

GROWING UP...



In the last eight years we've grown from one after-school program with 15 girls in an elementary school to 17 after and in-school programs reaching close to 500 girls and boys annually.

It's not just our small three person staff and handful of consultants who are making this happen. We have passed the torch, so to speak, and have several teachers at local elementary schools leading after-school Girls and Boys Projects, as well as all seventh grade teachers at Tompkins Square Middle School conducting our middle school curriculum with every seventh grade class during advisory. The Young Immigrant Boys and Girls Projects have expanded from one program in a high school in Brooklyn two years ago to six programs in four International High Schools for 9th and 10th grade immigrant youth. It's an exciting time around here! Demand and growth are at an all time high as well as our commitment, enthusiasm and all around anticipation about our future!

ROLL OUT AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Funded in part by New Visions for Public Schools, the ILC set out to create a gender-specific advisory curriculum for 7th graders. Advisory (like homeroom) is a time that small groups of students meet with a staff member (their advisor) to check-in and discuss all kinds of issues. Tompkins Square Middle School (TSMS), a local school in the East Village, very much wanted to address the social and emotional needs of their students during this time with a curriculum that students and teachers alike could relate to and embrace. We're now in year two and happy to report that teachers at TSMS are facilitating Girls and Boys Projects weekly. The ILC created and piloted the 20 week program which is now reaching 120 students. Staff and students are very happy with the program, appreciating the opportunity to step out of their usual classroom roles and interact about topics such as media, stereotypes, relationships and sexuality. Principal, Mark Pingitore, said, "Advisory has always been difficult. This is the first time the teachers feel successful and that the kids are really engaged and talking about real issues."

Seventh grade boys and girls exchange questions with each other in a session about how the opposite gender really feels.

Boys' Questions for Girls

- Do all girls like romance?
- Why do girls act different in front of boys?
- Have you ever wanted to be a guy?
- Do you want boys to be gangstas or smart?
- How do you feel when women are referred to as "hoes" in songs?
- Do you feel insulted by the way the media shows girls?

Girls' Questions for Boys

- Do you think there's something wrong with girls who are large shaped?
- Why do boys feel that they are the best at everything?
- What are your stereotypes about girls?
- If you had a choice, would you be a boy or a girl?
- What does the Boys Project talk about?



... AND OUT NEW SPACE FOR THE GIRLS & BOYS PROJECTS

We've outgrown our accessible little storefront on the Lower East Side and the offices of the Girls and Boys Projects are moving. We have acquired a new space on the same block – a big storefront – four times the size! This will not only enable us to hire more staff (we're in the process of hiring a Boys Project Director) but also conduct our annual Train-the-Trainer workshops on site.

SELF RESPECT = RESPECT FOR OTHERS = NO HARASSMENT

At Brooklyn International High School, 10th grade girls and boys got together for their last Girls & Boys Projects sessions to share what they learned. The girls prepared a skit on sexual harassment where they got to holler back things like "would you say that to your mother?" and "do you really get dates that way?" when being harassed on the street. This led to a discussion about the difference between flirting and harassment. Boys were clearly confused and complained about double messages – "why is it okay for some boys to talk to you, but not others?" Girls complained about boys saying nasty things to them – "we don't mind if you talk to us, but we don't like being harassed!" In the end, one young man, Eddie, stood up and said, "any boy that harasses girls on the street has no self respect." He continued: "If you respect yourself, there is no need to bother girls on the street or to force ourselves on them. If you have self respect, then you also respect others."

OUR BODIES/SELVES IN A NEW WORLD

The Young Immigrant Girls Project has combined yoga and dance with our 15 week empowerment curriculum in two international high schools this year. Girls meet after-school and start out with 15 minutes of yoga – stretching, breathing and poses – ridding themselves of the day's stresses and negativity. They then go on to activities where they explore what it's like being a young woman in a new world, examining stereotypes, harassment and relationships. Each session ends with dance – either traditional Indian dance led by facilitator Pavithra Vasudevan or a Caribbean, Latin or African dance led by one of our girls. Pavithra says of her work with the Girls Project, "Facing increasing violence in the media, on the street, all around, we try to create space where young women can build their inner strength and wisdom to face daily life struggles. Our goal is for the girls to know themselves better and clarify their own values and boundaries which will lead to healthy decisions."

YOGA TO SUPPORT THE GIRLS PROJECT

On June 25th EAST YOGA CENTER will host a two hour yoga class in which a portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Girls Project as part of a vernal equinox celebration.

