THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUNG WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

OUR STORY WITH GIRL SCOUTS

By Val Swan and Sarah Miller
“IF YOU ARE ALWAYS TRYING TO BE NORMAL, YOU WILL NEVER KNOW HOW AMAZING YOU CAN BE.”

Maya Angelou
Executive Summary

This paper outlines the importance of young women’s leadership in supporting girls and strengthening our communities and world.

- Studies have shown that girls experience a dramatic drop in confidence at the onset of adolescence.
- The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) has demonstrated powerful results with our research-driven early leadership development work for youth.
- In 2014 and 2015, CCL collaborated with local Girl Scouts Carolinas Peaks to Piedmont council to develop customized programming for 100 middle and high school-aged young women called the Young Women’s Leadership Institute (YWLI).
- This paper tells the story of those programs, highlighting each of the four sessions.
- The authors and program staff model the themes of YWLI by sharing our own stories of connection.
- We hear directly from the girls on the impact of this work, and make a strong case for robust growth and support of this initiative and others like it.
Dear Reader:

How did you spend the summer before your senior year of high school at age 17? Catching up on sleep? At the pool? In the summer of 2009 I found myself with nervous excitement at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina for the first Young Women’s Leadership Program (YWLP) held in partnership with Girl Scouts.

The week was full of engaging and interactive sessions that encouraged us to think about the leaders we were as individuals and what that meant when working with others. Assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) enabled me to recognize different preferences people have and gave me the language to articulate my own. This generated many "aha" moments which validated my natural inclinations, and encouraged confidence in myself as a leader.

Towards the end of the program we created our Leadership Journey Map, which was the first time I considered the leader I wanted to be, rather than the leader I was expected to be. With intentional time given to reflect on the learnings of this experience and dreams for the future, I was able to piece together a colorful representation of my leadership journey past, present, and future.

Already 13 years into my Girl Scout career, I was very aware of my interest in philanthropy and personal development as it pertains to youth. I led and participated in community service projects, attended summer camp programs, and made the pilgrimage to visit the home of Juliette Gordon Low, Girl Scouts founder, in Savannah, GA. I earned my Gold Award, making and teaching others to make recycled t-shirt tote bags to replace paper and plastic bags, with over 720,000 views online, and also earned leadership and career awards. These passions, coupled with the chance to attend YWLP, informed my leadership roles held from the completion of the program and beyond.

Margaret’s journey to be continued later on in this paper...
Young women need our support

Studies have shown girls experience a dramatic drop in confidence at the onset of adolescence. The American Association of University Women’s report “Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America” conducted an extensive national survey on gender and self-esteem which found that girls are less confident than boys in every age category. As adolescent girls and boys get older, confidence in their abilities reflects a growing gender gap.


The 10 percentage point difference in confidence between elementary girls and boys becomes a 19-point difference between high school girls and boys.

49 percent of elementary school girls take pride in their school work; this number plummets to only 17 percent in high school.

Almost twice as many boys as girls refer to their talents as what they like most about themselves; girls are nearly twice as likely as boys to mention a physical characteristic as the thing they like most about themselves.

Between elementary school and high school, girls’ self-esteem drops 3.5 times more than boys’.

As Girl Scouts USA current CEO Anna Maria Chávez notes, “Girls opt out of leadership as early as fourth grade, when they have trouble raising their hands in class.” (Porter, 2015). This phenomenon has been referred to as loss of voice or the confidence gap.

Experts agree that there are a number of reasons why girls lose confidence in adolescence, including:

- **Focus on appearance:** During this time of puberty there is a shift of focus and the body becomes a measure of worth in a new way. Andrea Bastiani Archibald, PhD, chief girl expert for Girl Scouts USA, says that during adolescence “girls are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that their appearances are a barometer of their self-worth in our media-intense culture.” (Loupe, 2014).

- **Concern about being cool:** Gifted girls hide their intelligence because it’s no longer “cool” to be smart. As they mature, they give up who they were in the confusion of who they are becoming, or feel pressured to become (Pipher, 1994).

