LEARNING TO MEASURE CHANGE
SUMMARY REPORT OF A GIRL-CENTERED COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT
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ABOUT GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION

Girls Action Foundation believes in the power of girls as agents of social change. Through our network of organizations across Canada, we lead, develop, and implement transformative programs that are adapted and relevant to the changing realities of girls’ and young women’s lives.

THE GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION APPROACH

Girls Action’s unique approach is based on five overarching principles.

1. POPULAR EDUCATION/ CRITICAL EDUCATION
Girls Action recognizes people as experts of their own lives, validating diverse experiences of violence. Peer support systems bring people together to talk, listen and share strategies and resources for coping and overcoming violence and oppression in their lives.

2. INTEGRATED FEMINIST ANALYSIS
Girls Action takes into account the multiple and intersecting impacts of violence on different groups of people because of their race, class, ability, sexuality, gender identity, religion, culture, refugee or immigrant status, or other status. Learning from others and re-examining our own views has the power to make conditions and structures of violence more visible. By placing value on gendered experiences of violence we can begin to build collaborative relationships of support and mobilize for social change.

3. GENDER-SPECIFIC SPACES
In the past, Girls Action has found that creating spaces specifically for girls allows them to feel free to talk amongst themselves, to share their experiences, to learn from one another, and to form solid relationships. At the same time, spaces that welcome diverse expressions of gender are an important part of creating a sense of solidarity in order to break the silence and isolation around their experiences of violence.

4. CRITICALLY ASSET-BASED
Girls Action considers individuals and groups to be active, not passive, and they are encouraged to develop their own knowledge and experiences. With support and resources, they can develop their self-esteem and empowerment, and become agents of social change. An asset-based approach celebrates the initiatives and successes of people who are engaged in speaking up, speaking out, and taking action on issues of violence.

5. SOCIAL ACTION AND CHANGE
Girls Action supports girls’ and young women’s initiatives to enact change in their own lives, their schools, their communities, their government, and their worlds. Girls Action recognizes that people who are socialized as women have different lived realities and experiences of violence, which must be addressed holistically, in its complexity.
THE COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

The Collaborative Evaluation Project began in 2012 with a vision: to create evaluation tools and methods for clearly measuring the impacts gender-specific programs have on girls’ lives.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation provided funding for Girls Action Foundation to implement this pilot project from 2012 to 2015. The objective was to design and test evaluation tools and an online platform with a diverse group of girls’ groups across Ontario over three years. Representatives from twelve partner organizations co-created the tools, tested the platform with girls from their programs, pooled their data, and shared their feedback and learnings.

In 2015, Girls Action is publicly launching the tools and platform created through this project for our national network.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report tells the story of how gender-specific programs provide girls with the tools to become stronger and more resilient. Such programs are making a positive difference in girls’ lives, and this report documents how girls and young women benefit from them in various ways.

It also chronicles the collaborative process of developing evaluation tools and an online platform that will now allow girls’ programs across Canada to highlight the positive changes in girls’ lives and share their results with broader audiences.

This report will be useful to:

- Individuals or organizations who are designing and facilitating girls’ programs in their communities
- Youth-oriented or other ally organizations
- Funders, policy makers and educators who want to make a positive impact on girls’ lives
- Researchers interested in the resilience of girls
- Anyone concerned about issues surrounding girls in Canada

WHY GIRLS?

Girls experience a number of challenges as they grow up. These may include exposure to violence, declining self-confidence, and other issues related to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Girls who experience marginalization, due to their race, sexuality, ethnicity, citizenship, socio-economic status, or disability, are often more adversely affected. Community level responses are important to help girls build protective factors\(^1\) and reduce risk in their lives.

\(^1\) Protective factors are conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports or coping strategies) in individuals, families, communities or the larger society that help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities.
WHY GIRLS’ PROGRAMS?

“I feel more COMFORTABLE about myself because we were ABLE TO TALK through stuff.” – Girls’ group participant

“It helped to be able to TALK ABOUT ISSUES. There isn’t always a SPACE to do that.” – Girls’ group participant

In programs specifically designed around girls’ issues and needs, girls are provided the space to open up about challenges they experience as they grow up. Girl-specific programs establish a safe environment where participants can discuss sensitive topics and gender-related issues. They provide access to resources and support, help girls connect with each other, and offer mentoring and leadership development. Participating in girls’ programming can have a transformative impact, giving girls strategies to cope with life’s challenges, take action and create change in their lives and in their communities.

Such programs are happening in communities all across Canada. Girls and young women are signing up for neighbourhood-based arts or sports groups, anti-bullying and violence prevention programs, psycho-educational groups, and innovative social action projects wherever they are offered. The number and diversity of programs is a testament to their need. Yet, despite their popularity, program facilitators often find it difficult to assess and learn from what works in specific contexts and to make a case for their programs.

There are many models for girls’ programs that can be effective. Research on girls’ programming throughout the US and Canada has identified a number of promising practices (see Text Box 1), if integrated into girls’ programs, these approaches can maximize positive impacts on girls.

Based on their experience in programming and networking with girls’ programs across Canada, Girls Action has summarized some program practices found to be most effective:

• PARTICIPATORY involve girls in program design and facilitation
• EMPOWERMENT support girls to express themselves and take action
• ASSET-BASED build skills and focus on girls’ strengths
• CULTURALLY RELEVANT respect for and integration of diversity
• COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT engage community members through mentorship and other means

These promising practices act as a pathway to strengthen outcomes for girls’ programs – they allow programmers to focus on girls’ strengths and create a space for girls to be connected and confident, build resilience, and develop critical thinking and communication skills.

