

# WASHTENAW UNITED: 'GIRLS GROUP' GUIDING TEENS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN WASHTENAW COUNTY TO A SOUND FUTURE

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Young women in Washtenaw County can face many obstacles in life, whether they're financial, educational, or emotional. Since 2003, Girls Group has been there to put these young women on the path to success. In this week's "Washtenaw United," WEMU's David Fair has a conversation about the work Girls Group does with its executive director, Sue Schooner, and one of its first participants, Tanee Collins.

WEMU has partnered with the United Way of Washtenaw County to explore the people, organizations, and institutions creating opportunity and equity in our area. And, as part of this ongoing series, you'll also hear from the people benefiting and growing from the investments being made in the areas of our community where there are gaps in available services. It is a community voice. It is 'Washtenaw United.'

## ABOUT GIRLS GROUP

Girls Group empowers young women in middle school and high school to achieve emotional and economic self-sufficiency by graduating from high school and creating meaningful college and career pathways. 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. We do this through:

- Fun and interactive programming
- Navigation of academic and community resources
- Long term caring and supportive relationships
- Exposure to new, inspirational, and educational opportunities

Girls Group started in 2003, and currently serves 550 young women in Washtenaw County. **100% of Girls Group high school seniors have defied the statistics, graduated from high school, and started their college and career journeys.** As of 2019, Girls Group has celebrated 180 young women beginning their college and career experiences. We are proud that 30 of these students



(From L to R) Girls Group executive director Sue Schooner and Girls Group participant Tanee Collins in the WEMU studio. Credit Susan Smith / United Way of Washtenaw County



have already graduated from four-year universities, community colleges, or certificate degree programs.

Girls Group participants often face multiple risk factors for not completing high school, including economic and emotional hardships, housing instability, and lack of exposure to college and career opportunities. Girls Group helps these young women to recognize their true potential and develop transferable life skills, such as asking for help, owning their voice, and managing anger and anxiety.

Girls Group uses a strengths-based approach to educational and emotional development, focusing on four program themes:

- Social/Emotional Readiness
- Academic Readiness
- Financial Readiness
- Community Service

Girls Group makes a long-term, intensive investment in participants, from middle school through college and beyond, with four core programs:

- Building for the Future
- Summer Enrichment
- College and Career Prep
- Women of Purpose

## ABOUT THE GUESTS

**Sue Schooner:** Sue is the Founder of Girls Group, and has served as the Executive Director for the last 16 years. She holds a BS in Accounting from Ithaca College, and an MBA from

Harvard Business School. Sue is a retired automotive executive, and developed mentoring programs at both the Chrysler Corporation and at Textron Automotive. Sue's experience in networking, strategy, business development, management, finance, and budgeting has helped Girls Group grow into a well-respected, low-overhead organization with enviable success. She is proud of the excellent staff and Board of Directors at Girls Group.

**Tanee Collins:** Tanee has been actively involved with Girls Group for the last 16 years. She was an original Girls Group participant in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She was involved in middle school, high school, summer camp, college prep, and Women of Purpose (our program for young women on their college and career journeys). She earned her undergraduate degree from Ferris State and her master's degree from Spring Arbor.



Access the full story at [www.wemu.org/post/washtenaw-united-girls-group-guiding-teens-and-young-women-washtenaw-county-sound-future](http://www.wemu.org/post/washtenaw-united-girls-group-guiding-teens-and-young-women-washtenaw-county-sound-future)

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