

news from girlsFIRST

Dear Friends:

Each spring we write to you to share news about the progress and growth of Girls First. As we enter our 12th year as an organization, we are incredibly proud of a significant milestone that occurred this year. Three former Girls First participants, who came to us first as campers, became Counselors-in-Training, and eventually grew into Jr. Counselors, are now attending Southeastern Louisiana University. We are very proud of Jantel Joseph, Crystal Gaston and Paige Spruille.

While there are many ways to measure an organization's success, our most important and compelling metric is the success of our girls! Another is the retention rate of girls who enroll in Girls First. To date, 86% of girls who enroll for one summer's program come back again and again!

While these achievements may seem modest, they are clear proof that our efforts to improve the lives of girls in New Orleans are having an impact. Each year we are making positive changes within a generation of young women in New Orleans. It has all been possible as a result of your continued support and encouragement.

We are excited with the possibilities and the challenges of the future. Our 2009 goals include:

- launching a wide-spread awareness campaign that highlights the benefits and value of sports and exercise for girls
- a targeted effort to enhance the sustainability of Girls First through successful grant writing and strategic partnerships
- expanding the leadership track for our Counselors-in-Training and Jr. Counselors
- increasing our capacity to reach more girls in the New Orleans area.

This year, Girls First summer camp will be held June 13-19 at Tulane University. Once again we ask for your generous support to give a girl the opportunity to experience Girls First – for the summer and all year long. Sports and the opportunity to play them can transform girls lives. Girls First will continue to provide a sports based program that will support the growth and healthy development of the most deserving and need qualified girls of New Orleans! Thank you for your generous support.

Helen Siegel and Missie McGuire, co-founders of Girls First



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girlsFIRST

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“Thank you for giving me and all of us a place we could always call HOME.”

–Jasmine, age 13

2009
Camp Dates
June 13-19
Come join
the fun!

“By being a part of Girls First, I have learned that I can do whatever I put my mind to. I know that now I can face any challenge and am successful as long as I do my best.” *–Cherrelle, age 10*

LEADERSHIP: Counselors-in-Training (CITs) and Jr. Counselors (JCs)

There was a buzz in the lobby of the Doubletree Hotel as the girls arrived and were excitedly chatting about their evening ahead. As promised, the Counselors-in-Training (CITs) and Junior Counselors (JCs) were finally getting together for their annual leadership retreat. The evening's work began with Coach Liz (Kritza) reviewing the GoGirlGo! Curriculum and the girls selecting the message and lesson they would introduce the following afternoon to the Girls First participants at their scheduled monthly activity. After practicing their peer-to-peer presentations, the girls got ready to take a brisk walk to Jackson Square where dinner reservations at Stanley's awaited them. After a hearty meal featuring appetizers, entrees and desserts, the girls enjoyed a carriage ride in the French Quarter with Coach Liz. After the Quarter tour, the girls returned to review and discuss what it means to be a leader. Coach Liz identified the expectations Girls First has of our girls and further discussions included goal setting and the vision for their growth and success. Finally, it was popcorn, pajamas, girl talk and *The Secret Life of Bees* that capped off an evening that lasted until the wee hours of the morning.

CITs and JCs are an integral part of Girls First. Throughout the monthly activities and the summer camp, they are called upon to provide leadership to the younger girls in the program. They help conduct all activities and often take the lead in demonstrating skills during events, providing a "big sister" for the younger girls to lean on, and communicating the positive effects of Girls First to our campers.

Our JCs and CITs are a very special group because not only have they been campers themselves, who are able to share their experiences as they have progressed through the program, but they are also role models for the younger girls and the future leaders of Girls First. All CITs and JCs have been a part of the program for at least two years and have demonstrated promise as a leader while embodying the Girls First spirit. The young ladies who are selected to serve in these leadership roles are positive, self-directed, compassionate, and motivated individuals. They are not only leaders within the Girls First family,



but also in their school and church communities and their neighborhoods. Our CITs/JCs have multiple interests and participate in many different activities including school and club sports teams, theatre and dance, music, art, student government, college preparation, and community service.

CITs and Jr. Counselors are very important to the success of Girls First, and we are continually challenging them to grow and become leaders in every capacity. The ongoing goal of providing leadership training and opportunities for our CITs/JCs allows for some very exciting experiences for this group of young women, such as the leadership retreat we just held.

We are proud of our girls and would like to acknowledge each of them for their hard work and service.