Together, these elements make up a “girl poisoning” culture that despite advances of feminism, lead American adolescent girls to fall prey to depression, eating disorders and suicide attempts at an alarming rate (Loupe, 2014; Pipher, 1994).

These struggles carry over into the professional realm. According to women’s leadership expert Ann Morrison, “Twentieth century struggles for women’s rights have paved the way for today’s young women to have more possibilities than ever in some areas of the world. However there is still a very long way to go, and women still occupy only a small fraction of the top leadership positions in government and the corporate world. We know from the *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* work in the 1980’s that women are not getting to higher positions in the workforce, and this is still deeply true today.” Morrison reiterated the research around the loss of confidence young girls experience and their subsequent smashing of self-image, noting that “we are losing all that talent through our culture.”
Supporting Our Girls:

A collaborative between the Center for Creative Leadership & Girl Scouts

Given this need for cultivating strong young women leaders, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) and the Girl Scouts have come together to create new, dynamic leadership experiences specifically designed to nurture young women. These programs are a culmination of years of research on women’s leadership, leadership development, and youth development.

Why CCL?

At the Center for Creative Leadership, we believe in the importance of early intervention. In a 2012 CCL Leadership Insights survey of hundreds of leaders, 84% believed leadership development opportunities should be offered to all youth (Van Velsor, Wright, 2012). Through our work with the Leadership Beyond Boundaries initiative, we have worked with youth, youth-serving organizations, and educational institutions around the world to make leadership development accessible to a wider audience, and to empower and develop young women leaders.

This work spans high-potential youth as well as disadvantaged young people in the United States and developing countries.

CCL’s history with young women’s leadership began in 2007 with our young women’s leadership program (YWLP), a summer program developed at our San Diego, CA campus. This program brought together small, diverse groups of high school girls from across San Diego County for an intensive experience coupling classroom learning with community projects, which thrived for six years.

Female executives often say how valuable a CCL leadership program would have been to them early in their careers. “The young women’s leadership program is a way of cultivating leadership skills and self-confidence for young women at a crucial time in their lives, while helping them prepare for their future,” says CCL senior faculty member Jennifer Habig.

This exciting program model continued in Greensboro, NC beginning in 2009 with local organizations, including a pilot program similar to YWLP with the local Girl Scout council, the 24,000-member Peaks to Piedmont Council, which covers 40 counties in central and western North Carolina. We invested in this start with Girl Scouts, and rolled out our Young Women’s Leadership Institute (YWLI) in collaboration with Girl Scouts in 2014, born out of these early beginnings. This paper will specifically focus on this outstanding opportunity open to all young women in 6th-12th grade, including non-Girl Scouts, and share some of the program highlights, as well as the powerful impact that is just beginning to emerge.

Return YWLI participant Maggie Stiles creating a leadership vision board
Why Girl Scouts?

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is the largest leadership organization for girls in the world, with approximately 2.8 million girl and adult members worldwide and a mission to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. In other words, to develop leaders. Although most of their members aren’t old enough to vote or even drive, Girl Scouts is determined to provide transformative leadership experiences to the girls in their programs. According to Andrea Archibald, all-girl environments like the Girl Scouts can be helpful for girls’ self-esteem (Loupe, 2014; Ban Bossy, 2015). Research also shows that girls who participate in girl-serving organizations have the highest levels of confidence (Shapiro, 2015).

“We have literally built the leadership pipeline of women in this country. If you look at the current women serving on Capitol Hill, 70% of the women in the United States Senate were Girl Scouts and more than 50% of the women in the US House were Girl Scouts. All the former female secretaries of state—Madeline Albright, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton—were Girl Scouts,” says Anna Maria Chávez (Porter, 2015).

As an organization, “Girl Scouts have such a focus on leadership development,” says Taryn Rimland, Girl Scouts program manager based in North Carolina. “From the very beginning, Girl Scouts starts laying out those principles of leadership and builds the foundation.”
Throughout the rest of this paper, we will zoom in on one initiative in particular that has come out of the collaboration between CCL and Girl Scouts: the Young Women’s Leadership Institute (YWLI).

