

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."



GIRLS INCORPORATED OF SIOUX CITY

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Award-winning Program: Fostering Futures
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CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

PLACING NEW EMPHASIS

Mandy Engel-Cartie remembers the shock of seeing the statistic: Nearly one in five of the young clients served by Girls Incorporated of Sioux City, Iowa, lives with a foster family. That day, Engel-Cartie, the affiliate's executive director, knew she would work to create the Fostering Futures program.

What emerged was a three-unit curriculum designed to change the way girls in foster care, ages 12 to 18, view themselves and their out-of-home placements. "Many have no real support system. Their birth mother might be incarcerated or absent or have overdosed. In the worst situations, girls on their third or fourth placement shut down and don't relate to their foster families," says Engel-Cartie. "What a way to think of family so early in life! We became determined to find strength in these placements and help the girls and families find continuity and hope."

THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

Fostering Futures nurtures the involvement of the girls' guardians, including foster parents, adoptive parents and relatives, who are invited to all of the program's discussion-driven activities. Engel-Cartie and her staff meet with these guardians separately before the first Futures session to reinforce their role in program success and the importance of such basic elements as a supportive home environment where discussions can continue.

Each unit in the curriculum—focusing on mental and physical health, education and self-image—can stand by itself. "These girls and families begin to locate assets they didn't know they had, commonalities, bonds," explains Engel-Cartie. "The girls see beyond their helplessness and anger for the first time. Their families begin to realize they can help change the frustration both sides are feeling. The biggest hurdle families overcome is dismantling negative thinking patterns."

Fostering Futures' girls, who often discover the program through a school-based marketing effort, also have access to a wealth of age-appropriate Girls Incorporated health, sports, life skills, sexuality and technology programs. In addition, the affiliate provides 32,000 free meals a year in a zip code where 70 percent of students receive free or reduced-cost meals. "In our after-school programs, though, we let the girls reinvent themselves," says Engel-Cartie. "One girl put it best: 'At Girls Inc., I can be anything.'"

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.



I ALWAYS REMEMBER THE FOSTER PARENT
WHO SAID, 'IF WE ESTABLISH POSITIVE
COMMUNICATIONS NOW, THE DAY SHE TURNS
18 ISN'T THE DAY OUR FAMILY ENDS.'

—Mandy Engel-Cartie, Executive Director, Girls Incorporated of Sioux City