

# WOMEN *WOMEN*

WINTER 2015

MAGAZINE

'Pessimism'  
is the Key

♥ to a Healthy Heart —

## *Helping Hands*

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READING RECREATION COMMISSION  
GIRLS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM—

*Leading Ladies*

## Reading Recreation Commission Girls Leadership Program—



**Daphne Klahr**  
Executive Director—  
Reading Recreation Commission

In fall of 2013, the Reading Recreation Commission (RRC) implemented an urban-focused Girl's Leadership Program at 3rd and Spruce Recreation Center. This unique program empowers young women in urban environments to be leaders and visionaries, and gives them the tools to be healthy, successful, and contributing members of society. The custom curriculum, developed by Judie Thompson, PCC of Myndsight Consulting Group, is relationship-centered, strengths-based, and solutions-focused. The



program was made possible with the generous support of the St. Joseph Regional Health Network and the Youth and Philanthropy Fund of the Berks County Community Foundation, along with support from local businesses and organizations, namely AMA Photography, Auntie Anne's, Berks County Intermediate Unit, Berks Women in Crisis, Boscov's, D&D Screen Printing, Reading Hospital School of Nursing and Sheetz.

The Girls Leadership Program met weekly from October 2013 to May 2014, and focused on positive identity, self-expression, life skills, career development, and life choices. In addition to weekly meetings, the girls visited St. Joseph Hospital, Reading Hospital, Kutztown University, Hawk Mountain, Reading Symphony, and New York City to see Cinderella on Broadway. One of the most successful nights of the program involved a roundtable discussion with local women leaders that the girls were able to question about

their careers, education paths, and more. In December, the girls were paired with women mentors for a special night of shopping for Angel Tree gifts for kids in need, along with an appropriate outfit for themselves.

The success of the program can be measured in very real terms. One girl from the program attended college this past fall—the first in her family. Another girl went from being a discipline problem with poor grades and school attendance to being accepted into a college-preparation program with the ultimate goal of attending a four-year college. One of our girls decided to run for class office after being in our program because she felt she had the ability to “be a leader.” The girls, as a group, decided to perform a community service project for senior citizens in lieu of having a party for themselves to celebrate the end of the program. Finally, a comparison of the participants’ self-assessments from the beginning of the program to the end of program saw a marked improvement in self-esteem, community awareness, and a better development of future education and career goals.



In March of 2013, the Girls Leadership Program was recognized by the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society for Excellence in Recreation and Parks. One of only 10 programming awards statewide, it was an extraordinary honor for the RRC and the City of Reading. The award helped to showcase, on a state level, the great things that the program is accomplishing in Reading.

Kimberly Helton, Director of Workforce Development for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and a graduate of Albright College, believes that the RRC's Girls Leadership Program will become a national model for other urban communities across the country. As she succinctly stated: “You are standing in the gap” [for these young women].

In fall of 2014, the program not only continued at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Spruce Recreation Center, but expanded to include a second club at Southern Middle School as a pilot



**About the Name:** The girls in the leadership program divided up into five groups and each developed a name and logo that they felt best represented them as a group. After each group presented their idea to the rest of the girls, everyone was given a chance to vote on the best name and logo. The result was the name "Leading Ladies" and Raycell Diaz, a student at Southern Middle School explained to all of the girls why her group chose the name and logo design.

"The logo has a small flower and a large flower because we are small now but will grow into beautiful women. The name is in cursive because we are girls and are curvy. And we chose the name 'Leading Ladies' because we ARE the future leaders of Reading."

Amen, Raycell.

program with the support of the Reading School District. It is hoped that the program will be able to expand in 2015 at all four middle schools, impacting more than 120 Reading girls a year. ■



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