YWLI is designed to assist young women in better understanding themselves so they can work more effectively with others, and make more informed and focused decisions about their future. It employs experiential learning to help girls explore CCL’s research-based leadership concepts that build their knowledge, awareness, and skills. The institute offers a number of themed retreats and workshops for young women that build on each other, with incentives encouraging girls to return over the years, including engaging and networking with local female role models in the community. This is a scalable and replicable program that can be rolled out over the course of several years, with optional train-the-trainer capacity building components to ramp up Girl Scout team members to assist in program delivery. Already we have adapted this program to meet the needs of a wide age range of girls, and experimented with different program versions to meet school-year and summertime needs. Overall, the goal is to create programs that mix leadership development with specific themed content, such as core values, personality, career exploration, healthy relationships, communication, and community building.

YWLI has four consistent themes: authenticity, self-clarity, connection, and agency. These themes are based on CCL’s research on women’s development and empowerment (Ruderman, Ohlott, 2002). For each theme, we describe the situation, or program components we employed, along with the opportunity—the outcome and results of each session.
Nuts and Bolts:
Program #1

Our program in March of 2014 at Camp Ginger Cascades in Lenoir, NC was a huge success, despite a nasty ice storm that crippled most of the state—we had 21 diehard young women in attendance! Our young participants ranged from 5th-10th grade, and they had an incredible amount of energy. We designed an interactive curriculum which kept them up and moving and allowed time for personal reflection and synthesis of the material. We talked about what leadership means to young women today, and engaged in fun activities to get to know each other and help develop our leadership skills, all geared toward increasing participants’ self-awareness. We talked about leadership 101, social identity, explored skills and interests (sparks), and made leadership vision boards. Girls shared what leadership is to them, who they are, what they are good at, how to not be afraid to be themselves, not to judge, cultivated connections with others, and experienced new things. Bullying and social identity were important areas of interest, as was how to have the courage to really be oneself.

Theme 1: Authenticity

Marian Ruderman, a Senior Fellow at CCL, has spent much of her career researching women and leadership. She writes that, “Women aren’t always true to themselves. In a vain attempt to live up to organizational norms and expectations, their behaviors sometimes go against their own values. But it’s not easy being a phony. It takes a lot of energy to behave in ways that are out of sync with our true values, priorities, hopes, characteristics, and style. The energy expended trying to come across as something you are not is energy unavailable for work and other activities. The alternative to this predicament is authenticity—a healthy alignment between your values and behaviors that can reenergize life at work and at home. Women who are authentic have a good understanding of themselves and their priorities. They attend first to what is important to them rather than what might be important to other people. They are clear about how they feel and what they need and prefer.” (Ruderman, 2014).

The situation: Time of discovery—Values Explorer and Personality

The opportunity:
Throughout our YWLI programs, we provided ample time for girls to get to know themselves better and explore what is most important to them. One of CCL’s long-held tenets of leadership development is that it is an inside-out process. Only when an individual has a strong understanding of herself, what her strengths are, and what is most important to her can she begin to successfully step into leading groups and teams. In Leadership Beyond Boundaries we like to call this process leading self, which progresses to leading with others. “A key component of acting authentically is understanding what you care about most.” (Ruderman, Ohlott, 2002).