TEXT BOX 1
GIRLS’ PROGRAM PROMISING PRACTICES

• Girls-only space
• Participatory
• Provides positive, trusting and safer environment
• Focus on girls’ strengths and assets
• Hands-on and interactive
• Holistic with range of activities
• Integrates critical thinking and gender analysis
• Encourages use of arts-based and other forms of communication
• Mentorship and involvement of girls and young women of different ages
• Provides opportunities for girls to practice different kinds of leadership
• Involvement of, or connection with, girls’ families/parents/caregivers
• Includes fun, social activities
• Incorporates physical activity in programming
• Gender and sexual identity and inclusion
• Racial and cultural awareness and inclusion
• Awareness and inclusion re: girls with disabilities/otherly abled
• Program is free or provides honoraria/ travel subsidy to participants
• Accessible in other ways (easy to get to, physical accessibility, convenient time and location)
• Incremental programming within your organization for girls as they grow
• Activities are not stereotypically girl-focused
• Girls are given voice
• Programming reflects and connects girls with their cultures
• Facilitators are culturally-relevant for participants
THE COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

WHY EVALUATE?

The Collaborative Evaluation pilot project was developed to help community-based girls’ programs evaluate how girls are changing through their programs, learn about promising practices, and communicate results to their funders and supporters.

Most girls’ groups lack the resources to carry out evaluation, particularly impact level evaluation. With a lack of time, resources and evaluation tools, girls’ programmers find it challenging to explain their program outcomes, or why these impacts are important for their community.

The most frequent forms of girls’ program evaluation are reflective group discussions and satisfaction surveys conducted with participants at the end of the programs.

The importance of girls’ programming is clear to facilitators and girls but the results often remain undocumented. This means the full extent of impacts may also not be communicated to key audiences, especially those that can champion the cause for enhanced funding and supports for girls’ programs.

Evaluation at the grassroots brings new insights on promising practice to the field and helps build awareness about the importance of organizational supports, funding and policies that enable girls’ programs to adopt and adapt those promising practices. Having access to this first-hand information from the girls and facilitators themselves about what is working is important so the programs can be adjusted accordingly.

WHY COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION?

Until now there has been no common platform and evaluation system for documenting and sharing the results of girls’ programs on girls’ lives. Some funders and larger organizations have brought facilitators together to talk about promising practices and shortcomings in their programs; however this way of documenting has not allowed groups to enter, manage and aggregate their own evaluation data. Girls Action’s innovative online platform empowers girls and facilitators in their communities, while also furthering the cause for girls’ programs in Canada by documenting their collective impact. The evaluation system blends both quantitative and qualitative results demonstrating transformations in girls both in the numbers and through stories and testimonials.

HOW IT ALL STARTED...

Before the Collaborative Evaluation project began, members of the Girls Action National Network gathered at its Annual Retreat to exchange about evaluation, consider collaborative approaches, and begin designing an evaluation process and parameters that would be useful for girls’ programs. After identifying the need for better evaluation, they brainstormed and prioritized a list of core outcomes as reflected in their own programming. The need for participatory and arts-based approaches for engaging diverse girls in evaluation was emphasized. Network members discussed the importance of facilitators observing and documenting change in girls, reflecting on how programming contributes to positive outcomes, and working together to further their collective understanding of promising practices.

The outcomes brainstormed collaboratively before the start of the project served as an initial framework for the tools developed for the collaborative evaluation. Girls Action Foundation looked for funding sources to put the framework into practice and presented a proposal for a 3-year pilot project to the Ontario Trillium Foundation that was approved.

Throughout the pilot project, the outcomes, corresponding indicators and tools were co-created and tested by and with partners and revised for greater relevance and ease of use. Given the multi-year funding provided, the tools designed were rigorously piloted and built from the ground up with many girls’ programming practitioners and experts.
CHOOSING THE OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

In the first year of the pilot project, four primary outcomes were identified and integrated into the evaluation tools. These were:
- Self-esteem and self-confidence
- Resilience and taking action
- Critical thinking
- Communication

By Year 2 the resilience outcome was refined by removing reference to “taking action” (see Text Box 2 for the list of Outcome Areas and their description). Additionally, a fifth outcome was added to the list: “Connectedness” to culture, peers and community.

A number of indicators for both program facilitators to observe and girls to self-assess, were developed for each outcome area and integrated into the evaluation tools (see Text Box 3 for the indicators).

Indicators were identified through existing, widely-tested scales and research completed by the B.C. Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health, the Canadian Women’s Foundation, and other evidence-based girls’ programs. The experience of Girls Action staff and girls’ program practitioners involved in the Collaborative Evaluation project further validated and contextualized the indicators. Indicators were further refined based on the words and ideas brainstormed with the girls taking part in the pilot project.

“Girls CONNECTED and felt MORE AND MORE connected as the weeks went by – by the end they were really BONDING and added EACH OTHER on Facebook.”
- Girls’ group facilitator

TEXT BOX 2
COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION OUTCOME AREAS

CONNECTEDNESS
Connectedness can be understood as the development of positive and meaningful connections to one’s culture, peers and community.

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE
Self-esteem and self-confidence can be defined as a person’s overall assessment of themselves based on their own perceptions and those of others, such as parents, teachers or peers.

RESILIENCE
Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to face, overcome and even be transformed by adversity or risk.

CRITICAL THINKING
Critical thinking is the ability to question social norms, widely accepted attitudes and pressures to think and act in specific ways from peers, media, and family.

COMMUNICATION
Communication is the ability to express thoughts and feelings in a way that others hear and understand.

TEXT BOX 3
GIRLS’ OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

CONNECTEDNESS
• are you better able to reach out to people you trust for support when you need it (adults or other young people)?
• do you feel like you’re less lonely or belong more (either to this girl’s group or to other groups in your school or community)?

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE
• are you able to better see what your strengths and skills are?
• do you feel better about who you are and the things that you do?

RESILIENCE
• do you feel better able to pick yourself up and try again when things don’t work out?
• are you better able to try new things and pursue your interests?

