



Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds



Big Sisters
of BC Lower Mainland

Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds (“Go Girls”) is a group mentoring program that encourages physical activity, healthy eating, and the development of a positive self-image among girls ages 11-14. In 2010 we served 89 girls in grades 6-8 in this program.

Each session, led by volunteer female mentors (ages 19–25), incorporates fun, educational games and activities to stimulate mentor/participant relationship-building as well as self-reflection and group discussion on topics like physical activity, healthy living, and emotional, social and cultural issues. Sessions are structured around three themes: active living, balanced eating, and feeling good about oneself.

Key Program Objectives:

- To support girls and give them the tools and information they need to choose to lead and maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- To enhance the competence, confidence and self-esteem of girls regarding healthy, active living.
- To build the leadership and life skills of all program participants.

Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds encourages physical activity, healthy eating, and the development of a positive self-image.

The Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds program provides at-risk girls, ages 11–14, with a safe space to explore issues of self-esteem, physical activity and healthy eating, while being supported by caring female mentors. Group activities are fun and physical (at an entry level), and participating girls often form friendships as they learn to support themselves and each other in the development of healthy habits and outlooks.

2011 Activities Planned with Timeline:

1) Serve 5 Coquitlam schools in 2011:

- Montgomery Middle School
- Maple Creek Middle School
- Summit Middle School
- Minnehada Middle School
- Hillcrest Middle School

2) Timeline:

- 5 sessions at 5 Coquitlam schools from the week of January 24 to the week of March 14, 2011 (Winter 2011 session).
- 3 sessions at 3 Coquitlam schools from the week of April 18 to the week of June 6, 2011 (Spring 2011 session).
- 5 sessions at 5 Coquitlam schools from the week of October 3 to the week of November 21, 2011 (Fall 2011 session).

3) Program Outline:

The program consists of eight, two hour sessions. Each session is structured around the three Go Girls! themes: active living, balanced eating and feeling good about oneself. The activities are interactive and encourage participation, cooperation and effective group work.

Go Girls! Themes:

Active Living
Balanced Eating
Feeling Good

The Eight Weeks of Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds

Week 1 – Child Safety Training

An abuse awareness and prevention program that reviews healthy and unhealthy relationships, assertive behaviour, and available support and resources.

Week 2 – Setting the Scene

Key concepts of active living, balanced eating and positive self-image are introduced.

Week 3 – Developing Positive Group Dynamics

Verbal and non-verbal communication skills and positive listening skills are developed in a group environment.

Week 4 – Understanding Influences on Girls

Factors that influence girls' lives, such as the media, peers, family and celebrities, and the decisions we make as a result are discussed. The group also learns how they can support each other in changing behaviours.

Week 5 – Towards a New Me

Program participants are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of who they are internally and externally to promote their self-esteem. Discussions are also held about the health risks associated with disordered eating.

Week 6 – Taking Control

Common issues for 11-14 year old girls are discussed, including friendships, body image, relationships, personal awareness and cultural issues. Problem solving skills, personal leadership potential, challenges in personal goals, how to get support from others and how to motivate others and yourself are learned.

Week 7 – Setting Goals and Making Decisions

Tools to explore choices and make decisions are introduced; the process of goal setting is discussed; how to plan personal changes and overcome challenges in the process is explored; and tips on how to monitor your goals and support change are provided.

Week 8 – Celebrating Our Success

The key learnings from the past seven weeks are pulled together to formulate concrete plans for active living, balanced eating and feeling good about oneself; participants also celebrate the peer connections, learning and growth that has occurred.

STEPHANIE'S STORY

Stephanie's life needed to be changed.

At age 12, Stephanie was walking across the street and was hit by a car. She almost lost her young, precious life. She spent the next year in serious recovery, and returned to school trying to make herself invisible.

Unfortunately, Stephanie had a number of physical injuries caused by her accident. She lost her self-esteem and confidence and felt worthless. In the classroom, her teachers noticed her grades were drastically slipping and, as much as the teachers tried, they could not motivate Stephanie. Sadly, they also noticed Stephanie was withdrawing from her friends. Each day Stephanie was getting more and more isolated and the school staff were becoming more concerned.

When Stephanie's school counsellor was asked to recommend girls for the Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds program, she immediately thought of Stephanie. She knew Stephanie was struggling with her relationships and lacking in self-care, and she was desperate to find a way to help her.

