

By Lisa Barry, WEMU

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There are people and there are businesses as well as bits of history and other local activities that have been featured as part of WEMU's "Hidden In Plain Sight." But for this edition, 89.1 WEMU's Lisa Barry reports on a local segment of society supported by the Ann Arbor "Girls Group" organization, believed to be hidden in plain sight.

There are many issues in the Ann Arbor area that people don't often talk about very much. One of them is the income disparity of residents and the impact of that on young girls.

Ann Arbor's Girls Group was founded 15 years ago by retired automotive executive Sue Schooner, who now serves as the group's executive director.

Ann Arbor's Girls Group helps young women learn to manage their academic, emotional, spiritual, sexual, and social health. When Schooner first started the program to connect and offer support to young women, there were between 10 to 15 girls involved, and that has now grown to serving over 500 Washtenaw County girls a year.

They lead 15 programs every week in local middle and high schools with what Schooner calls "holistic programming."

On a recent Tuesday, about a dozen 7<sup>th</sup> graders gathered for various activities and lessons at Ann Arbor's Forsythe Middle School. They were making bracelets for Ozone House as part of a community service project focusing on homelessness and how it affects their community.

One 13 year-old Girls Group 7<sup>th</sup> grader says the organization has helped her find ways to deal with some anger issues.



Kia Sweeney (far right) oversees a group of 7<sup>th</sup> graders at Ann Arbor's Forsythe Middle School making bracelets as part of a community project.

Another 7<sup>th</sup> grade Girls Group participant from Ann Arbor says she enjoys what she gets from the group as far as life skills and friendships.

Program director Kia Sweeney says it's their goal to teach girls how to tap into the amazing resources in the community.

Shalonda Williams is a senior at Eastern Michigan University majoring in social work and is doing an internship with the Girls Group and says she feels like she is making a difference and learning a lot at the same time.

Teaching social, emotional skills are a big part of the program emphasizing healthy relationships, time management, and organizational and study skills.

Helping adolescents deal with their rapidly evolving bodies and brains and the effects of social media are also emphasized as well, in addition to exploring new things and not letting your failures define you.

All important skills for young women to learn, according to Kia Sweeney, especially in a community with the perception that everyone is "wealthy or privileged"—something she says may be hidden in plain sight but is not true.



Listen to the full story at [www.wemu.org/post/hidden-plain-sight-girls-group-empowers-young-women-washtenaw-county](http://www.wemu.org/post/hidden-plain-sight-girls-group-empowers-young-women-washtenaw-county)



7<sup>th</sup> graders at Ann Arbor's Forsythe Middle School participating in Girls Group activity.