



A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR — by **Cydney Pullman**

These are rough times as everyone knows. Small and big organizations are struggling to survive, let alone thrive. Here at The Girls & Boys Projects we've been growing – not necessarily in terms of revenues, but in 2009 we will have **reached more youth (over 1,000!!) and trained more teachers than ever before.** This is due to several factors: we've completed our curricula (for three age levels), we've got an amazing staff who are geared up to train and support folks in the field, and there is a demand out there for innovative programs that touch on real issues for kids – whether it's figuring out how to have good relationships, understanding the media's role in body image, or stopping bullying and harassment in the hallways or on the streets. This combo of increased capacity and demand is enabling us to move forward providing a key service and, ultimately, changing our culture for the better!!

Our newsletter is full of stories and words of wisdom from our staff, our trainers and our kids. Enjoy!

“PLAYING HOUSE”

CHANGING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS by **Clio Stearns**



It is so natural for family relationships to evolve as children grow older. When I noticed that the girls in my 5th grade Girls Project group were talking a lot about changes in their family dynamics, it seemed like a good topic to spend a few sessions on. For many of the girls it was their first opportunity to **talk openly about how their relationships with their parents and siblings were changing, and how it made them feel.**

The girls came up with an idea to create an advice column called Girls Project Guru and wrote letters and responses to problem-solve some sticky situations! All of the girls felt a sense of relief and normalcy when they heard other girls' stories about their arguments with their siblings or their new found need for just a little more independence from their parents. One of the highlights of the sessions was giving the girls a chance to play "house" – something many of them hadn't done in years – and act out and analyze their fantasy family situations. There was a lot of giggling along with the very serious thinking and understanding of their changing family relationships.

Shakespearean Thought

by Franklin “Shakespeare” Rossman

This past Wednesday was one of **the most memorable working with The Boys Project.** I don't know whether it started when Nasir ran around the school to gather the other boys or the group's amazement when I “freestyled” for them. There was something really touching about it all.

I'm really just a big kid, so my ice breaker for the session was a simple one: “Tell me your name, your favorite video game, and favorite song.” The kids were slightly taken aback by my knowledge of Mortal Kombat v. DC, Naruto, and Linkin Park. It was the beginning of a mutual understanding that implicitly said, “Even though I'm older, I'm very much like you.”



Continued next page

I asked the boys if they have ever been teased, picked on, or made to feel like an outcast for being different. **They openly spoke of being teased about: being overweight, clothes, liking a different kind of music or game and even favorite colors.** From there, we began talking about constructive ways to deal with emotions, and I played Lupe Fiasco's "Kick Push." At first, the boys misconstrued the chorus for fighting. I explained to them that the song was about Lupe's love for skateboarding; the chorus was really about the motion your feet make when you're on a skateboard. And, I relayed to them that just as Lupe had an outlet in skateboarding, they could alternately use music and words.

I taught the boys that Hip-Hop is usually composed in a 4/4 measure, and then taught them how to count bars to a beat. As we all sang "1-2-3-4" in unison, Alex began dancing and others were tapping their feet. I then offered a few rhyming techniques and they began writing their raps. Most impressive was their eagerness to share their new rhymes with their friends. It was sweet to have Marcos tell me, "I'm going to finish my rap when I go home."



Rap by Paul (EVCS)

Video games they a waste of time
What I like to do
It's called a rhyme
All my buds here - Eddie and Mikey
Not to mention the rest
They all like me

All the skin on my body
It's oh, so light
Some people they don't like me
They call me "white"
That ain't an insult
At least not to me
People makin' me out
For who they think I [be]
But that's not me!

Rap by Bhreyion (EVCS)

Lookin' for a rap to sing, it's called "bling bling"
Started to sing then the door went ring, ring
It was my cousin, the dopest king king
Sang for him, he said it was a hit

When I asked him to sing he said he was feeling mad tight
He said, "play for the queen"
I said it doesn't seem right

So I went home spitting my song to my mom
What was that! You never told me you could sing
When I was young, robbin' the mic

Then I brushed my teeth and I went to bed
Man, I was sound asleep
This is my story and as you know
My name is Bhre Bhre



SMALL GROUP WORK WORKS!

Joe - P.S. 63 is ambitiously implementing our curriculum with 4th graders! A gregarious group, the boys have found success in partner-work and letter writing. Who said boys don't like writing?

FROM MY EYES TO YOURS by Javaid Khan

The Boys Project Director

This winter, Jule Jo Ramirez, The Girls Project Director, and I spent time visiting schools facilitating The Girls & Boys Projects programs. This is a snapshot of some of the great work being done:

SEX ED JEOPARDY

Adam - The boys at Tompkins Square Middle School, or should I say "contestants," recently learned about sexually transmitted infections by playing Jeopardy!

Answer: "The only method that is 100% effective against pregnancy and infection."

Responder: "Abstinence - no sexual contact!"

Rest of class: "He didn't phrase it in the form of a question!!"

Responder: "What is Abstinence - no sexual contact?"

What a great way to get the information across!

NO NAME CALLING... FOR A WEEK

Luis - At the Children's Workshop School, the boys admitted to taking part in recent name-calling around school. After discussing their actions, the boys accepted their teacher's challenge to not call anyone names for a week. It's a start...

DUDE, WE'VE GOT ISSUES...

Emily - The New Heights Charter School will be implementing our curricula next year. In anticipation, we asked teachers and students separately to identify the biggest non-academic issue facing students there. Teachers: Balancing social, academic, and family life; strict parents. Students: gossip; bullying; adhering to school rules. Obviously, there is work to be done - and the faculty and staff there are excited to tackle it all!

