOSA students learned skills they could never have learned any other way.

—Jennifer Summerall, Health Teacher

Following the lead of the girls, more than **500** teens and teachers at the high school, and others in the community, have demonstrated more friendly and inclusive behavior toward the special needs students. The girls plan to continue this project, and are expanding it next year to include a classroom of less severely disabled teens.

Students contributed **7,890** hours to this project which translates to a value of **\$171,923** for their time. **6** of them have decided to work with special needs clients as their future career. Adult volunteers contributed **200** hours to the project, which translates to a value of **\$4,358** for their time. The project received **\$116,100** in in-kind contributions from the community.

Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida (Second Year of Project)

Teens from Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida are providing homework assistance and tutorial sessions since 2011 to children in order to help them advance to the next grade level and prevent drop-out and truancy, as well as foster self-esteem and feelings of belonging. Miami Dade County is a community characterized as the third poorest city in the nation, with a 25% poverty and hunger rate among children under the age of 18, and one of the highest violent crime rates. Sixty-one percent of the community's population is Hispanic, and half of the county's 2.3 million residents are foreign born. Many parents work in agricultural settings or low income temporary employment for long hours. Children are frequently left at home to be cared for by older siblings. County studies indicate that child maltreatment and domestic violence are at high levels, and many children are at risk of school failure, having limited English language skills or cultural adaptation.

The girls committed to attending two hours, three times a week, to provide homework assistance to 175 students. Girls learned about the (oral) ORF and PACER Pre-tests and mentored younger students on a weekly basis at the After-School Program. The after-school program initially received USDA funding in 2003 through 2005, and has secured other community partners to ensure continuity of program delivery. In the spring, students took the Mid-test administration of ORF and PACER and **94% of the students demonstrated an improvement in ORF and physical fitness**. In Year



Girls participating in a survey of their community by handing out flyers related to their project.

2, they grew the program through a new partnership with Nova

Southeastern University and the assistance of a reading specialist who targeted struggling readers based on their ORF scores. Of the 25 intensively-involved girls in the project 90% of girls

"Our girls have challenged themselves and have come up with a project that will have great impact in our community for years to come" – Adult Volunteer

reported trying to do something about problems that came up with the project, being able to re-think plans and make changes as needed, they felt as members of a group in their community outside of their family and friends, and were able to inspire others to take action.

As a result of this initiative, **25** Challenge and Change intensive youth leaders and **72** less-intensively engaged youth contributed **1,788** volunteer hours at an estimated value of **\$38,960**. **Eight** adults volunteered **130** hours of time at a value of **\$2,832**. The community has contributed **\$115,293** in cash, in-kind, and time value resources.

Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania (New Project)

Girl Scout Troop 30699 in Smethport, PA is teaching the community how to grow and sustain gardens, no matter what size. They are constructing square foot garden boxes, planting them with organic produce and flowers, and holding workshops for the community to learn about gardening and nutrition, construct their own garden boxes, and adopt healthier cooking and canning practices. When naming their project, there were two things they wanted represented; their strong involvement in Girl



Girls and volunteers participate in a work session to create box gardens.

Scouts (the G and S) and the incorporation of their idea of square foot gardening – hence *Garden S²*. Smethport is a rural community with a population of 1,652, however, the girls recognized that it was lacking in the availability of fresh produce due to lack of agricultural space, minimized growing season, and poor economic conditions. The community is rural and access to produce markets requires traveling 40-60 minutes one way. Approximately 18 % of the Smethport population lives at the poverty level. The low income pre-school obesity rate for McKean County is 12.6% while the state's average is 11.5%. The adult obesity rate is 26.1% compared to the state's 27.2%, and adult diabetes rate is 8.7% versus the state's 9.1%.

To date, the girls have collaborated with a Master Gardener and several local businesses on their project to offer two community workshops. The first workshop, the girls, volunteers from the community, and students built **150** square box garden containers including **1200** vegetable plants (corn, peas, beans, squash, and cucumbers) and flowers. The girls plan to develop a canning series in the fall to teach families on the sustainability of their crops, and will hold 3 canning/cooking classes. In the next 2-3 years, the girls plan to continue the square box gardens, canning, and cooking classes. They will further educate the public by holding activities with a "Veggie Wagon" at local fairs and educational programs on healthy snacks at elementary schools.

To date, **16** youth volunteered **800** hours at an estimated value of **\$17,432**; and, **37** adults contributed **650** hours of volunteer hours at an estimated value of **\$14,163**. A total of **\$4,018** of cash and in-kind and time value resources were leveraged by the grant.

I have always loved Girl Scouts and Challenge & Change has showed me how I could look at my community, identify a need, and actually do something to help, it makes me feel good about myself.

- Girl Scout, 17 years