CRITICAL THINKING
• do you think you are better at questioning the world around you and your place in it?
• are you better able to accept that decisions you make may not always be popular with friends?

COMMUNICATION
• are you better able to express yourself in different ways (artistic, writing, talking, etc...)?
• are you better able to express your feelings, thoughts and opinions openly even when someone might disagree?
THE COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

EVIDENCE FROM THE RESEARCH REVIEW

To support the relevance of the outcome areas and indicators, Girls Action partnered with the Centre for Research in Education on Violence against Women and Children at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario to write a research review.

The research review concluded that girl-specific programming can have overwhelmingly positive outcomes for girls in various ways:

- A sense of **connectedness** and strong social support networks, developed through girl-only spaces, can allow for the nurturing of a positive and healthy sense of identity.
- The encouragement of girls’ strengths and unique qualities can help to foster **self-esteem and self-confidence**, reducing the potential negative impact of stress, mental illness and violence in girls’ lives.
- Participation in meaningful, engaging and educational programming can help girls develop a sense of **resilience**, an ability to cope with challenges ahead, make well-informed decisions and become active agents of change.
- When girls are provided with the proper educational tools and the space to question the world around them, they have the potential to develop **critical thinking** skills to dissuade negative and disempowering messages.
- When girls are given the space to talk openly about their everyday realities they have the capacity to **communicate** their feelings and knowledge honestly to facilitators, peers and mentors, building their self-confidence and self-efficacy.

The research review found that all girls have the potential for social, political and economic success. Girl-specific programs and spaces that are asset-based, participatory, and engage diverse cultures and contexts have the ability to empower girls to become agents of change in their own lives and communities. With the support of these programs, girls have a better chance of tackling and minimizing difficult issues that may come their way, allowing them to lead healthy and fulfilled lives.

“I didn’t know many PEOPLE when I came to CANADA... By THIS PROGRAM I came to know different girls of DIFFERENT CULTURES and about girls’ importance, girls’ role in media and how different things influence girls. It was FUN joining this group and it TAUGHT ME NEW EXPERIENCE.”
- Girls’ group participant
THE TOOLS AND THEIR DESIGN

A package of tools for collecting, comparing and reporting on evaluative data for the pilot project was developed, piloted and reviewed by the project partners. This included:

- Demographic, program and promising practice surveys
- Girls’ self-reporting guide and package
- Facilitator observation form
- Online evaluation platform

1. Demographic Survey and Promising Practice Survey

The demographic survey and the survey of promising practices were integrated into the online platform once it was designed and operational in Year 2 and Year 3 of the project. These surveys aimed to get an overview of the girls participating in the programs, the communities they came from, as well as the programming objectives.

“Girls were able to IDENTIFY CHANGES in themselves and were ENGAGED in the PROCESS”
- Girls’ group facilitator

The voting tool used a modified survey format. It was designed to be fun and interactive, but also reflective. The voting process was also anonymous. Each girl received her own voting package with envelopes for each question, and medallions or decals for each possible answer. Questions were read out by the facilitators and the girls were asked to place their answers based on a voting scale into their envelopes. The envelopes were then collected by the facilitator after debriefing with the girls and the data was then entered into the platform.

“I have used a SIMILAR EVALUATION with other girls’ groups that aren’t part of the COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT. The voting method is FUN AND EASY for the girls to understand.”
- Girls’ group facilitator

2. Girls’ Self-Reporting Guide and Package

The girls’ self-reporting tool was designed as a two and a half hour session with an arts-based warm-up and a voting process followed by a group debrief. The design reflected earlier feedback from members of the Girls Action National Network about the use of art as an effective way of giving a voice to a diversity of girls. Participants were asked to illustrate through drawing or collage what it looked like or sounded like for girls to be connected, self-confident, resilient, to think critically and communicate well. This activity allowed facilitators to observe how well girls understood the outcomes and indicators, before administering the survey. The arts-based warm-up also provided an opportunity for girls to contribute their own ideas about the indicators of change related to program outcomes.

In Years 1 and 2 a six-point scale was used for the girls’ self-reporting tool (i.e. totally better, somewhat better, a little bit better, about the same, worse, not sure). Based on feedback from the partners, the scale was simplified for the final pilot year (i.e. a lot better, a little bit better, about the same, not sure, worse).

“This TOOL has been instituted in all programming now for our women and girls. We have found it a FUN WAY to ENGAGE and get TRUER RESULTS when evaluating.”
- Girls’ group facilitator
THE COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

3. Facilitator Observation Form

An observation form was created so that facilitators could document their observations regarding the girls in their programs. Program facilitators were asked to enter their data from the observation forms and the girls’ voting results directly into the online measurement tool.

In Year 1 and 2, facilitators recorded their perceptions of how much girls changed by filling in the observation forms both at the beginning and end of the program. Some facilitators found it difficult to make their first observations of the girls early in their programs. They felt they had not developed strong enough relationships with the girls after two or three sessions to give an accurate assessment. By Year 3, Girls Action decided to simplify the tools in preparation for the launch of the platform to a broader audience. The observation tool was revised for use only at the end of the program, after facilitators had developed stronger relationships with the girls and when the girls were also reporting.

The indicators and scales for the facilitator observation form were also redesigned in the final pilot year to directly correspond to those in the girls’ self-reporting tool. The evaluation tools for facilitator observation and the girls’ self-reporting were not initially designed for comparison purposes, yet interesting comparisons in the kinds of changes girls experienced and those observed by facilitators were inferred from the Year 1 data. In the second year of the project, all of the indicators in the girls’ self-reporting tool were included in the observation form, with several additions.

Throughout the pilot project, all of the data on the individual girls was kept strictly confidential. Facilitators assigned each girl a number so that Girls Action and the evaluation consultants were not aware of participants’ details.