These girls include: Chenell Thurmond, Jasmine McGary, Maya Spruille, Laywana Lewis, Carlnesha Allen, Amber Bowie, Alvinisha Sims, Anthonia Smith, Shautera Clofer, Paige Spruille and Jeronique Johnson.

“As I get older, I love Girls First even more. I will always be involved in Girls First no matter what or where I am.”

–Carlnesha, age 16, CIT

Interview with a Mother and Daughter

Amber is a straight-A student at Edna Karr High School.

Pressure

by Amber Bowie



Sharon Bowie, mother of Amber

“I remember when we saw the girls of Girls First at the park, and I went up to one of them and asked, ‘Who are you?’ It looked like such a wonderful group of girls. That was four years ago. Now when my daughter sees a flyer for a Girls First event on the fridge, she will come to me and ask, ‘Did you call yet and tell them I’ll be there?’ Every day she’ll ask me.

“What I love about Girls First is the fact that the girls just get to be girls. In school, so many young women are trying to grow up so fast, and at Girls First, Amber has learned that she does not need to be in such a rush to grow up. Through the mentoring of the Girls First program, she has learned to make her own decisions, be responsible for those decisions and be a real leader. She will come and tell me how she wants to be like D-Mama (dorm mother, board member and attorney Inem O’Boyle) and do something good.”

Amber Bowie, Jr. Counselor, age 16

“I enjoy Girls First so much. Being a part of Girls First has taught me how to handle problems and how to communicate better with other people. We learn about pressure and what can happen if we let it get to us. I know the decisions I make now can affect my whole life.

“I would love to go to college, and we have learned we can do anything you can put your mind to do. All the people in Girls First are like family because they believe in you—and you miss them and they miss you when you don’t see them.”

What’s this I see pressure
Pressure all around me
Pressure to be cool
Pressure to fit in
Pressure to do drugs
Pressure to have sex
Pressure, pressure, pressure
As teenagers that’s all we see
But we have to play it smart
Rise over the pressure to be cool
The pressure to fit in
The pressure to do drugs
The pressure to have sex
Just say it’s not me
Staying true to your self
Is what matters the most
If they don’t accept you
For who you are
So be it, you don’t need it
True friends will raise you up,
Not break you down
True friends always bring out the best in you
Not feed you into the pressure that surrounds
Pressure
The pressure of being a teenager is on
And it’s up to you to rise above it.

WHAT DO SPORTS AND GIRLS FIRST TEACH US?

- How to be competitive
- The courage to speak up and use our voices
- Play fair and play hard
- What it means to be a leader
- How to avoid negative behavior like bullying
- Poise to take wins gracefully and accept and learn from our losses
- Stand up for our rights
- The value of teamwork and collaboration



“By being a part of Girls First, I have learned that I don’t need to watch TV all the time, there are other interesting things to do.”

–Megan, age 8

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS:

Emeril Lagasse Foundation
New Orleans Wine and Food Experience
Rebuilding our Community, Inc.
The Azby Fund
The Cudd Foundation

Goldring Family Foundation
Oprah Winfrey Foundation
The Payback Foundation
Women’s Sports Foundation
United Way of Greater New Orleans



Save the Date

GIRLS NIGHT OUT FOR GIRLS FIRST

Thursday, June 11, 2009
from 5 – 7 pm

The Swizzle Stick Bar
in Café Adelaide

All drink sales benefit Girls First.

Population of Girls Especially at Risk

Participation in sports is a needed intervention in the lives of many young women who are at risk for teen pregnancy and who may lack other sources of empowerment. For girls of color and girls from low-income families, however, significant barriers exist that hinder their participation in sports. For example, girls from economically disadvantaged families may not be able to afford expensive gym memberships or athletic apparel and equipment, and urban centers may lack public facilities and programs. Also, many girls and young women may need to supplement their families' income by working after school, making it nearly impossible for them to participate in extracurricular and/or recreational activities. Additionally, certain cultures may espouse gender roles that devalue athletic females.

Yet, research has shown the importance of sports to girls at risk of becoming pregnant. One study revealed that girls who live in poor neighborhoods are less likely to engage in sex if they are physically active. For some, involvement in sports may prove to be the factor that breaks them out of the cycle of poverty, lack of opportunity, and early childbearing.

“Girls First means no boys allowed!”

–Tyler, age 8



“I feel good about myself ever since I have been a part of Girls First.”

–Diamond, age 12

