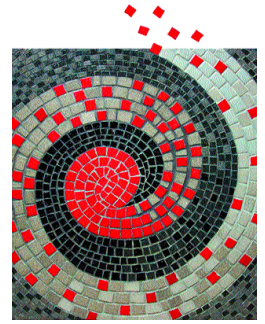


# *Train Youth to Become Future Leaders and Role Models*



*Patty Fernandez*

*Girls Inc. of the Central Coast/Action Council of Monterey County*

***“Many young people need jobs, and many high school-aged girls like working with younger girls. Building on these two factors, interest in youth work can be developed at an early age and guide career decisions later.”***

## **YOUTH AS LEADERS**

Girls Inc. of the Central Coast believes that having high school girls participate in their youth leadership program is their best recruitment strategy. Realizing that working with a contact person who is involved and cognizant of their goals is crucial for their success, they begin by asking the schools to refer girls who might benefit from their program. The ten month long leadership program, which is led by the previous year’s program graduates in partnership with adult volunteers, teaches the girls leadership and public speaking skills. The girls not only learn, but observe young women close to their own age in positions of leadership and authority - young women who have the same responsibilities as the adults with whom they are partnered.

All girls who become paid staff for Girls Inc. of the Central Coast begin as participants in the high school leadership program. When they graduate from the program, they are eligible to apply for a position as a Youth Leader or a Teen Teaching Team member. Generally fifteen to twenty-five girls are hired each year to be program facilitators. They are given a tremendous amount of responsibility, and given opportunities to make decisions and provide input into the planning and implementation of the elementary, middle, and high school programs offered by Girls Inc. of the Central Coast.

## SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Consistent and continual support and training is something that Girls Inc. of the Central Coast believes is important to retaining their youth workers. The adult partners meet with the youth workers after each program session to debrief and determine what did and did not work. These sessions also provide youth workers opportunities to suggest new activities or ways of making the material more relevant.

Specific training is offered to the youth workers that includes practice facilitation, information about women's rights and advocacy, and program content. These training sessions provide them with the skills they need to create retreats on their own, including the materials they will need to implement any workshops they create. Training sessions are followed by periodic meetings to ensure that youth workers feel competent and comfortable with their work.

Each year, more young women apply to become youth leaders and very few ever drop out before their year of employment is complete. Also, those who begin their employment as juniors apply to continue working as seniors. There is a tremendous incentive to continue working because they are very serious about helping young women and girls learn and achieve, and know they are making a difference.

*Girls Inc. of the Central Coast serves 300 girls in the Monterey County, California area. They employ 23 part-time direct care staff; the ethnicity of the staff is 95% are Hispanic/Latino and 5% are Pacific Islander. Salaries are comparable to other "first job" wages available to high school students in the area. Youth workers are evaluated and eligible for a raise after six months. Many of their alumni go on to college at one of the University of California or California State University campuses, and major in a youth development related field.*

