



GIRLS INCORPORATED
OF GREATER
SANTA BARBARA

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

A NEW CHAPTER

When the staff of Girls Incorporated of Greater Santa Barbara, California, wanted to foster more effective communications between mothers and daughters, they found their strategy in a special kind of book club.

Formed in 2004, the Mother-Daughter Book Club gives mothers and daughters a way to talk about the coming-of-age issues presented in powerful, provocative materials they read together. The Club has exceeded the staff's fondest hopes as discussions started in the Club continue and expand at home. In 2005, the program achieved a 90 percent success rate—as measured against goals for reading, home discussions and relationship building.

“Parents have embraced the concept,” says Kathryn O’Brien, director of program services for the Santa Barbara affiliate, which serves girls from 40 public schools. “And the girls tell us they have benefited—at the time in their lives when they most need to communicate and are probably least likely to do so.”



THE BOOK CLUB IS A CATALYST FOR MOTHER-
DAUGHTER COMMUNICATIONS THAT
EMPOWERS PARENTS TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE
ROLE IN THEIR DAUGHTERS' GROWING UP.

—Monica Spear, Executive Director, Girls Incorporated of Greater Santa Barbara

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

The Book Club engages up to a dozen pairs of mothers and daughters in open group discussions, moderated by Girls Incorporated staff. Mothers report that the conversations about sometimes difficult topics have helped them assume more active roles in their children's development and decision-making. The girls themselves feel better able to initiate discussions with their parents.

"All at once, we had a forum in which the girls could communicate and interact and express feelings," explains O'Brien, "and the mothers were right there, listening, learning and becoming more effective parents at the same time." Staff now involve mother-daughter pairs in selecting the books, which thus far have dealt with issues they were experiencing, such as fighting at home, coping with peer pressure and budding sexuality, and dealing with drugs and alcohol.

Evaluation questionnaires reflect strong overall levels of empowerment for both mothers and daughters, with parents reporting many specific benefits as well. High on the list are learning new strategies for engaging daughters in regular conversations at home and finding ways of being supportive without being judgmental. Mothers also requested more activities in which they could participate across Girls Incorporated's other programs.

"Our extraordinary results mean parents and their children have found a way to grow together, effectively support each other and, in the end, become a stronger family," says O'Brien.

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Girls Incorporated, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Girls Incorporated affiliates with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.

Through more than 1,000 affiliates nationwide and in Canada, Girls Incorporated offers programs that support parents in sparking their daughters' learning, encouraging their self-esteem and building their communications skills. The results are brighter futures for young women, whose families have helped them become "strong, smart and bold" in pursuit of their dreams. "We strengthen girls' family relationships and help instill the confidence they will need if they choose to become parents one day," says Girls Incorporated president and CEO Joyce M. Roché. "Every girl offers the promise of two generations of stronger families—their own and the next."

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Award-winning Program: Mother-Daughter Book Club

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