During YWLI girls worked with CCL’s self-assessment tool, Values Explorer, to identify and reflect on their core values and see how they help shape who they are, the decisions they make, and influence effective leadership. One participant said, “I learned that to be a leader, you need to know yourself and your values.” For young women, finding the courage to speak up for what they believe in becomes an easier decision when they have spent time exploring and explaining the values they hold. We also investigated challenges to living our values. We took a look at how we spend our time every week and examined where we have misalignment with our values.
In addition, we spent time looking at personality—in several sessions of YWLI, girls did a self-assessment called the Murphy-Meisgeier Type Indicator for Children® (MMTIC®). Like the well-known Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) instrument, MMTIC® is a self-report assessment developed to measure children's psychological type preferences. One girl shared that “Personality... made me know more about myself and think about more things I can do.” Girls used this information to understand themselves and learn about each other. This type of information was woven throughout the program, as girls did other projects and talked about topics like conflict. Understanding and appreciating the value that different personality preferences can bring—like extroversion and introversion—helped the girls to understand that they could each be a leader and contribute to groups in their own way. It also helped them understand others better; one young woman had a moment of clarity while we were discussing preferences around planning, realizing that she and her mother were total opposites which contributed to some of the tension they had recently experienced. Armed with this new information on personality preferences and conversations with peers who were similar to her mother, she was able to look at this conflict in a completely new light.

These quotes from our participants highlight some of the ways we develop self-awareness at YWLI:

“I think from now on I will look at everything differently than how I did before.”

“I learned that leaders come in any shape or form. I felt that I could be a leader even though I am shy.”

“I will use these skills in school when working with people and in groups.”

“I learned more about my personality and the type of person I am and how to apply it to a leadership setting.”
Nuts and Bolts: Program #2

We spent a week in July 2014 at Keyauwee Program Center in Sophia, NC for our summer program and came away with some memorable experiences. We had nine girls at this session, ranging in age from 6th through 12th grades, so we adapted the content accordingly and the girls and program staff bonded tremendously by week’s end. One 20-year-old high school participant even stayed engaged despite fasting during Ramadan that week. Leadership 101, values and actions, social identity, personality, and communication were among the modules we explored. We spent a good amount of time outdoors doing team-building activities around our themes, including the ropes and challenge course, climbing wall, and improv. Research tells us that girls of color and girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds report even stronger benefits from outdoor experiences (Girl Scouts, 2014). We enjoyed group time by the campfire sharing our leadership mementos with each other, which were items we brought with us that represented an accomplishment we were proud of, or a leadership characteristic we possessed.

Theme 2: Planning for the Future (Self-Clarity)

“Self-clarity is knowing who you are and how you fit into the world. It means developing a view of yourself that reflects your preferences, priorities, strengths, and weaknesses. It allows you to address problems and reframe courses of action.” (Ruderman, 2007). Self-clarity is essential to counter the loss of self that young women often experience in the face of friendship, school, work, or family pressures. Self-clarity helps identify our gifts and talents, and leads to achieving greater happiness and fulfillment in daily living (Ruderman, Ohlott, 2002).

The situation: Exploring in a non-judgmental setting, Social Identity, Skills and Interests (Sparks), Career Women’s Lunch

The opportunity:

Girls need safe spaces to be themselves. We are very intentional about creating a safe space from the beginning of each program, establishing norms as a group of how we will be together for the duration of our time. We started our programs with icebreaker activities such as take a stand, an activity where we took turns sharing interesting facts about ourselves in small groups and what we stood for, disclosing up to each person’s individual level of comfort. Drawing on work by former CCL researcher Kelly Hannum, we explored social identity in relation to groups, and had some deep discussions around issues young women face with identifying as belonging to particular groups, juxtaposed with their fluid self-concept.

Our sessions on skills and interests, called sparks, examined what participants might want to do with their lives and how to get there. We did a fun exercise based on the Campbell™ Interest and Skill Survey (CISS®) by David Campbell, former senior fellow at CCL, to help the girls start thinking about what they were interested in, built around categories. They played a game and made colored piles of shapes based on how they answered the questions and later assessed what colors they had the most of. If they had a lot of blue (helping), and green (influencing), for example, we talked about what kinds of things they could do to utilize those skills, such as community involvement, school leadership activities, etc. and how to build on those for future areas of study and career paths.
We focused on things they were both good at and enjoyed, and emphasized those as considerations when the girls transitioned back home.

This work led us into a serious conversation about the pressures young women face when it comes to school, college prep, and the like, from their teachers, parents, and peers. We talked with them about being who they want to be despite these outside influencers sometimes drowning out their inner voices. They began to see that they could harness the courage and support to be their true selves.

