Final Report – Section I

The young girls chosen for our project were a small representation of girls around the country, who are usually overlooked and forgotten due to their economic state and isolated location. These girls are oppressed within the cycle of poverty and restricted to their rural community. Because of this, they lack the ability to see what is available for them to take advantage of opportunities and do not know the experiences that await them beyond their small, country towns. Through this program, we wanted to show our small group of girls that they are not confined to this one area and that they can dream bigger. We wanted to instill in them the belief that they have the ability to succeed outside of the constraints of their environment by not getting trapped in the adolescent routines showcased around them and also encourage the girls to pursue a higher education, which will better their chances to succeed in life.

The girls involved in our project were at risk youth, who mostly came from single parent homes. Through contacts with teachers and an inspirational community leader, we were able to identify ten girls, who could benefit the most from our program. We met with the girls for eight weeks, four times a week from 9a.m. to 2p.m. On most Fridays, we went on field trips to colleges, universities, museums, etc. As project leaders, we were excited about the program and jumped in with high hopes and big smiles, but the girls weren’t as cooperative as we had hoped. The first couple weeks were filled with despair and doubt that we would make a difference, but by the end of the program we realized that we had a great purpose in the little town of Colfax, and had already made a big difference in these young girls’ lives.

Every day of the program we had a routine which started each morning with snack and social time for the girls to get them to better settle down for the rest of the day. Every other day, we would say the pledge and the poem, Phenomenal Woman. We believed that this poem would encourage the girls to embrace their beauty and the power that withhold. We could tell that some of the girls had low self-esteem. We had them write poems about what they liked about themselves and why.

We also played games and did group building/bonding activities. After the warm-up activities, we would read the book, Red River, which shockingly the girls were very interested in. Red River is about Colfax, and a brutal massacre that happened there. We had very interesting conversations about the situations discussed in the book. They were very responsive. We encouraged them and succeeded in getting the girls to think deeply and ask good questions about life and the past.

After reading, we would do personal work, which they would present to their parents at the bi-weekly parent meetings. The girls created “Me Boxes,” which told us about them: things people knew and things most people didn’t know. They created vision boards, which displayed where the girls saw themselves in the future and what they dreamed of being.

After personal work, we would either do Math, Science, English, or History. The girls had the most trouble with Math and History, which is what we tried to focus on the most. Since the girls love competition and anything that involved moving and candy, we played board games, team games, and mind game that revolved around the lesson we taught for the day.

We had some days where the girls didn’t want to cooperate and we had to penalize them for that. Due to not cooperating and the guidelines/contracts we set up with them at the beginning of the project, we ended up losing two girls, but we kept in contact with them. At the end of the day, we made sure the girls cleaned up behind themselves and put everything away. Housekeeping, tidiness, and organization are important traits in life!
On Fridays, we took the girls on little outings to colleges, museums, etc. The girls really enjoyed themselves, and many of them hadn’t been to over half the places we went to. At the schools, we had students talk to them about college life and the importance of getting a higher education. We let them see the different opportunities available to them at these different places. They also had the chance to experience a little college life at the dining hall, which scared them a little bit, but they liked the environment. The girls took a lot from our field trips and learned different things that helped them to decide that they wanted to see beyond the life of Colfax.

Also at the end of the program the girls received a vision packet which they will hopefully use at least until they graduate from high school if not also in college. They received a netbook, a TI-89 calculator, an inspirational book of poetry, and many other educational trinkets. They were so thankful for them.

Throughout the program, the girls had to plan a community service project all on their own (well with our guidance of course) and they decided to put on a Fun Day for the community and raise money for Saint Jude’s. We raised over $200, and the day was a success. The kids and parents in the community came out and had a blast. The girls were excited.

Section II

Peace is the freedom from disquieting oppressive thought and emotion. In the mist of negativity, it is the calmness that arises from within. Peace allows for the cultivation of hope, in desolate soil. It involves the belief in oneself and one’s community and is driven by the notion of inner power. Peace intertwines the individual and the individual’s environment and community. Therefore peace provides hope and hope provides power to those rendered powerless.

Our project sought to plant the seeds of confidence in young girls and give them hope in a community devoid of opportunity. Furthermore, we sought to help them realize their power and their responsibility to themselves and their community. This was no easy task. We received ten girls who had been inundated with negativity and thus reflected the negativity they absorbed. The girls were wounded by a lack of faith, which the adults in their environment passed onto them, and the mending of these wounds was difficult. As we educated the girls, teaching them both academic and personal lessons, we worked to increase their knowledge and confidence. Through these methods we not only revealed to the girls the power they possessed, but also the responsibility they had of that power and to invoke change.

Knowledge is eternal and patience is a virtue: these were the greatest lessons that we have taken from our summer along the dirt roads of Colfax. Our time spent in this rural community profoundly impacted our views of the world and profoundly changed us.

“Our eight weeks with our phenomenal little women in the small town of Colfax can best be described as this: You have shown us the rudeness, bitterness, and hurt that society has placed upon you now we demand to see the beauty, love, and respect we know is within you, we are patiently waiting, and we refused to look away.” - Jillian Edosomwan

“This program was the best thing that could have every happened in this town of Colfax because the girls left with instilled beauty and pride about themselves and their community. This program taught me the true value of inspiration because these young girls inspired me to want to be so much greater.” – Randal LeDet
Jillian Edosomwan works with the girls of Beyond as they create their “I Have a Vision” Posters.

The girls present their “I Have a Vision” Poster to Jillian Edosomwan and Randal LeDet when they finished.