

## **An Open Letter to the Members of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio: 2014 Year in Review**

Dear Members of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio:

The purpose of this communication is to present the 2014 Year in Review for you. Since our inception more than a century ago, we have celebrated our founder, Juliette Gordon Low's vision for girls. She believed that girls should receive the same opportunities as boys to develop physically, mentally, and spiritually. As a nonformal educational organization, she ensured that girls were exposed to activities like basketball, camping, and community service, resulting in life skills of that time, and preparing girls to take their place in the world.

This 2014 Year in Review will report on specific areas of work that you have told us matter to you – outcomes progress, volunteer engagement, membership outreach, and financial well-being. We know that, in Girl Scouting, it's not just what girls do, but how they do it. Did you know that experiential learning increases girls' problem-solving skills? In a recent study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute, girls who experienced the three Girl Scout processes – Girl Led, Cooperative Learning, and Learning by Doing – outperformed their peers on all outcomes measured. We also are confident that Girl Scout Journey experiences help to ensure success by combining the three Girl Scout processes. In a national study, 74% of Journey users say that, because of Girl Scouts, they have become a leader in more activities, compared to 61% of non-users.

Today the activities that girls are involved in through Girl Scouts have changed. Our mission: to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place, is more important today than it ever has been. Girls have to navigate a more complex world than ever before – but the benefits remain the same. Juliette Low prepared girls for life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Girl Scouting now prepares girls for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, regardless of their life choices. We know that Girl Scouts makes a positive impact in the lives of girls. In 2014, we carried the messages that came from a Girl Scouts of the USA report called, *The State of Girls: Unfinished Business*. This report summarizes key issues and major trends affecting girls' leadership and healthy development in the U.S. today. As the voice for and of girls, Girl Scouts believes it is critical for those who support girls to have up-to-date, accurate information about the status of girls' physical, social, and psychological well-being.

*The State of Girls* report finds that while there is promising news for girls in areas such as their educational attainment, many girls are being left behind, and not all girls are faring the same. However, we know that “data is not destiny” and Girl Scouting is committed to ensuring that all girls have the opportunity to reach their full potential. If you would like to read the full report, you will find it on our website.

We also know that girls benefit immensely from their time outdoors in Girl Scouts. A national study called, *More than S'mores: Success & Surprises in Girl Scout Outdoor Experiences*, reported that girls with more frequent and lengthy outdoor experiences are more likely to see challenges and are better at solving problems. Monthly outdoor experiences are especially important for girls of a comparatively low socioeconomic status. These girls, who had a monthly outdoor experience, say that they are much more likely to become leaders because of Girl Scouts.

Outcomes Progress: Nationally, nearly eight in ten teachers believe a larger focus on Social Emotional Learning will have a major benefit on students' ability to stay on track to graduate (80%), prepare for college (78%), and become good citizens as adults (87%).<sup>1</sup>

Girl Scouts show real results! Discovering ways to physical health and wellness is critical to girls' development, academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment, happiness, and overall well-being. *The State of Girls* found that 26% of Ohio girls and 30% of Indiana girls, ages 10-17, are overweight or obese. Our Girl Scout research shows that:

- 68% of members surveyed have developed a strong sense of self
- 72% of members reflect positive values
- 51% of members gain practical life skills
- 60% of members seek positive challenges
- 50% of members develop critical thinking skills

Roughly 14% of Indiana girls and 15% of Ohio girls, ages 6-17, have experienced neighborhood violence. Our research shows that:

- 59% of members develop healthy relationships
- 63% of members promote cooperation and team building
- 70% of members resolve conflicts positively
- 69% of members advance diversity
- 65% of members feel connected to their communities

80% of adults surveyed say that men and women make equally good business leaders, but 55% of women who were surveyed say men continue to hold top positions of power in business in the future:

- 47% of members can identify community needs
- 56% of members are resourceful problem solvers
- 58% of members advocate for themselves and others
- 55% of members educate and inspire others
- 68% of members feel empowered to act

Volunteer Support: The strength of our Movement rests in over 12,000 volunteers – troop leaders, service unit managers, recruiters, data coordinators, and all the other volunteers who give tirelessly of their time to support girls' development. Girl Scouts of the USA recently reported that adolescent Girl Scouts who agree that “In Girl Scouts there is at least one adult who makes me feel like I’m valuable” are more likely than their peers to report that Girl Scouts has prepared them to be a leader. A recent national study of the volunteer experience found that 85% of Girl Scout volunteers surveyed say that “In Girl Scouts I feel like I can make a difference.” In addition, 84% say “Volunteering with Girl Scouts is a valuable use of my time.”

