



Evaluation of girlsBEST Fund II (2007 - 2010)

Executive Summary

January 2011

Introduction

After successful completion of the first generation of girlsBEST (girls Building Economic Success Together) from 2002 – 2007, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota launched a "second generation" of girlsBEST programs (girlsBEST II) at 13 sites across Minnesota in 2007 – six in Greater Minnesota, and seven in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Outcome

One outcome drives all girlsBEST programs: "to build girls' readiness for economic well-being." The girlsBEST "Theory of Change" sees girls advancing through three recognizable stages of economic development: 1) awareness, 2) agency, and 3) activism.

Investment in state's most vulnerable girls

Research indicates urban girls of color and rural white girls must navigate rockier paths to economic well-being, including: sustaining high aspirations for the future, demonstrating high school success, enrollment in post secondary education, and delaying pregnancy.

Most girlsBEST participants are from underserved populations and many endure unstable family situations characterized by poverty and violence.

Yet, with support from girlsBEST, even the most vulnerable girls find a second home that nourishes and supports them, helping them prepare for more successful futures.

The following statement made by one girlsBEST grantee sums up where many girls begin their journey to become ready for economic well-being as adults:

"At the beginning of this three year program, the girls' level of economic readiness was low or non existent. Girls were not aware of or had very little access to the resources necessary to gain financial literacy. When some of the girls entered the program, they did not even consider college as a way for economic development and advancement. Many were also not familiar with budgeting, financial aid options for college, or the basics of saving."

Key Findings

Over three years of programming, three key findings emerged that point to girls' future economic success:

1. **High School Graduation:** High school graduation rates for girls in girlsBEST programs were significantly higher than graduation rates for girls of similar ethnicity statewide. Girls in girlsBEST programs graduated at a 23% - 30% higher rate than other girls of similar ethnicity in Minnesota,
2. **Post-Secondary Enrollment:** Rates of post secondary enrollment for girls in girlsBEST programs was 86%, far exceeding post secondary enrollment rates for girls of similar ethnicity statewide of 34% - 54%.
3. **Teen Pregnancy:** The rate of teen pregnancy among girlsBEST participants is significantly lower than statewide pregnancy rates for girls of similar ethnicity. In addition, the rate of teen pregnancy among girls in girlsBEST programs is lower than the rate of teen pregnancy for white girls, who typically have the lowest rate in the state.

Greatest Success

Data indicate 43% of African American women live in poverty in Minnesota, the highest rate in the state, and one of the highest poverty rates in the nation.

Yet, results from one in-school program demonstrated a success rate of 100% college enrollment for 159 African American girls over three years, far exceeding statewide post secondary enrollment rates for African American boys and girls.

girlsBEST Model and Theory of Change: Lessons Learned

The girlsBEST model programming provides a safe, nurturing place for girls to *plan their futures*:

- **Awareness** – Girls learn to make smart, safe personal choices while becoming more aware of the challenges women and girls face on the road to economic success because of sexism.
- **Agency.** With an aggressive focus on leadership and enrollment in post-secondary education, girls in girlsBEST programs planned their futures and led girlsBEST programs, in schools and communities statewide.
- **Activism** – Girls advocated for change on a variety of issues in the community, and raised money for their programs to continue their advocacy.

girlsBEST: From vulnerable to resilient girls

Evidence of girlsBEST girls' resiliency can be seen throughout girlsBEST programs statewide.

With the help of dedicated adult program mentors, girlsBEST girls gain the confidence to face many inevitable challenges on the road to economic success, and:

- 1) Girls learn and thrive when they feel safe;
- 2) Girls plan for college, not babies; and
- 3) Girls advocate changing unfair policies and practices that limit women's economic success.