4. Key Learnings

Each partner involved in the pilot project was unique. They differed in their program approaches; the ages of the girls and their backgrounds; the length of program; the setting; as well as the capacity and preferences of the facilitators (see pages 13-14 for highlights of the partners’ programs). Given this diversity, there were some challenges in the consistent use of the tools and reporting of the data across programs. Some of the challenges were the arts-based approach not being relevant for all programs; difficulties in allotting adequate time for the full girls’ self-reporting process; age of the girls varying considerably from 7 to 21 years; the language of the girls’ self-reporting tool not being really accessible for girls who were new to Canada, those who had varied language levels, and younger girls age 9-12.

Due to these challenges and also after the feedback we received from partners at end of years 1 and 2, the tools were revised further and improved, incorporating changes on the language and also on the way they were administered. Some of the adaptations included: putting the girls in pairs to work on the graphic illustration of the outcomes in the art warm-up; having the girls perform skits about their favourite part of the group; asking a volunteer who was not part of the group facilitation team to read the questions to avoid any bias; and having the girls read the survey questions themselves and vote at their own pace, rather than having questions read to them and voting all together.

At end of year 3, partners reported they had become familiar with the self-reporting process, and would be able to plan more time for it in the future, as girls did benefit from and enjoy the full set of activities.

However, in moving towards a public launch of the platform Girls Action will clearly specify that currently, the tools and process will best fit girls ages 9-17 and hopefully in the near future, we will be able to make additional changes to the platform and serve a broader range of programs.
5. The Online Platform: “DATA SPARK”

Initially, Girls Action envisioned the platform for measurement of the changes in girls throughout the program to be a collection of already existing online tools. During the design and piloting of the project, it was decided to create a new custom tool that would enable the facilitators to enter their data and generate their own unique program reports. The newly designed platform would also aggregate the data generated from programs across Canada to paint a picture of how girls’ programs are contributing to positive changes in girls’ lives at a broader level, highlighting their successes and identifying challenges.

In Year 1 of the pilot project, the evaluation platform had not been developed, so other tools were used to document the findings – such as Excel worksheets and Survey Monkey.

Work on the platform began in the second year of the project, when Girls Action partnered with a tech solutions provider to develop a custom online platform that would provide a user-friendly tool for documenting, evaluating and reporting on the outcomes of girls’ programs. In Years 2 and 3, this online platform was designed, piloted, revised, tested again and re-tweaked to ultimately provide an innovative new online tool that will change the way evaluation of girls’ programs is done.
PROJECT PARTNERS

ENGAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN THE PILOT PROJECT

Girls Action did outreach to its network of over 100 network members in Ontario to tap into a diverse group of community partner organizations. Organizations that were actively implementing programs with girls were contacted to assess their ability and willingness to partner in pilot-testing the evaluation tools. Over the 3-year pilot phase, 12 different girls’ groups formally collaborated with Girls Action to co-create a relevant, easy-to-use girl-centered evaluation system that could be adopted by girls’ groups in communities across Canada. The partners belonged to diverse communities and their programs were varied, but all had to agree to certain minimum specifications of their programs.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS’ PROFILES

1. SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE, LONDON
   The Sexual Assault Centre creates safe spaces for survivors to be believed, supported and counselled so that they can begin to heal. Their services are about re-discovering strength, hope and joy both as individuals and as a community. A critical component of their work is helping women and girls recognize their potential as powerful agents of change – promoting equality, working in partnership and making a difference.

   Girls Creating Change is a group for young women to discuss issues important to them. Instead of viewing girls as victims, the program helps young women find their voice and use it. By the end of the program, they move towards a focus on action and empowerment – ways in which young women can take action in their lives to promote healthy relationships and to stand for a cause/belief they identify as important.

2. TROPICANA COMMUNITY SERVICES
   Tropicana Community Services is a Toronto-based, multi-service organization that provides all youth, newcomers, people of Black and Caribbean heritage and others in need with opportunities and alternatives that lead to success and positive life choices. Our mission is achieved through culturally appropriate programs such as counselling, child care, educational and employment services and youth development.

   The Defy your Label program is designed to support the growth of girls by inspiring and encouraging them to defy the negative labels, stereotypes and expectations placed on them and promote healthy self-esteem and self-respect. Through this, the girls develop a sense of community and extend their growth within their communities as positive civic-minded individuals.

3. WAA ZAH ZAA

   The Reality Check 2 program offers a psycho-educational group that concentrates on developing healthy self-esteem, confidence and assertiveness. This group educates young girls regarding healthy body image and the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Each participant has an opportunity to share their own feelings and experiences and be assisted to grow as an individual and as part of a group.

4. YWCA MUSKOKA
   YWCA of Muskoka creates a safe, inclusive community that works to advance gender equality through leadership, partnerships and advocacy. They envision a Muskoka in which all women and girls are thriving in a safe community of possibility.

   Their Girlz Choice program is a school-based life skills program supporting secondary school girls. A youth-driven program, Girlz Choice participants identify the issues they want to discuss. These often include relationships, drugs and alcohol, body image, sex, recognizing signs of abuse, family, stress and mental wellbeing. Together with a YWCA facilitator they explore personal goals, choices, alternative paths and opportunities.
5. GASHANTI
Gashanti is a group of young Somali women in Toronto, whose mission is to provide girls and young women with a safe atmosphere to develop their gifts, abilities, and positive relationships. They do this through the provision of leadership and mentoring programs, consultation and information services, and through community capacity building and training and education.

Their Future Leaders program aims to boost educational, social, civic, leadership, and family and community attachment for young Somali women in Toronto. Their program offers a combination of leadership development activities and mentoring opportunities.

6. PLANNED PARENTHOOD OTTAWA
Planned Parenthood Ottawa (PPO) is a pro-choice organization promoting healthy sexuality and supporting informed sexual and reproductive health choices through education, counselling, information, and referral services.

