

An Open Letter to the Members of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio: 2016 Year in Review

Dear Members of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio:

The purpose of this communication is to present the 2016 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 2016 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 20th century. Girl Scouting now prepares girls for life in the 21st century, regardless of their life choices. We know that Girl Scouts makes a positive impact in the lives of girls. In 2016, 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: Successes & Surprises in Girl Scouts' 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%).¹

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

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:

- 79% of members surveyed have developed a strong sense of self
- 81% of members reflect positive values
- 58% of members seek positive challenges

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

- 76% of members resolve conflicts positively
- 80% of members advance diversity
- 70% 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:

- 67% of members are resourceful problem solvers
- 57% of members advocate for themselves and others
- 76% of members feel empowered to act

Volunteer Support: The strength of our Movement rests in over 11,000 volunteers – troop leaders, service unit chairs, 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 2016:

- We supported engagement with the volunteer toolkit and the new online registration and onboarding system, providing new and returning volunteers with a streamlined process for joining, background checks, placement, and training.
- We continue to redesign and restructure the staff and volunteer support that is provided to Girl Scout leaders and Girl Scout families. Girl Scouts of Western Ohio is a leader among councils in customer service processes.
- An enhanced volunteer appreciation system, implemented in 2015, was strengthened and resulted in increased participation and recognition of our volunteers.
- 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 42,000 girls in western Ohio and southeastern Indiana, with the support of about 11,000 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

different ways to stay active in Girl Scouts and we are working to meet that need. We experienced a small increase in girl membership in 2015, while membership across the country is struggling.

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.
- 88% 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, legal and financial audit services, personnel and risk management, accounting and financial resources, as well as fund raising costs were funded by twelve 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 \$1.5 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 \$1.5 million, but we use less than 25% of camp capacity, based on expected camper day usage.
- The council owns a total of 6 camp properties. The board has continued to look at ways to strengthen our program facilities on these properties to make them more attractive to our members.
- 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 40%, from \$1,368,000 to \$819,300.
- 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 104-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,



Ellen Iobst
Board Chair



Roni J. Luckenbill
Chief Executive Officer