GIRLS PROJECT @ LUNCH



Sixth grade girls who graduated from the Girls Project last year wanted more. "It's not fair," they cried to GP director, Julie Hill, when she started an all new group of 5th graders at PS 19 in October 2005, "why can't we still meet?" So, Julie started a lunch time GP. Fifteen 6th graders meet once a week at lunch time to discuss everything from boys (of course) to gossip and the big changes ahead as they graduate and move on to middle school. But, is that enough? No, they want more. So, through a grant from Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the 6th grade girls will now be participating in an after-school X-Cheerleader Project, another program of the ILC. Led by long time GP trainer and ex-cheerleader, Jule Jo Ramirez is running a six week intensive program where the girls will learn the basics of cheering – gymnastics, dance moves – and create their own cheers about topics such as body image, stereotypes, puberty & more.

LEAVE US ALONE *

Leave us alone, don't mess with us!
Get too close and we'll put up a fuss.
You want me! You need me!
But you're not gonna get me.
Don't touch my butt
I'll punch you in the gut!
We're way too young
To take this crap!

* a sample of a cheer a group of girls created this year when Jule Jo was a guest artist at a local school

GIRLS PROJECT JOURNAL

Julie Hill, GP Director

Day 2 at the Beacon Afterschool Program.

The girls were a bit late coming up to the classroom and I was impatient to get started. Within seconds of hearing the first hint of movement in the hallway the girls rushed in, a mass of chatter and laughter. Brianna was leading the group carrying a sheet in her arms. Other girls grabbed the corners and spread it on the floor in the middle of the circle of desks. I quickly realized what Brianna had done and why the girls were so excited. During our first meeting when we talked about what we wanted and needed to create a safe-space where we could be ourselves and share sensitive issues with each other, the girls spoke of having pillows and blankets – to feel literally comfortable. I listened and nodded in agreement at the time, but didn't think getting pillows and blankets was going to happen. But Brianna was not deterred. She decorated an old sheet with the phrase, "One Love, One Club, Many Girls, One Girls Project" and created that comfort they all wanted. The sheet also contributed to our growing sense of connection to each other. While the girls settled themselves in a circle on the sheet, tossing off shoes and sweaters, lounging on elbows and each other, I was in awe of them in all their exuberant girl-ness, of the potential of the space and the year ahead that we would spend together.

BREAKING THE BOY CODE

After a professional development day where BP facilitators viewed the PBS documentary *Raising Cain: Exploring the Inner Lives of America's Boys*, the Boys Project at the Beacon After-school program began an important conversation about the "boy code" -i.e. being tough, not showing feelings, having lots of girlfriends. When the topic of fighting came up, the boys said they have to fight to "save their rep." But as the conversation progressed they were able to share with each other that they really didn't want to fight – and maybe a lot of other boys didn't want to fight either. "The boys are beginning to understand the power of numbers," says Sharif Williams, BP facilitator. "(The boys) began to explore the idea finding people who do not enjoy the rigid enforcement of the boy code, and joining forces. The BP gives these boys the support they need to express how they feel!"



boys project IMPACT

Teddy Fernandez leads the Boys Project after-school program at the Neighborhood School. The following is a note from one of the 5th/6th grade teachers at the school.

Dear Boys Project,

Most of the boys in my class attend the Boys Project, and I can see the impact of Teddy's work. They always seem to look forward to it, though they never explicitly discuss what they talk about there. However, the learning and growing they are doing in that context really shows through in class. In several recent class discussions about stereotypes, the boys have been very vocal, talking about social demands placed on boys and men to always act manly or strong. They are open about discussing the fact that boys, too, have feelings and need ways to express them, and they are also open to listening to what girls have to say about the social restrictions they feel. I have noticed that the boys in my class are getting to be better and better listeners as well as participants in class discussions, and they tell me that Teddy's work has really helped them in this way. It seems really valuable to these boys that they also have a weekly space outside of the strictures of the classroom to discuss and work on some of their particular struggles and challenges.

Sincerely,

Clio Stearns, 5/6 grade teacher Neighborhood School

BOYS PROJECT JOURNAL

Mario Hernandez, 5th grade Boys Project Facilitator

I had low numbers today because of required test prep. My original plan for activity time needed more boys. While I was thinking about how to adjust the arrangement, two boys paired off and grabbed hands, attempting to spin each other until they lost their footing. Seeing this, another joined in. Then another. Soon all of them were holding hands in a circle, trying to turn and spin each other out of the circle. The smallest boy, sensing his advantage in the game, would go airborne for a few seconds then land, laughing the whole time. The silliness of the situation finally took a hold of all of them and someone began chanting in an affected sing-song, "Ring around the Rosie...". The laughter continued, the boys now dizzy, someone went flying rolling off onto the gym floor. "Hey," one boy remarked, "if the girls see us, we'll never be able to show our faces in school again." To see this 'tough' group of boys, holding hands and singing showed me how important this "boy only" space is. I don't think there's any other place, outside the comfort of their families where they can let down their guard and truly be little boys!