We hosted several successful career women’s lunches. Christine, an 8th grader, said this was the best day of her life! Area community career women from a variety of fields (and some former Girl Scouts) were in attendance, including former area Girl Scouts Carolinas Peaks to Piedmont CEO Marcia Cole, who gave an inspiring talk. These were incredibly rich opportunities for the girls to talk freely with the career women, ask questions, and hear what their lives and careers were like, in a relaxed setting over lunch.

“I’m taking away a new ability to want to help others. This camp has showed me new skills I was good at and didn’t even know it.”

“I learned more about myself and what I might like to do for a living.”

“Don’t be scared to be yourself.”

“I will use this as I run for vice president of student council at my school!”

“I felt safe because I thought no one would judge me.”

Girls enjoy time with community women learning about different career paths
Theme 3: Connection

Connection involves creating intentional networks and seeking out support systems and community. Strong relationships are important sources of meaning in our lives and foster our effectiveness, and role models and mentors can be a source of encouragement and inspiration. “Through exchanging stories, women learn that they are not alone. It is empowering to know that what you feel and experience is real and widely shared.” (Ruderman, 2007). In working with people we grow our empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, a core component to building successful relationships and partnerships of all kinds.

The situation: Team Building, Equine-facilitated learning, Conflict, Skits, Healthy Relationships, Mental Models, Service

The opportunity:
We designed a group activity at camp where the girls had to move a group of horses around a ring. Horses have a great deal to teach us about leadership, and people are often moved by the power of simple exercises working with horses in groups, at any age. We tied in values with our work with the horses, as well as teamwork, trust, leading from behind, and the power of the energy that we show up with. In a herd of horses, leadership is shared. Horses demand authenticity and balance, and are quick to notice if someone is being inauthentic, by giving a nudge, refusing to move, or even running off! Ultimately, the herd members must know that the leaders have their best interest as their source of motivation at all times (Gunter, 2007). These sessions were a highlight for many girls. One quiet 7th grader from Hickory, NC, who loves animals, opened up during the activity. She was talking a mile a minute, and felt comfortable being herself—the exercise was very affirming for her.

With a group exercise around another element of CCL’s core content, mental models, we worked on challenging ourselves to think differently about things as a team. One girl said it was her favorite activity, and that she learned that “together you can make a bigger picture than just alone”.

The girls engaged in skits, another program favorite, particularly on bullying, where they acted out a conflict as it would play out in real life “as-is”, and then did an “instant replay”, this time employing a strategy for handling conflict. They gained empathy surprisingly quickly for the bully as well as for other roles in these scenarios, and practiced putting
themselves in other people’s shoes. They walked away with solid tools for handling difficult situations, and how to empower themselves and others regardless of what role they played.

Amy McCall Stiles says the program gave her daughter, Maggie, a chance not just to learn leadership, but to do leadership. “It’s not just saying, ‘Be a leader,’ it’s how to be a leader,” says Stiles. “They did a lot of cooperative work activities where they were given opportunities to step up.”

“Girls greet a horse and engage with their full attention

“It’s a really good opportunity because you get to learn a lot that you didn’t already know—it’s actually really hard to lead because there are so many different people, and it’s good to learn about why people might behave a certain way.”

“I learned how to solve conflicts, and that girls can do any job and be great leaders if they stop and think.”

Mental models team activity
Nuts and Bolts: Program #4

July 2015 brought another highly successful week at camp and two half-day programs at CCL's Greensboro campus for 16 young women this summer from across North Carolina. With an experiential learning frame, we examined our values and actions, social identity, performed spirited skits around conflict and bullying, and how to stand up for ourselves and others. We worked with an activity on mental models and assumptions, discussed the messages society tells us about being a girl, and determined what messages we needed to show up in the world as a person we are proud of. The girls created individual posters to take home containing the messages most important to them. The program culminated in creating a group empowerment tapestry project. When asked what their favorite part of the program was, we heard “laughing,” “I liked meeting new friends and doing the skits,” “a sense of empowerment,” and “that girls can do anything.”