Their Christie Lake Kids STAR program focuses on elevating the girls’ level of connection in their community and with their peers, as well as encouraging self-confidence, vulnerability and trust. In their Girls Drama initiative they focused on team and trust building, improv skills, scene work and journal writing, as well as basic acting and performance techniques.

7. WINDSOR WOMEN WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN
Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women (WWWWIW) is a non-profit organization that helps to assist immigrant and refugee women and their families to become full and participating members of Canadian society.

Their Girls in Power program is heavily focused on participants’ self-esteem, with each session having a different sub topic that related to self-esteem. The main goals were to teach the participants that it is possible to change anything negative into something positive. Some of the other topics discussed included, communication, depression, self-confidence, body image and social support.

8. LADY BALLERS CAMP
Lady Ballers Camp is a non-profit charitable organization that develops girl-centred programs which encourage non-competitive physical, emotional and educational development. Their interactive and dynamic approach fosters strong social skills, self-confidence, healthy and realistic body image and dynamic learning. In their commitment to social change, their mandate is to create equitable access to recreational and sporting programs for every child, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Their program, Emerging Leaders: Rise Above and Beyond, focuses on harnessing the leadership potentials of girls, nurturing it, and then bring to light that this capacity is transferable to their academic and eventual professional lives. The program helps to foster healthier and stronger communities, where girls and young women can rise and shine, and be true advocates for change.

9. THORNCLIFFE NEIGHBOURHOOD OFFICE
Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office is a multicultural, multi-service agency committed to building a safe and healthy community through supporting and strengthening the quality of individual and community life in Thorncliffe Park.

Their Newcomers Girls’ Group is an interactive program that introduces continuous dialogue and activities relevant to the experiences of immigrant girls that are new to Canada. The youth gain understanding of relevant community resources, improve on social and communication skills, reflect on their self-esteem and confidence, and enhance their ability to identify healthy vs. unhealthy relationships. The program also incorporates cultural adjustment, inter-generational conflict and various strategies and methods to better cope and strive in Canadian society.

10. YOUTH NET/ RÉSEAU ADO
Youth Net/ Réseau Ado (YN/RA) Ottawa is a bilingual, regional mental health promotion and intervention program run by youth, for youth. Through education and intervention they reach out and help youth develop and maintain good mental health, as well as healthy coping
strategies for dealing with stress, while decreasing stigma around mental illness and its treatment.

Youth Net hosted a francophone mental health promotion project called PhotoVoice. The girls in the group had weekly discussions on the topics that they identified as important to them. These included bullying, self-esteem, healthy relationships, how to help a friend and healthy stress coping mechanisms. The program worked to improve girls’ interpersonal communication skills, their ability to self-advocate, and become more aware of their own mental health.

11. YWCA NIAGARA REGION

YWCA Niagara Region provides shelter, food and assistance to women and families in poverty. They are committed to social change and work to create a community that supports women in need and provides support through each step towards financial stability and independent living.

Their prevention program, Safe Sisters, takes a unique, holistic approach to violence prevention by considering physical, emotional, social and environmental factors. It encourages girls to make healthy choices in all areas of their lives, empowering them to take an active role in creating safe environments for themselves. Through a gender-based, strengths-based framework and analysis, girls have input in the creation of the program in their community to guarantee their specific needs and interests are met.

12. GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION

Although not a community organization based out of Ontario, Girls Action Foundation acted as an unofficial partner that tested and provided feedback on the tools and processes throughout the pilot project. Having its ear to the ground in its local girls’ programming enabled Girls Action to play this role in addition to its broader role of convening partners for the project.

Girls’ Club programs in Montreal support girls aged 8 to 18 to develop their skills and overcome barriers. Through its workshop series implemented in partnership with schools, it delivers tailored programs responding to the needs and experiences of the girls. Using popular education and arts-based activities, Girls Action facilitators help girls explore themes related to various topics such as bullying, violence, healthy relationships, body image, self-esteem, stereotypes, leadership, the media and more. The program is participant-led, with the girls assuming an active role in setting the ground rules and providing input for the programming.

THE GIRLS

By the end of the pilot project 190 girls had participated in evaluation activities in the programs implemented by the 12 community partners. The girls were also partners in the project as their insights, feedback and experience helped shape the tools. The girls’ program participants were as diverse as the partner organizations and their communities.

To give you a sense of who participated in the pilot project in the final year:

- The girls ranged from ages 7-21, while the majority were aged 14-16
- 39% of participants identified as racialized/a person of colour
- 21% of participants identified as newcomer, immigrant or refugee
- 17% of participants identified as living with a disability
- 8% of participants identified as queer, lesbian, bisexual, trans or two-spirited
OUTCOMES OF THE PILOT PROJECT

GIRLS’ SELF-REPORTING

Girls in the partner programs reported compelling positive changes from the start to the finish of their programs. Almost 80% of the girls who self-reported said they experienced improvements across the outcome areas, ranging from a little bit to a lot better or totally better. Around 20% of the girls weren’t sure they changed in some of the outcomes.

Girls expressed that they made their greatest gains in resilience and critical thinking. They particularly changed for the better in their capacity to pick themselves up and try again when things didn’t work out for them (resilience), and their ability to question the world around them and their place in it (critical thinking). In Year 1 more girls were unsure about whether they were able to find things to do that could make them happy - one of the resilience indicators in that year’s survey - even though some made great gains in that area. In Year 3, girls said they were much better at critical thinking. Similar to the first two years, they believed they were much more able to question themselves and their place in the world by the end of their programs.

“I can see how [the girls] start to LOOK at their LIVES a little DIFFERENTLY or with a more FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE.”
- Girls’ group facilitator

In Year 3, girls made the most positive change in their connectedness to others. They felt a greater sense of belonging and ability to reach out to those they trusted for support when needed. Comparatively, girls participating in partner programs in Years 1 and 2 gave themselves slightly lower scores in the area of connectedness. (see charts on pg. 16 & 17).

