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Science Club for Girls: Equity & Diversity

The Beginning

In 1992, the American Association of University Women's report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, found that girls and their teachers' confidence in their ability to do mathematics and science is precipitously lower than that in boys.

Two years later, in 1994, a group of parents concerned with the education of their daughters formed a Gender Issues in Education Committee at the King Open School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The committee, recognizing the disciplines of mathematics and science as the greatest failures in the education of girls, became committed to combating these gender discrepancies.

Their initial project was to create an after-school science club for the girls of the King Open School in Cambridge. Although their expectations were humble, nearly 60% of all the girls in kindergarten through second grade wanted to join! As a result the pilot program developed into Science Club For Girls (SCFG), a grassroots organization with powerful visions of the future.

SCFG's Vision for Change

SCFG strives for a future in which girls are no longer excluded from a culture that has traditionally favored boys. SCFG endeavors to create a world in which girls feel sufficiently empowered for equal participation in scientific investigations.

Free, hands-on after school science clubs unlock the door of fun and interactive science exploration for girls in kindergarten through 7th grade. Girls from 7th to 12th grade are introduced to the world of leadership by working as counselors to the younger girls and participating in workshops.

In the classrooms, hallways and on playgrounds of Cambridge's public schools, churches, and community centers, these girls burst with enthusiasm for science and engineering. By uniting girls through science and supporting their participation in science the SCFG builds a community for the future generations of women in science.

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Leadership Preparation through SCFG

When girls (like boys) are young, their primary mentor is their parent or guardian. As girls enter school, teachers often act as mentors. In middle and high school, peer relations influence young women's decisions. SCFG's programs foster interaction between young girls, teen mentors, staff members, and adult mentor-scientists and creating a cross-generational sisterhood that inspires confidence, learning and achievement.

Our mentor-scientists model and foster leadership in all areas of life. They affirm college as an expectation, and promote careers in science and technology as goals and options. They reproduce the magic of science in a collaborative learning environment, which allows the girls to further understand that science is not a lonely activity. As women role models in science remain uncommon, our mentors also serve to materialize and enhance the model of the female scientist for other aspiring female scientists.

Our leadership program for teenage girls is an opportunity to become thoughtful leaders and role models. The Junior Assistant program for 7th to 12th grade girls provides early teens with greater responsibility and a small stipend. These girls engage in science-oriented activities and act as mentors and role models for the younger girls. Additionally, they are offered life skills workshops, college preparation and receive first-hand advice from prominent women scientists in the greater Boston area.

The Catalyst Awards

In our society girls often struggle to find examples of female scientists to emulate. For girls dreaming to be singers, success stories are multiple. However, the achievements of women in science are rarely seen or celebrated. Models of scientific achievement are almost always male and prestigious scientific prizes are rarely awarded to women. Public recognition of female pioneers emboldens advocates and role models for the next generation of women and girls.

On Tuesday, May 26, 2009, SCFG will host their second Catalyst Award Ceremony. The Catalyst Awards will be given to two influential women who are strategic, innovative and effective in creating change that promotes diversity in the sciences and engineering and who also display the personal qualities that young girls can aspire to. This year's ceremony will also coincide with SCFG's fifteenth anniversary celebration.

For more information please visit www.scienceclubforgirls.org

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