girl scouts

How Girl Scouting Benefits Girls

A Compilation of Findings from the Girl Scout Research Institute

The Girl Scout Research Institute is a vital extension of Girl Scouts of the USA's commitment to addressing the complex and ever-changing needs of girls.

How Girl Scouting Benefits Girls is a collection of recent GSRI research findings addressing the benefits that Girl Scouts gain through program participation, including the Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE), the Girl Scout Cookie Program, STEM initiatives, outdoor experiences, the BFF ("Be a Friend First") series, and more. It also explores issues related to satisfaction, retention, and long-term impact.

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Long-Term Benefits of Girl Scouting

- **Girl Scout alumnae display positive life outcomes to a greater degree than women who were not Girl Scouts.** These outcomes pertain to sense of self, community service, civic engagement, education, and income. And this is the case for all Girl Scout alumnae, across age groups/generations, social classes, and races, and regardless of engagement in other extracurricular activities.

  Source: *Girl Scouting Works: The Alumnae Impact Study* (2012)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)

Girls experience the GSLE by participating in the three Girl Scout processes (girl-led, cooperative learning, learning by doing) and by engaging with the National Leadership Journeys.

- Girl Scouts who have higher-quality GSLE experiences (that is, those who experience the Girl Scout processes and use a Journey) **are more likely to develop leadership skills** (GSLE outcomes) than those who have fewer such experiences (81% vs. 37%).
- Girls who experience the GSLE (fewer than 1 in 4) report that they **have fun** and **are more satisfied** with Girl Scouting than those who do not.
- Girls who experience the GSLE **are more likely to remain in Girl Scouts**. The combination of Journeys *and* engagement in high-quality Girl Scout experiences boosts member retention at the age when girls are most likely to leave Girl Scouting. Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes who experience *both* key components of the GSLE are more likely than others to report registering for the upcoming program year.

Sources: *What Works in Girl Scouting* retention study (2012); *Best Case Final Report (2013)*

Girl Scouts and Perceptions of Leadership

- Girl Scouts **have more leadership experiences than other girls** and boys. More than three-quarters (78%) of Girl Scouts have had leadership experiences in out-of-school time activities, compared with 55% of a national sample of girls and 61% of boys.
- Girl Scouts **are more likely to consider themselves leaders compared to other girls** and boys: 64% of Girl Scouts consider themselves leaders compared to 44% of a national sample of girls and 52% of boys.
- Compared to a national sample of girls, Girl Scouts **are more likely to think of women leaders in a positive way** (creative, collaborative, inspirational), and are less likely to think of women leaders in a negative way (power-hungry, mean, selfish, arrogant). For example, 45% of Girl Scouts see women leaders as creative, compared with 35% of a national sample of girls.

Source: GSRI BanBossy youth poll (2014)

Perceived Benefits of Girl Scouting

- Across multiple studies, about one-third of Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes "strongly agree" that **they have been a leader in more activities because of Girl Scouting**.
- Slightly more than half of Juniors "strongly agree" that Girl Scouts **has helped them recognize their strengths and the things they can do well, become a better team member, and get to know new people in their schools and communities.**
- **Girls of lower-socioeconomic status** (lower-SES girls)—that is, those with mothers who have less than a college education—**report greater benefits from Girl Scouting than do higher-SES girls**.

Girl Scouts have more leadership experiences than other girls and boys.

Satisfaction with Girl Scouting

- Overall, Girl Scouts are satisfied with their Girl Scouting experiences, though satisfaction is highest at the youngest levels.
- At every grade level, **Girl Scouts who are extremely satisfied** with their Girl Scouting experiences **are much more likely to report having re-registered** for the upcoming program year.
- High-quality GSLE experiences (processes and Journeys) deliver fun with purpose, creating extremely satisfied girl customers. However, too many girls do not have high-quality experiences.
- Girls who "agree a lot" that **Girl Scouts helped me grow as a person this year are nearly three times as likely to recommend Girl Scouts to their friends** as girls who feel they have grown less through Girl Scouting.
- Girls who participate in monthly outdoor experiences in Girl Scouts are significantly more likely to enjoy Girl Scouting and recommend it to their friends than those with less outdoor exposure.

Sources: *What Works in Girl Scouting* retention study (2012); *More Than S'mores: Growing Strong Girls & Courageous Leaders Through Girl Scout Outdoor Program* (2014)

Take Action

Taking action is Girl Scouts' approach to making the world a better place.

- Girls who engage in **Take Action projects** (especially through the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards) report that these projects **helped prepare them to play an active role in their communities in the future.**
- Feeling empowered to take action is difficult for girls, but experiencing the GSLE can lead to significant growth in girls' leadership skills.
- **Participating in environmental service in Girl Scouts is one of the strongest predictors of girls' environmental stewardship** (see finding under The Outdoors on page 13). More than two-thirds of Girl Scouts volunteer for an environmental cause through Girl Scouts, and 8% do so every month.