Theme 4: Empowerment (Agency)

Building confidence is one of the keys to helping young women navigate these challenging teenage waters. Ninety percent of parents say that because of Girl Scouts, their daughter is more confident (Girl Scouts). Given the extensive research surrounding the distinct drop in self-esteem that many young women experience as they enter adolescence, part of the challenge adolescent girls often face is finding the courage to advocate for and be oneself.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling’s co-author Ann Morrison says doing something innovative and unique at this critical age contributes to making girls stronger and helps create a stable sense of self: “This is where your work with young women can really make a difference! Letting girls know that being different is OK, and that it’s better not to fit in, because that is going to make them stronger and continue their identities when they are older. It is so important to provide support for them to continue doing these things.” Agency empowers young women to develop a positive vision for the future and the strength to take action toward their aspirations.

The situation: Empowerment Messages, Resilience, Risk-taking, Vision Boards, Improv, How to be Ordinary Leaders, Putting it all Together

The opportunity:
To help the girls build a “reservoir of courage”, we designed experiences to get them outside of their comfort zone, such as rock-climbing, working with horses, and improvisational acting exercises. The goal was to push girls’ boundaries and challenge their assumptions about what they were capable of to create positive memories and boost self-esteem.

We incorporated flexible time and space for girls to express themselves creatively—a way for them to synthesize all that they were learning about and envisioning for themselves. One such activity was creating vision boards. Sifting through leadership quotes, values, images, and other art supplies, the girls created collages that represented themselves as leaders and their hopes for the future. Maggie Stiles liked the opportunity to share with other girls in an open, accepting environment. “Girls got to express themselves and be themselves,” says Maggie, who participated in two YWLI programs. “There were people that were like me, that were my age. And they were going through some of the same stuff I was going through.”
One participant reflected: “I learned that everyone is a little bit different but you can still manage to get along. I also learned that it’s okay for your voice to be heard.” Another young woman expressed that she will take home what she gained in YWLI: “I will share it with my peers and use it when I am questioning myself.”

The girls created ideal girl leaders in teams, archetypes with characteristics of the best girl leaders they could think of, and proudly displayed them during their lunch with community career women.

We ended this session with the entire group creating a wall to wall-sized empowerment tapestry of the messages they need to show up in the world as a person they are proud of, including the messages they will give to other young women. The girls found this session very powerful and finished the day feeling strong, beaming with their newfound confidence.

YWLI participants left the program clearer on their values, priorities, and their own preferences and needs around group interactions and relationships. These steps helped equip them with the confidence and sense of self necessary to lead more authentically.

“My favorite part is just getting to know all the girls and learning about myself, and seeing me unfold into the leader that I am going to be.”

“I will use this information to help my middle school and make a difference in the world.”

“Being a girl is one of the best things ever, and this program will help you learn that. It will help inspire you and encourage you to be the best that you can be!”

“I felt nervous at first but now joyful to have so many girls who want to be leaders like myself.”

“I will take the confidence I have here with me!”

“You are stronger than you think.”

“I feel happiness, the flow of knowledge, joy, laughter, and the feeling of having new friends and new people that support you.”
Conclusion

Locally, young women’s leadership programming creates positive ripples of change in our communities. Globally, the urgency of this work is undeniable, and the future is ripe with possibilities. In their book *Half the Sky*, Kristof and WuDunn note the recent recognition of women and girls as a resource, quoting Lawrence Summers when he was chief economist with the World Bank: “The question is not whether countries can afford this investment, but whether countries can afford not to educate more girls.” They mention the 2001 World Bank study, Engendering Development Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice, which argues that promoting gender equality is crucial to combating global poverty. “Women’s empowerment helps raise economic productivity and reduce infant mortality. It contributes to improved health and nutrition. It increases the chances of education for the next generation.” (United Nations Development Programme, Kristof, WuDunn, 2009).