Stephanie's first day of the Go Girls! Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds program was typical. As the other participants were chatting and getting involved in the fun activities, Stephanie was continuing to make herself invisible at the back of the class. She refused to participate in the games and instead buried herself in her backpack so she wouldn't be noticed. The mentors of the program were advised of Stephanie's situation and trained by Big Sisters to take extra special care to include her. During each Go Girls! session they started to slowly break down Stephanie's wall by focusing on how feeling lonely, different and scared was normal. Stephanie gradually started to realize that she was not alone.

she started to believe in herself again.

After the eight week Go Girls! program, Stephanie's outlook indeed changed. Armed with new information on how to take care of herself and feel good about herself inside and out, and given the chance to meet other girls who felt the same as Stephanie, she started to believe in herself again.

At the end of the Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds program, Stephanie wasn't trying to make herself invisible any longer. With new friends, a smile a mile wide, and confidence shining through, Stephanie now sits boldly at the front of the class.

Who are the girls in need?

The girls we serve in the Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds program tend to come from low income families and single parent households. They have diverse ethnic backgrounds, and for many of them, English is a second language.

Go Girls! participants are young girls (ages 11-14) who are not presently engaged in physical activity or healthy eating and may have low self-esteem. Program participants are chosen by teachers or school champions at our partner schools and tend to be girls who are struggling with low self-esteem and don't normally participate in organized school activities. The school personnel believe they will benefit from mentoring and discussion around physical activity, good eating habits, and making healthy choices in a safe, small group environment. Within the Go Girls! group, a space of mutual respect and non-judgment is promoted where girls can interact freely, regardless of their social ranking in the classroom.

What is the problem? Why is this program needed?

According to a wide array of research, physical activity levels of girls significantly decline in adolescence. This age group often struggles with issues of healthy eating, body image, and relationships. The main goal of the Go Girls! Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds program is to develop an appreciation of the benefits of an active, healthy lifestyle in grade 6–8 girls.

Studies show that when girls reach adolescence, their aerobic capacity begins to decline and they are less likely to be physically active than boys their age. They are also three times more likely to have a negative body image, and to engage in unhealthy eating behaviours and weight loss practices, especially dieting.

By focusing on physical activity, healthy living, and positive self-image, Go Girls! Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds encourages girls to be more physically active, increase their self-confidence and knowledge, create healthy patterns of eating and sleeping, and establish positive attitudes and behaviours to last a lifetime.

How are we uniquely solving the problem?

This innovative group approach to supporting vulnerable girls works especially well for those in grades 6–8. Middle school is often a time of intense peer pressure, and girls are especially at risk of picking up unhealthy habits and behaviours that can impact them academically, socially, physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Group mentoring allows these 11–14 year old girls to learn by example, as the sessions are facilitated by enthusiastic, caring, young women, ages 19–25, who have a passion for healthy living and physical activity. These volunteer mentors develop relationships with their program participants while leading them through a process of positive self-reflection.

The mentoring approach is used because mentors close in age to participants have had similar experiences and can speak to having “survived” adolescence. Such a relationship is an important factor in providing a safe space for girls to try out healthy new behaviours and make positive changes in their lives.

To our knowledge, there are no similar programs being offered at the school or community level in the districts we serve. The Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds program is offered at schools where our partner school boards have identified a need for this program and where there is strong support from school personnel to deliver the program successfully.

Program Sustainability & Evaluation

We have extensive program evaluation measures to ensure that our programs are achieving their desired outcomes and having a positive impact on the community. The Go Girls! Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds program runs for eight weeks, and all measurements are encapsulated within this time frame. The volunteer mentors and school champions assess the development of the girls at various points in the mentoring experience to determine if the desired outcomes are being achieved. After each program, our program coordinator collects anonymous evaluations from all program participants (girls, mentors and school champions) to gather information on their experiences with the program and the impact it has had on them, including how the girls feel about themselves and if they are more active after having completed the program.

As 2011 marks the introduction of Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds into Big Sisters’ core mentoring programming, we are committed to ensuring the delivery of this program for many years to come. We have three key support groups that help us sustain the Go Girls! program: our donors, our volunteers, and our school partners. We will continue to steward our current donors and solicit new donors as needed, to ensure a healthy program funding mix. We will also continue to enhance our volunteer outreach to engage young, enthusiastic and healthy women as mentors for this program; and we will maintain our existing relationships with schools and reach out to new schools whenever program expansion is possible.

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