  Source: Service Learning Capacity Building Grant: 2009–2011; *More Than S'mores: Growing Strong Girls & Courageous Leaders Through Girl Scout Outdoor Program* (2014)

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Financial Literacy (Cookie Program)

- **Participating in the Girl Scout Cookie Program helps girls develop five essential life skills.**[1] On average, 80% of girls achieved at least one of these skills. Significantly, more than half of girls (55%) achieved all five skills.
- Learning the five skills has a positive impact on girls' lives: girls who developed them were more likely than those who didn't to report that, while selling cookies, they learned new things that will help them in school and other areas of their lives (93% vs. 63%, respectively).
- **Participating in the Girl Scout Cookie Program helps girls build leadership skills**: a majority of Girl Scout "cookie entrepreneurs" achieved the following GSLE outcomes: positive values, practical life skills, critical thinking, healthy relationships, cooperation and team building, ability to resolve conflicts, and resourceful problem solving.
- High-quality process experiences can mean the difference between achieving and not achieving the five essential skills girls learn through the cookie program: girls who acted as leaders, engaged in hands-on learning experiences, and worked cooperatively as part of a team developed more of the five skills than girls who did not.

80% of Girl Scouts achieved at least one of the five essential life skills girls learn through the cookie program.

- Girls report that selling cookies is fun (96%), and learning by earning makes it even more fun: girls were more likely to report cookie selling was fun when they developed the five skills than when they did not (98% vs. 90%, respectively).

Source: *The Girl Scout Cookie Program: Teaching Essential Skills for a Lifetime* (2012)

1: The five essential skills girls learn through the cookie program are goal setting, money management, people skills, decision making, and business ethics.

Academic Success

- **Girl Scouts contributes to girls' academic success by helping them develop important leadership skills, such as resourceful problem solving and challenge seeking.**
- Girl Scouts contributes to girls' academic success as much as or more than their positive relationships with teachers and weekly participation in other out-of-school activities.
- **Learning to plan and solve problems in Girl Scouts may help compensate for some of the effects of lower socioeconomic status on girls' achievement.** Lower-SES girls reported significantly lower grades and perceived scholastic competence than their higher-SES peers. However, lower-SES girls who achieved the problem-solving outcome reported levels of scholastic competence on par with girls who had better-educated parents.
- **The GSLE helps girls learn *not* to avoid things that are hard for them, and this makes them better students.** Girls who are not challenge seekers—who tend to "avoid doing things that are hard for me"—are less likely to feel scholastically competent and academically engaged. Cooperative learning and girl-led experiences in Girl Scouts help girls become stronger challenge seekers.

Source: *Linking Leadership to Academic Success: The Girl Scout Difference* (2012)

Girl Scouts who have monthly outdoor experiences (40%)

- *Are stronger problem solvers*
- *Are better challenge seekers*
- *Are more likely to recommend Girl Scouting to their friends*

The Outdoors

- Girls are having unique experiences through their outdoor participation. Ninety-seven percent of girls participated in at least one outdoor program in Girl Scouts during the school year, and nearly 40% participated on a monthly basis. **More than 70% of girls said they first tried an outdoor activity in Girl Scouts, and half said they could not have done one if not for Girl Scouts.**
- **Girl Scouts indicate a much higher level of engagement in environmental stewardship than girls at large in the U.S.** Girl Scouts were much more likely to take actions to protect the environment and have a personal experience in nature that made them appreciate it more, compared to non–Girl Scouts (from the Nature Conservancy's 2011 Youth Poll).
- Regular (monthly) outdoor exposure is a key driver of leadership. Girls reporting monthly outdoor experiences were stronger problem solvers and challenge seekers.
- Two-thirds of girls enjoy the outdoor activities they participate in through Girl Scouts. Girls report higher enjoyment when they have opportunities to improve skills and help other girls learn.
- **Girls with regular (monthly) outdoor exposure were more likely to recommend Girl Scouts to their friends than girls with less outdoor exposure.**
- Hispanic/Latina girls are significantly more likely than non-Hispanic girls to say that Girl Scouting has had an impact on their exercise habits and health, they first tried an outdoor activity in Girl Scouts, and they would not be able to do an outdoor activity if not for Girl Scouts.

Source: *More than S'Mores: Growing Strong Girls & Courageous Leaders through Girl Scout Outdoor Program* (2014)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

- Girls show an increased appreciation of and interest in studying STEM subjects after participating in Girl Scout STEM programs.
- **Girls learn specific STEM and leadership skills—such as perseverance in the face of challenging problems, the ability to build and design things, and the ability to think of different ways to solve a problem before deciding on a solution—through Girl Scout STEM programming.**
- Program participation has contributed to the development of a stronger sense of self among girls, greater confidence in their STEM abilities, and the formation of more positive STEM gender identities.
- **Girls recommend the Girl Scout STEM program to other girls!** The majority of girls who complete Girl Scout STEM programs would recommend them to their friends and plan to participate in the program next year.

Sources: Motorola final evaluation reports (2012, 2013), *Imagine Your STEM Future* final evaluation report (2012)

Bullying-Prevention Programming

BFF (or "Be A Friend First") is an innovative bullying-prevention program based on Girl Scouts' aMAZE! leadership curriculum for middle-school girls.

- After participating in the program, girls had a greater awareness of what constitutes bullying.
- **Girls who participated in the BFF program gained a stronger sense of self and important leadership and relationship skills, such as the ability to resolve conflicts, educate others, and inspire them to act.**

- Hispanic girls were more likely to see bullying as a "huge" problem prior to the start of BFF. By the end of the program, they demonstrated even more improvement than their non-Hispanic peers in their sense of self and their ability to resolve conflicts.
- While girls reported increases in their "friend first" or friendly, pro-social behavior, their relationally aggressive and bystander behavior remained unchanged. (This finding is consistent with other short-term prevention programs.)

Source: *A New Approach to Bullying-Prevention for Girls: Outcomes-Based* Research Is In on Girl Scout Program (2014)

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