“Many girls commented on FEELING MORE CONNECTED with other girls in the group and being able to THINK MORE CRITICALLY about messages they receive from external sources.”
- Girls’ group facilitator
Girls definitely showed progress in their **self-esteem and self-confidence** as a result of participating in the programs, from feeling a little better to a lot better by the end of their groups. Yet in this outcome area and the **communication** outcome, girls consistently reported experiencing a little less change compared to other areas. Girls gave themselves more average or low ratings in their ability to see what their strengths and skills were – an important measure of self-confidence.

While girls saw change in themselves by the end of the programs in their capacity to communicate in different ways (including talking, writing, art, etc.) and to express opinions even if others might disagree, more girls said they were about the same or unsure about the change they had made related to the communication indicators (see charts on pg. 18 & 19).
Year 2 How Girls Reported - Each Indicator

Feel like you are less lonely or belong more - either to a group of girls your own age, or to your school, or your...
Better able to reach out to people you trust for support when you need it (adults or other young people)?
Feel better about who you are and the things that you do?
Able to better see what your strengths and skills are?
Better able to try new things and pursue your interests?
Feel better able to pick yourself up and try again when things don’t work out?
Better able to accept that decisions you make may not always be popular with friends?
Better at questioning the world around you and your place in it?
Better able to express your feelings, thoughts, and opinions openly even when someone might disagree?
Better able to find your voice and express yourself in different ways (artistic, writing, talking, etc…)?

Year 3 How Girls Reported - Each Indicator

Feel like you are less lonely or belong more - either to a group of girls your own age, or to your school, or your...
Better able to reach out to people you trust for support when you need it (adults or other young people)?
Feel better about who you are and the things that you do?
Able to better see what your strengths and skills are?
Better able to try new things and pursue your interests?
Feel better able to pick yourself up and try again when things don’t work out?
Better able to accept that decisions you make may not always be popular with friends?
Better at questioning the world around you and your place in it?
Better able to express your feelings, thoughts, and opinions openly even when someone might disagree?
Better able to find your voice and express yourself in different ways (artistic, writing, talking, etc…)?
OUTCOMES OF THE PILOT PROJECT

GIRLS’ AND FACILITATORS’ REPORTS COMPARED

Several trends emerge from a comparison of the girls’ self-reporting and the facilitators’ observations. The most evident is that, across the years and across the partner programs, facilitators report seeing more positive change in the girls than the girls report experiencing. Although they were more modest in their assessments, the girls agreed with their facilitators that they had made progress across outcomes and more in certain areas. Both the girls and facilitators agreed that significant gains were made in girls’ capacity for critical thinking through the programs, for instance. In particular, both reported advances in girls’ ability to question the world and their place in it.

“A common theme in our discussions, regardless of topic, was about CHANGING and ADAPTING to a new country, a new culture, a new system. I am HAPPY to see in the evaluations that many of the participants REALLY felt a LOT BETTER about their ability to PICK THEMSELVES UP in difficult times.” – Girls’ group facilitator

Across the years, girls and their facilitators had different views about the changes made in the area of connectedness. In Year 1, this outcome was not assessed by facilitators. Participants said that while they definitely experienced positive changes, they were a little better rather than a lot better at being able to reach out to people they trusted. In Year 2 girls reported more average than strong change in this area, but fewer said they had low capacity. Facilitators in year two saw a bigger improvement in girls’ sense of belonging and their ability to connect with others and make friends by program end than the girls experienced. Girls in year three however, reported the most positive change in the area of connectedness, especially their sense of belonging and ability to reach out for support to others they trusted. Their facilitators agreed.

Year 3 How Facilitator Reported - By Outcome Area

Resilience is another outcome area where facilitators and girls agreed that more positive change happened over the course of the programs. Interestingly, this is one outcome area where girls thought they changed for the better even more than their facilitators observed.

Facilitators gave a stronger assessment of the girls’ communication capacity at the start and finish of the programs than the girls did. In general, girls experienced lower than average change in the communication outcome or were less sure about gains they made in this area. Some girls said they felt worse about their ability to communicate by the end of the program. Yet their facilitators observed that they had excelled in this area.

“Many of the girls indicated INCREASED SELF-CONFIDENCE and CRITICAL THINKING skills at the end of the program. I noticed many of the girls were MORE WILLING TO SPEAK UP and had developed STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS with the other girls in the GROUP.” – Girls’ group facilitator

“A lot better”

“A little bit better”

“About the same”

“Not Sure”

“Worse”

Across the years, girls and their facilitators had different views about the changes made in the area of connectedness. In Year 1, this outcome was not assessed by facilitators. Participants said that while they definitely experienced positive changes, they were a little better rather than a lot better at being able to reach out to people they trusted. In Year 2 girls reported more average than strong change in this area, but fewer said they had low capacity. Facilitators in year two saw a bigger improvement in girls’ sense of belonging and their ability to connect with others and make friends by program end than the girls experienced. Girls in year three however, reported the most positive change in the area of connectedness, especially their sense of belonging and ability to reach out for support to others they trusted. Their facilitators agreed.
“One of the girls in our program was very quiet in the first week, but by the last week she wanted to start her own girls program at her high school.” – Girls’ group facilitator
OUTCOMES OF THE PILOT PROJECT

NOTES ON THE DATA

During the piloting phase, the evaluation tools were revised each year based on testing and feedback from project partners. Outcomes were added, indicators were eliminated, the platform was redesigned, and processes were improved for greater relevance and ease of use. As a result, not all of the results can be compared or added up across the pilot years.

Yet consistency across many of the outcomes and indicators has allowed Girls Action to paint a picture of the positive changes that participating programs were able to affect and support in girls during the pilot project. The outcomes and indicators that were consistent across the years for facilitators’ observations and girls’ self-reporting are listed in Text Boxes 4 and 5.