Proven and cutting-edge is how clients refer to CCL’s work. Our young women’s leadership institute is continuing this tradition by serving an important audience, girls, and extending our research and evaluation efforts in exciting new directions. This is just the beginning, and we look forward to capturing more data to quantify its impact in the years to come, including more formal evaluation of the growth girls experienced. We are currently growing this initiative, building on this strong foundation, and seeking the right partners to help expand our reach and further our mission of improving the lives of as many young women as possible.

“You don’t have to wait 20 years to be a leader. You can be a leader now. If you’re passionate about what you’re working on, people will follow.”

—Anna Maria Chávez, CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA
Accolades for YWLI

“I can’t come close to touching the level of knowledge, experience, and background that the staff at CCL have. One big focus for me as we develop this institute is making sure that we are really able to serve any girl that wants to participate. We’re working really hard to make sure this is available to every girl, everywhere.” –Taryn Rimland, Girl Scouts program manager

“How wonderful this experience was for my daughter, at her tender age of almost 12, to have a greater understanding of herself and others, as well as the other programming around bullying, acceptance, and leadership that you provided—thank you, thank you, thank you!” –Sara Thomas, parent of a YWLI participant and CCL program alumnus

To girls thinking about attending future YWLI programs, here is advice from a few of this year’s participants:

“You should attend these programs because they’re really good, and they can pretty much help you learn about leadership and can get you through a lot of your problems.”

“Definitely do it, it’s one of the most fun things you’re going to be able to do during the summer.”

“I had a great time and definitely feel like I will do this again and convince the rest of my troop to join me!”

Program closing circle and graduation
Margaret’s Journey Continued, all grown up

In addition to affirming my love for developing others, the young women’s leadership program sparked a flame in me for early leadership development which still burns to this day. Three years after my program experience, I found myself back at the Center for Creative Leadership working with the Leadership Beyond Boundaries team full time, the same group that facilitated the Girl Scouts program I attended. With a mission to democratize leadership development and make it accessible to all, I knew this was a movement I wanted to be a part of.

I now have the chance to create space for other young women and young leaders to forge their own leadership journeys, and support them as they explore their passions and understandings of who they are as leaders every day. I do this primarily through my work with the Golden Leaf Scholars Leadership Program and the Girl Scouts Young Women’s Leadership Institute. In thinking about the work that CCL is doing today with Girl Scouts and the lives we are touching, I’m most excited that these young women have the chance to have that transformative experience that meant so much to me when I first came to CCL as a Girl Scout.

Margaret today, bottom left, co-facilitating a YWLI program in July 2015 at CCL’s Greensboro, NC campus
“I had the best time, my life is amazing.”

“Hi, at camp we learned about leadership and how knowing ourselves helps you be a better leader. You should come next time!”

“Hey Mom- I’ve had fun at camp this week... I’ve learned to be a stronger leader and to seek help.”

“To my sisters: I miss you a lot and I can’t wait to see you. But this week I learned more about myself a lot. I know new things about myself that I never think about. Thank you for everyone helping me!”
References


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Additional Readings

Those of us connected to this program know the importance of sharing our stories growing up as young women.

Meet Val

Val Swan was a proud Girl Scout from an early age growing up in Upstate New York. She loved earning and collecting colorful badges, and going on exploratory trips with her troop (her favorite was a sleepover at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, PA). She has wonderful memories of weeks at Girl Scouts summer camps on the Finger Lakes, doing Polar Bear swims, tipping canoes, sailing Sunfish, songs around the campfire, plotting secret nighttime pranks, and the homesickness and joy the daily mail delivery brought. More importantly, the girlfriends she made from this period were for a lifetime. “Make new friends, but keep the old, one is silver and the other gold…” There were many leadership gifts that Girl Scouts brought to her life as a young leader. Somewhere between 5th and 6th grade, Val experienced that research-supported loss in confidence so common to young women. She went from a nerdy, curious, and gutsy girl who always raised her hand and celebrated extra credit assignments over ice cream with her teachers to worrying about what others thought of her, tamping down her gifts and talents with self-deprecating humor.

