

# Helping Girls Build a Better Future

Last November, members of the Ann Arbor Social Capital Fund giving circle at AAACF shared their insights on college and careers at a Girls Group workshop hosted at Peace Neighborhood Center.

More than 30 high school girls listened intently as the group of young professionals offered their perspective and advice on careers and college. Nothing was off limits as they answered questions that ranged from “Is it hard to run your own business?” to “Were you a nerd in high school?”

**The Friday afternoon session was part of the year-round programming Girls Group provides to help middle and high school girls build healthy futures.**

Girls Group partners with local agencies and a small army of volunteers to help young women from low-income families graduate from high school, stay away from drugs and alcohol, delay pregnancy, and become the first in their families to graduate from college.

The organization seeks to help young girls develop character, leadership, self-confidence, and social consciousness - including the commitment to give back and mentor others.

Executive Director and founder Sue Schooner works with a staff of three, all recent college graduates who reflect the ethnic diversity of Girls Group participants, to coordinate volunteers, local organizations, and guest speakers to provide a wide range of programming from tutoring and college prep to yoga workshops. Volunteers facilitate mother-daughter workshops, mother-only support groups, and have opened their homes for sleepovers and etiquette brunches.

To get ready for college, volunteer mentors offer help with college applications, essays, ACT prep, and applying for scholarships and financial aid. Girls Groups also offers tours of local colleges and universities, and is currently planning its Spring Break tour of historically black colleges and universities.



Front Row: Christie Wong Barrett, Caitlin Klein, Helen Kaplan, and Girls Group Executive Director Sue Schooner.

Back Row: GG Program Director Alissa Little, GG Education Director Kia Sweeney, Stephanie Freeth, and Girls Group Education and Financial Literacy Coordinator Stephaney Moses.

37 Girls Group “graduates” are currently enrolled in college, and continue to receive support: transportation to and from school, help with dorm supplies and text books, birthday gifts and care packages, and help finding summer internships.

**Last Fall, AAACF’s Youth Council and the Ann Arbor Social Capital Fund awarded \$13,868 in total grants to support Girls Group.**

Since Sue Schooner founded the organization nine years ago, Girls Group has made a real difference in the lives of many. When asked what she’s most proud of, Schooner cites the young women who open their hearts and minds, their mothers who are committed to seeing them succeed, a passionate and creative staff, and the number of girls served - especially the 37 young women now in college. She notes: “When we first started nine years ago, I met young women in middle school who are now in their fourth year of college.”