The evaluation data does not report on all of the girls participating in the partner programs over the years as some partners were not able to survey the girls, while in other programs participants did not answer all of the questions. The analysis of outcomes in this section is based on the following numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR 1</th>
<th>YEAR 2</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator Observation 42</td>
<td>Facilitator Observation 52</td>
<td>Facilitator Observation 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Reporting 31</td>
<td>Girls Reporting 30</td>
<td>Girls Reporting 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TEXT BOX 4
QUESTIONS COMMON ACROSS ALL 3 YEARS – GIRLS SELF-REPORTING

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE
1) Since you began the program are you able to better see what your strengths and skills are?
2) Since you began the program do you feel better about who you are and the things that you do?

CONNECTEDNESS
3) Since you began the program are you better able to reach out to people you trust for support when you need it (adults or other young people)?

CRITICAL THINKING
4) Since you began the program do you think you are better at questioning the world around you and your place in it?

COMMUNICATION
5) Since you began the program are you better able to find your voice and express yourself in different ways (artistic, writing, talking, etc.)?

TEXT BOX 5
QUESTIONS COMMON ACROSS ALL 3 YEARS – FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE
1) Able to see what her strengths and skills are
2) Values rather than devalues herself

CONNECTEDNESS
3) Seeks out advice and support from people she respects (peers and adults)

RESILIENCE
4) Is willing to try new things and pursue her interests
5) Is able to pick herself up and try again when things don’t work out

CRITICAL THINKING
6) Questions the world around her and her place in it
7) Understands that her decisions may not always be popular with friends

COMMUNICATION
8) Able to find her voice and express herself in different ways (e.g. arts, writing, dance, verbal)
An important objective of the Collaborative Evaluation Project was to grow the capacity of girls’ programs to evaluate and critically reflect on their work. The platform and tools were one strategy to achieve this. Girls Action also convened a community of practice to tap into partners’ experience and give them the opportunity to share with each other and with the project staff.

Throughout the project partners gathered in person, by teleconference, and through webinars to learn about evaluation, provide input on the project tools and approaches, share information on their programs, and discuss the evaluation results and their learnings. This continuous consultation and partner input led to the initial design and further revisions to the tools including the platform, and verified the importance of the specific outcomes and indicators evaluated throughout the project. It also resulted in greater interest and capacity of partners for evaluation.

Girls’ programs have few resources and little time to do evaluation. In the piloting phase it was discovered that the partners were somewhat more inclined to evaluate. When the partners were surveyed:

• 70% said the project increased their ability to evaluate their programs
• 33% said they became a lot more interested in evaluation as a result of participating

Partners commented that the reports generated through the platform have been particularly helpful. Some use them to work with the participants, but most share them with program staff, other organizational representatives, and also with funders and boards.

“Our facilitators have had the OPPORTUNITY to see the RESULTS, which is HELPFUL when planning the next sessions. It’s also INTERESTING to see the difference between the girls’ self-evaluation and the facilitator’s observations.” – Girls’ group facilitator

“We’ve used the GRAPHS AND DATA produced in our final reports to funders, in our applications for NEW FUNDING, and in our monthly program reporting to the BOARD. It has made all of these processes not only EASIER, but more ROBUST – there is STRONGER SUPPORT for the claims we are making.” – Girls’ group facilitator
CONTRIBUTING TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The piloting process reinforced the fact that girls’ programs are very diverse. Programs are shaped by the specific needs of girls in their communities, and the organizational focus of the program hosts. The diversity of programs speaks to the diversity of girls’ interests and needs. When designing tools for evaluation and reflection, they must be relevant and accessible for a variety of different programs.

In spite of this diversity, girls’ programs share many of the same outcomes. Their fundamental purpose is to support girls to thrive by helping them grow in critical ways, such as their connection to and communication with others, resilience and self-esteem.

“The process of EXCHANGING THOUGHTS with other girls’ programming individuals has DEFINITELY led to the implementation of BEST PRACTICES and CHANGES to curriculum.”
- Girls’ group facilitator

Although not all partners adopted all the effective practices for girl-specific programming, each was strong in several of the effective practices. Through the piloting phase and collaboration with peers, project partners had the opportunity to reflect on how they might improve their programs to achieve the most positive results for and with girls. Those that did not emphasize skill building, for instance, might include more activities that help girls to try new things and assess their strengths to boost girls’ self-awareness and self-confidence. Others that do not integrate social or arts-based activities might provide some programming in these areas to encourage greater inclusion and different forms of expression with participants.

Many of the girl participants made great gains in critical thinking and connectedness. Even though partner programs may focus on different activities such as sports, arts or education, they all provide unique opportunities for girls from different backgrounds to socialize together in safe, girl-only environments and to question and challenge societal norms and practices that may hold them back.

An important learning from this pilot project is that girls are more likely to be modest in their assessments about the positive changes in themselves throughout the programs. Yet their facilitators witness more significant progress from their vantage point. Girls’ programs might use this finding to add or increase facilitated discussion on self-image and self-awareness, as well as positive peer-sharing with the girls at the end of the program about the gains they have made and how they can integrate those changes into other parts of their lives. They might also consider including a mentoring component post program for girls to connect one-on-one with a significant volunteer or facilitator who can reinforce the positive changes they made in the group program.

The evaluation findings over the three years of this pilot project suggest connections between some indicators and the outcome areas, and between effective practices and outcomes. These links warrant further research and discussion among girls’ program facilitators and managers. The pilot project was focused on program outcomes and indicators suggested and verified by facilitators and program managers and the research. In the future, girls’ programs and Girls Action might consider engaging the girls more in determining which outcomes and indicators they think are most important and relevant to them.

Through the pilot project it was confirmed that facilitators of girl-specific programs appreciate the opportunity to evaluate their work, learn together, share tools and contribute to effective practice. Girls Action sees an important role in this work and will continue to facilitate these opportunities going forward.