NUMBER ONE FEAR: PUBLIC SPEAKING

TRAINING AT ICE by Javaid Khan

"According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."

— Jerry Seinfeld



If you're familiar with Jerry Seinfeld's stand-up, you probably know the quotation. It came shooting to my mind after a recent teacher training at the Institute for Collaborative Education (ICE). The exercise was simple enough: each person in the small group has one minute to answer the question, "What do you like about being a woman or man?"

For most, the hard part is not finding the answers - it's having the floor all to yourself. One teacher echoed as much: "I have my students do activities like this all the time without giving any thought to how uncomfortable it can be to talk in front of a group. I had a really hard time with this one!"

Exactly. Now, imagine being a teen or pre-teen whose self-worth is measured by peer acceptance. Hopefully, she took away some strategies for making her space feel safer and more comfortable for the kids to speak openly.

WARNING: UNWANTED TOUCHING

We have received calls from four schools in the last few months asking us to come and talk to them about training their teachers to deal with an increase in unwanted touching. Examples include: boys lifting girls skirts and touching them, boys leaning up against and pressing into girls in the hallway, and verbal harassment.

In our meetings with schools, we let them know that the problem won't go away overnight and they need to discover a way to shift the culture of the school so the students have a new outlook and don't feel the need to bully or harass each other.

The Girls & Boys Projects program aims to help participants understand what is behind harassing behavior, how it makes both the victim and harasser feel, and how to prevent it in the future. We empower students individually so they don't feel the need to belittle someone. One student said "I don't know why the boys won't leave me alone, they're always trying to touch me and it's annoying. I used to think I did something wrong or I was stupid or something. I sometimes played along because I was afraid of what might happen if I resisted. I learned in The Girls Project that I did not do anything wrong, and this made me feel better about myself. All of us girls made a pact to try to stop it. It's hard but we stick together and it usually works."

SHARING TIME FOR GIRLS ONLY

by Jule Jo Ramirez The Girls Project Director



While working with the a group of 5th grade girls last week, I felt a little behind schedule. In my mind there were certain things to accomplish during this session and I was nowhere near complete. After their snack break, I went to gather the girls to continue our session on **building sisterhood and solidarity**. We only finished half of our planned activities and I told them we should focus and continue with the rest of the session, since we had yet to accomplish anything.

The girls interjected: "Yes we have! We checked-in, had snack, wrote in our journals, listened to music and made up a dance." After listening to them I realized I was pushing to check more To Do's off my list. They were happy sharing time for girls only, in a girls only space, just being there together. Looking at their faces, I realized they were right, we had accomplished quite a bit already.

GIRLTALK/BOYTALK: BLOG LAUNCH

by Jule Jo Ramirez & Javaid Khan

We are extremely excited to announce the launch of our blogs!! That's right, we are taking our Girl Talk and Boy Talk online in the form of blogs. Our blogs bring light to a large range of topics - some which are in the news, others which may not have received press but are on our minds. Through the blogs, we hope to create an online learning community to dialog around and share information on a variety of social issues including gender, adolescence, violence, and education.

The following excerpt from "Don't Google Your Name!" was posted after a visit with a group of 5th grade boys and girls having a joint discussion on the recent domestic violence between pop star couple Chris Brown and Rihanna. It was a reminder of the amount of work to be done in this field when almost all of the girls placed the blame solely on Rihanna's shoulders:

“After sitting in on a NYC middle school advisory this week, it is clear that this “siding” [with Chris Brown] is the norm, not the exception. Are we raising a generation of girls that will come to accept violence in relationships as normal? Even worse, are we raising boys who are listening to these girls and thinking, “If they don't have a problem with it...””

Please visit our website and join our online discussions! www.gp-bp.org

In A Word

by Girls from PS 363

The Neighborhood School girls were asked to describe their experience in The Girls Project by using just one word and this is what they came up with:

- ⊕ FUN
- ⊕ PRICELESS
- ⊕ DISCUSSIONS
- ⊕ SECRETS
- ⊕ AWESOMENESS
- ⊕ RADICAL
- ⊕ COOL
- ⊕ NICE
- ⊕ SAFE
- ⊕ FUN
- ⊕ FUN
- ⊕ FUN
- ⊕ SHARING
- ⊕ CONFIDENCE
- ⊕ HAPPY
- ⊕ LEARNING

THE GIRLS PROJECT ON

THE TYRA BANKS SHOW!!!



This past Fall we were invited to be guests on The Tyra Banks show. Girls Project graduate **Ana Lise Feliciano Hansen** led a group of girls through “*Our Bodies - Likes And Dislikes*” - an activity on body image. **It revealed that the girls had no problems pointing out characteristics they disliked about themselves but had a hard time listing their likes.** Tyra encouraged the girls to look at themselves in a different light; to become more accepting and less critical of themselves. She challenged them to flip their lists to have the list of body likes be longer than the list of dislikes. We're all up for the challenge...

The Girls & Boys Projects was also chosen to receive a grant from Tyra Banks through her TZone Foundation, which provides resources to nonprofits that create safe spaces where girls and young women can feel empowered. We are hoping for a long relationship with Tyra and TZone!

THE GIRLS & BOYS PROJECTS* 541 East 12th Street New York, New York 10009 212 505 3184 www.gp-bp.org

*projects of the Institute for Labor & the Community, a 501(c)3 non profit organization