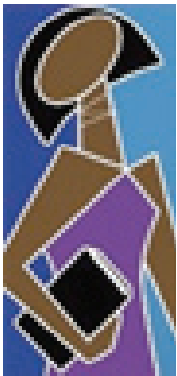


Girls Group: *A heartfelt commitment to transforming lives*

By Scott Talley
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A homeless girl with a crack-addicted mom who still finds a way to attend high school, get decent grades and hold down a part-time job at Kroger. These stories are commonplace in communities across our country, but what is less common are people who care enough to actually step forward and make a difference in a young person's life.

Fortunately for the young lady described and many others in the Ann Arbor area, Sue Schooner does care and through her nonprofit organization, Girls Group, she helps young women overcome obstacles and places them on a path to success.

"We provide love and support and encouragement," says Schooner, a former automotive executive who retired from her job to devote more time to Girls Group. "We are a family, and we have a very intimate type of environment."

Girls Group carries out Schooner's vision of "building a better future one girl at a time" by empowering middle and high school girls to achieve emotional and economic security by graduating from high school and becoming first-generation college graduates.

To support its mission, Girls Group provides year round programming and mentoring to develop character, leadership, self-confidence, and social consciousness, including the desire and ability to mentor others.

In supporting 30 high school girls and 25 first-generation college students, Schooner and her volunteer staff do not attempt to take the place of the girls' mothers. Instead, Girls Group supports and encourages ac-

tive program involvement from the mothers of Girls Group participants.

"All moms want their kids to be successful and do well," says Schooner, whose organization has coordinated cooking demonstrations for girls and moms, and yoga classes for moms.

"The more we support the moms and make them feel empowered, the more they can make a difference."

Girls Group participants are committed to graduating from high school, not fighting in school, delaying pregnancy, and abstaining from drugs and alcohol. To plan for college, participants attend college tours, work on applications and essays with Girls Group mentors, and make a serious commitment to improving their academic performance.

Other areas of emphasis for Girls Group programs include anger management, self-defense, health and community service. As the girls advance in school they take on greater responsibility within the program as mentors, for example, college students mentor high school students and new high school students become mentors to middle school girls in the program. While other organizations may offer similar programs it is Schooner's energy, which makes Girls Group unique.

"I personally like working with girls and moms. They are a big part of my heart and a big part of my life," says Schooner, who constantly seeks feedback from the girls and mothers in the program to ensure all participants have full ownership in Girls Group.

Schooner's passion for the girls and mothers in her program is a reminder of the precious nature of human life. It is this passion that has led to heartfelt thank-you messages from her girls, and has prompted other concerned community members to support Girls Group, including Juliette Okotie-Eboh and Dee Dee McKinney Odom of MGM Grand Detroit.

"Juliette and Dee Dee have been to our graduation parties, fundraisers, friends-raisers, and they have hosted our girls for lunch and presented them with beautiful gift bags," says Schooner, who keeps supporters abreast of her girls' accomplishments through monthly e-mail updates that are loaded with success stories.

"One of the first things Juliette said to me when we first met is that there is nothing wrong with these girls, they just need opportunities, and she and MGM Grand Detroit have been with us since."

"They believe in us; they can see what we're doing; and they have been there for us for so many different things. They have been a huge part of what we do and have helped to make Girls Group more special."

To learn more about Girls Group, including how to make a donation, please visit www.girlsgroup.org.



Girls Group
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one girl at a time