“It’s a GREAT EXPERIENCE to be part of the project and such a THRILL TO CONTRIBUTE to making an evaluation tool for girls’ programs!!”
- Girls’ group facilitator

Ultimately the collaborative evaluation project reinforced that it is the facilitators working directly in local communities who are best able to support girls and design relevant programs. Yet Girls Action, as a network convener and capacity builder, plays an important role in amplifying the work being done on the ground. Rather than imposing a set of evaluation outcomes and measurement tools from the top down, Girls Action has provided network members with a system built by and for program facilitators and their participants.
MOVING FORWARD: EVALUATION OF GIRLS’ PROGRAMS

SHARING OUR RESULTS

To wrap-up and celebrate the completion of the 3-year collaborative evaluation project, Girls Action Foundation hosted a multi-stakeholder event, Making Connections: A Roundtable on Girls in Ontario, in Toronto, ON on May 7, 2015. At the event Girls Action shared project results, presented the new Data Spark evaluation platform, and shared related tools and resources to a variety of stakeholders including, member-groups of the Girls Action network, policy actors, national organizations, education and health sector leaders, as well as other supporters of girls’ programming. Event participants discussed key issues affecting their communities and explored opportunities for collaboration to advance girls’ programs in Ontario.

A panel discussion was held to give project partners and consultants room to share some of their learnings from the collaborative evaluation project. Several facilitators discussed the positive impact the outcomes and indicators had in the development of their girls’ program.

“Knowing the OUTCOMES and INDICATORS beforehand allowed us to ADJUST the program and to PAY ATTENTION to what the girls were talking about, related to each outcome.”

Therefore, considering these tools in advance allowed facilitators to identify the changes in the girls throughout the duration of the program and to improve the program as a result. Several other facilitators echoed this statement by commenting on the flexibility and accessibility of the outcome areas, matching girls various needs and contexts.

Another key theme that emerged during the panel was how the new evaluation tools affected facilitator’s day-to-day work. For instance, several panelists commented on the practicality of the qualitative and quantitative data generated from the evaluation process for meeting funder requirements. Project partners shared their excitement for the new process and this enthusiasm resonated with audience members as well, as they remarked on the tools effectiveness, in contrast with previous evaluation processes, in better reflecting the girls’ experiences throughout the program.

“[Girls Action] changed the IDEA of evaluation being something that you HAVE to do into something that you WANT to do and LEARN ABOUT.”

Moreover, at our regional skill-building events for girls’ programmers in Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax, the evaluation platform sparked a great deal of interest among participants. This is another clear indication of the demand for impact level evaluation that is tailored to girls’ programmer’s needs and varying circumstances. The project reflections and learnings support organizations in making the case for the delivery of their girls’ programs and in improving how their impact is measured and shared.
MOVING FORWARD: EVALUATION OF GIRLS’ PROGRAMS

NEXT STEPS

This innovative and complex project has been a significant challenge for Girls Action and its dedicated partners over three years, but Girls Action is delighted at what has been learned and created through a spirit of collaboration and flexibility! Girls Action now has the evaluation tools and resources to support a diversity of girls’ programs seeking to more easily track their progress and demonstrate the transformative and impactful spaces they facilitate amongst girls. The results of this project will continue to enrich girls’ group organizations’ work and strengthen programs for girls.

This is just the beginning – creating, reviewing and finalizing the research, tools, and platform were just the first step in changing the landscape of girls’ program evaluation moving forward.

Once the pilot project supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation is complete, Girls Action will seek out other sources of funding to do a targeted roll-out of the evaluation tools and platform for members of the Girls Action National Network. Feedback obtained will verify whether the tools that have been developed are indeed adaptable and useful to diverse communities across Canada. A national launch will take place in the next phase. Girls Action also discovered throughout the implementation phase that furthering discussions with girls would help strengthen the indicators and further piloting would allow for more learning on the links between promising practice and outcomes.

Going forward, as new users from all over Canada are added to the platform, they will join a growing number of girls’ programs using the tools to reflect on their practices, input data from their programs, and generate reports on their impacts. The reports will help them measure outcomes, identify challenge areas and report on their successes to important stakeholders. As a result, we hope that girls’ programs will become stronger, more impact-oriented and better resourced. In addition, we hope this will lead to easier and more efficient evaluation for facilitators, and make for a more engaging and fun process for the girls participating.

Additionally, Girls Action Foundation will be able to aggregate data from all partners to get a picture of how girls participating in gender-specific programs across Canada are changing for the better. This large-scale data input and analysis will help to significantly advance the cause of girls’ empowerment in Canada. Girls Action will monitor and share the aggregated results with broader audiences in the spirit of collaboration and collective impact. With these tools, Girls Action is better able to support community-based girls’ programs across the country in documenting their work, while creating a much needed portrait of the sector as a whole, with the hope of becoming better able to advocate for and speak to girls and girls’ programs in Canada.

A FINAL NOTE OF THANKS

The development of these tools has been a labour of love carried out by an engaged team of program managers, researchers, tech experts, evaluation and statistical consultants, Girls Action staff and most importantly girls’ program participants and facilitators. What has been co-created responds to a direct need that exists throughout the Girls Action National Network. Girls Action is grateful to have received this funding opportunity from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and would like to once again thank everyone for their dedication, time and commitment to this process. Girls Action’s ability to create innovative tools and measure collective impacts for the sector is possible thanks to all of you and your willingness to envision new ways of designing and implementing evaluation.

“What I ENJOYED about working with Girls Action was the CHANGE some of the girls made from our first week to last. I felt that they were MORE OPEN AND OUTSpoken, and I have to THANK GIRLS ACTION for that, for giving me the OPPORTUNITY to MAKE A DIFFERENCE in at least one female’s life.”

– Girls’ group facilitator
“I am super, super excited about this awesome tool! I think it will be such an impactful tool for facilitators to have when developing/revamping programming that is being run. Well done ladies!” – Girls’ group facilitator