



# GIRLS INCORPORATED OF OMAHA, NEBRASKA

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

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## MAKING PARENTS A PRIORITY

When Roberta Wilhelm became Executive Director of Girls Incorporated of Omaha a few years ago, she asked girls, their families and her staff how the affiliate could be even more effective in building strong young women. One clear priority emerged: For the girls to gain the most from their experiences, their parents needed to become more meaningfully engaged. The result is the Parents Count; Count Parents initiative.

A systematic effort to support and engage parents, Parents Count; Count Parents is now on the agenda for every staff meeting and many board meetings. The program also carries the long-term goal of strengthening parent-daughter relationships at home. At both Girls Incorporated centers in Omaha, all parents now participate in a mandatory general orientation session, as well as at their daughters' first meeting for a selected program.

"The girls often tell us, 'You can teach me about good nutrition, you can teach me about fitness, but if you don't reach my parents, nothing will change at home,'" Wilhelm says.



PARENTS HAVE COME TO REALIZE  
THAT WE CONSIDER THEIR  
INVOLVEMENT ESSENTIAL TO MAKING  
THESE GIRLS SUCCESSFUL.

—Roberta Wilhelm, Executive Director, Girls Incorporated of Omaha

## STRONGER FAMILIES, STRONGER GIRLS

As a result of Parents Count; Count Parents, Girls Inc. of Omaha now offers a range of new activities responding to parents' interests and concerns, from a mother-daughter pregnancy prevention program to financial literacy workshops that teach both generations how to build their assets. Classes in nutrition and physical fitness encourage families to work together in making healthy choices. The centers offer day care options to allow parents with younger children to attend sessions without having to make special arrangements.

"Now staff members are always thinking about how to engage parents in our work with the girls. Helping parents find ways to play a more effective role in their daughters' lives has become central to what we do," says Wilhem.

Parents have come to see the program as an ally in their work and a resource for strengthening their entire family. For example, a year-end talent show that used to draw just a couple of dozen parents this year drew 140. Parents have recently expressed interest in forming a Parents' Association. "That's the important next step," Wilhelm observes. "Parents will have a permanent presence and a lasting impact in every thing we do. What a big step forward for these girls."

## 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 strategies 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 their 1,500 program sites 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: Parents Count; Count Parents

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