Based upon feedback from volunteers, we have strengthened a number of our processes and supports in 2014:

- We continue to test ways to improve our processes for volunteer recruitment, application, background checks, and placement, and you will continue to see improvements in the coming year as we automate and streamline this work through our new volunteer system and toolkit.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey* (a report for CASEL), 2013.

- We launched our new website, which is far more robust, user-friendly, and able to support volunteer needs in the coming years.
- We have redesigned and restructured the staff and volunteer support that is provided to Girl Scout leaders. This past year saw implementation of our new structure chart for paid staff and volunteers, as well as new ways of work for service teams.
- We have continued to provide a system of regular volunteer communication through service unit meetings, our website, and online materials.

Membership: Since 1912, Girl Scouting has been at the forefront of providing girls with leadership opportunities. Girl Scouts of Western Ohio, one of the largest councils in the United States, provides the Girl Scout Leadership Experience to approximately 43,000 girls in western Ohio and southeastern Indiana, with the support of about 12,000 adult volunteers. We serve one out of every seven girls in 32 counties, well above the national average of one out of eleven girls. Reaching out to girls in a variety of ways that meet their needs is a challenge in today's fast-paced society. Pathways to support flexible delivery of our program are being implemented in new and exciting ways. We recognize that today's girls are looking for a different ways to stay active in Girl Scouts and we are working to meet that need. We have seen an increase in girl membership in late 2014 and are hopeful that 2015 will continue to see strong gains in the number of girls able to participate in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Finances: The board and staff are committed to maintaining a balanced budget – one that balances our expenses against our revenues. We are committed to that principle for the long-term health of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio.

- The largest percentage of our revenue comes from our product sales, with the remainder coming from United Ways, annual contributions from donors, foundation grants, program fees, and retail sales.
- 85% of income was spent to provide direct services and support to girls, volunteers who work with girls, and volunteers who support troop leaders.
- Management and general expenses, such as business services, insurance coverage, legal and financial audit services, personnel and risk management, accounting and financial resources, as well as fund raising costs were funded by fifteen cents of every dollar of income.
- Standards of accounting indicate that well managed nonprofit organizations keep fundraising and management and general expenses under 30% and Girl Scouts of Western Ohio easily meets that standard.
- A conservative estimate of the dollars held in troop accounts is \$1.65 million.
- Like many Girl Scout councils across the country, we have a significant portion of our resources invested in program properties. The cost of providing and maintaining our council properties is over \$1.6 million, but we use less than 25% of camp capacity, based on expected camper day usage.
- The council owns a total of 7 camp properties. A 2011 volunteer property task group recommended that the council investigate options for ownership, management, or use of our least used camps and that work is ongoing. Work was completed in 2014 to permanently conserve Camp Myeerah as a City of Bellefontaine park and Camp Greene was conserved by The Glen Helen Association. Some of the proceeds from Camp Myeerah are going into a renovation of Camp Woodhaven and we will celebrate these exciting improvements in 2015.
- United Ways have continued to struggle to meet campaign goals, causing some allocations to come in below previous years. Since 2008, our United Way funding has decreased 38%, from \$1,368,000 to \$848,000.
- Our investments have rebounded since 2008 and are being closely monitored by the investment task group.

Your board and staff continue to focus on careful stewardship of our fiscal resources, and we will do our best to ensure sound management of the council in the coming year. The board is committed to increasing communication with our membership and we will be looking for ways to strengthen our ability to gather and share information with you.

Throughout our 102-year history, the most vital elements of our Movement have remained unchanged. The Girl Scout Promise and Law, and our mission will continue to guide our work and our organizational goals will focus on developing girls of courage, confidence, and character. We ask that you continue to support Girl Scouting and give us input as we move into our second century. Thank you for your dedication to Girl Scouting.

Sincerely,



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Board Chair



Roni J. Luckenbill  
CEO



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