She left high school after her junior year and went to college, hoping for an open environment that would more fully allow her to be her authentic self, and fell in love with sociology, making a difference in the community, and youth leadership. She read *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* in her intro to sociology class, and came to work at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) in Greensboro, NC many years later. She didn’t make the connection until a conversation over lunch one day three years ago with Ellen Van Velsor, co-author of the book, about a shared love of camp, Girl Scouts, and empowering young people. She has been involved with the partnership between Girl Scouts and CCL ever since, and has directed the work since the fall of 2014. It has been a real thrill for Val to witness the growth and momentum of this initiative, to develop special connections with other strong women, and expand her passion for creating cultures of peer support. It took her a long time to get back to that confident girl she once was, and she wants to help circumvent that process for others through this work.

Val’s experience spans over two decades of diverse roles in not-for-profit, academic, healthcare, legal, and corporate spheres. She earned a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from the University of Arizona, and has worked with a wide variety of youth populations. Since 2008 at CCL, Val has served as a dedicated program designer and facilitator of leadership development programs for 6th-12th graders, primarily with the Girl Scouts Young Women’s Leadership Program and the YMCA Black & Latino Achievers Leadership and Mentoring Program. Val is also Senior Program Manager for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Executive Nurse Fellows. The RWJF *Executive Nurse Fellows* program is a three-year, world-class leadership development experience to enhance the effectiveness of nurse leaders to impact the US healthcare system. You can reach Val at swanv@ccl.org.
Meet Sarah

Sarah Miller was a Daisy, Brownie, and Junior Girl Scout, and spent several fun summers at Keyauwee and Douglass Long camps growing up in North Carolina. After selling cookies out of a Biscuitville drive-through window, her favorite Girl Scout experience was the Around-the-World Showcase. That love of travel and exploration has guided her career path. Sarah has worked with CCL’s Young Women’s Leadership Program since 2009 and is excited to see this partnership grow with the Girl Scouts because young women have the power to change the world! Sarah has a depth of design and facilitation experience, and she is seasoned and knowledgeable about customizing work to fit organizations’ needs. She has traveled extensively with CCL, designing and facilitating programs like this one. She excels at exploring possibilities and brings energy and creativity to her work, inspiring others to think in different ways. Sarah received her MA in History from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and her BA in Psychology and History from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Sarah currently works in organizational development at Red Hat in Raleigh, NC.  

Sarah rocking her Girl Scout Uniform!
Contributions & Acknowledgments

The authors would like to extend a special thank you to Ellen Van Velsor, PhD, and Margaret Patterson Whitt, both powerful women who helped launch this initiative with their contributions and commitment, and to Ann Morrison, MBA, MA, for her valuable insights and perspectives. We salute our CCL San Diego colleagues for their tremendous work and energy championing young women's leadership programming.

We wish to thank Lyndon Rego, Joel Wright, Marian Ruderman, and Cathleen Clerkin for their thoughtful review and feedback of earlier versions of this paper.

We dedicate this paper to all those lifting up and supporting the next generation of young women leaders. To the young women we’ve worked with, and those whose lives we have yet to touch—you are our inspiration!
...and then the day came when the risk to remain tight, in a bud, became more painful than the risk it took to blossom...

*Elizabeth Appell*
Collaborate with Us

CCL’s Leadership Beyond Boundaries team is always seeking partners for our work and we welcome collaborators from around the world who are working towards a wide range of solutions. To learn more about any of our current projects or programs, please go to www.leadbeyond.org. To talk with us further about how we might work with your organization or group, please contact LBB staff at LBBinfo@ccl.org. LBB teams are located in Greensboro, NC, Brussels, Belgium, and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

About CCL

Founded in 1970, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) has a long history in leadership research, training and development. Consistently ranked as one of the world’s top leadership training institutions, each year, CCL provides leadership training to more than 20,000 individuals and 2,000 organizations across the public, private, nonprofit and education sectors worldwide. Launched in 2006, CCL’s Leadership Beyond Boundaries initiative seeks to make leadership development affordable and accessible to all.