

A Letter From a Returning Youth Leader

My name is Yesenia Duran, and there is so much I want to say about the enormous impact Girls Inc. has made on my life. Looking back, I can still remember the day when Girls Inc. visited my Freshman English class to do a presentation about the ECHO Leadership program. After joining ECHO, I started going to the meetings and found that the youth leaders and the mentors covered many interesting topics. It is my belief that this program really helps young ladies like me who might be "lost" or heading down the wrong path to find themselves. I was not really involved at my school, not a club, sport, or even an organization; and this meant that I did not have anyone with the resources necessary to tell me whether my school decisions were the right ones or not. As a freshman in high school, I was clearly on the wrong path. I was naïve to the new world that surrounded me, but thankfully, Girls Inc. motivated me to believe that I was capable of so much more.



When I first applied to be a youth leader, I was so excited, not only because it was my first job; but more importantly, I would be helping my community. As soon as I received the call letting me know that I was going to be the next year's youth leader, I was both extremely happy and scared because my parents were undecided about moving to Bakersfield. They had recently bought a house down south, and they weren't sure if we were staying the upcoming year. Still unsure, I decided to take the job, and that was probably one of the best decisions I have ever made. Finally, my parents made the decision to move to Bakersfield; but I stayed behind with my grandparents because I had a commitment to Girls Inc. It was so hard to separate from my parents, but ever since they moved, I've grown a great deal. Now, I value the time we have together so much more. I am an independent teen and have learned not rely on other people to do what I can do for myself. I have learned so much in the past year — how to schedule and re-schedule dentist and doctor's appointments, how to manage my savings and checking accounts, and even how to drive — being a youth leader has helped me with all of that and more. I am now proud to say that I am a more organized, responsible, and mature teen. This is my second year as a youth leader; I will be working with an amazing group of women with big ideas for our group. The Girls Inc. staff has been GREAT. They have all inspired me in their own way. They do everything in their power to help you whenever you need them.

I can never repay all the knowledge that I've gained from being a part of the Girl Inc. family. **THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR EVERYTHING!!!!**

::Yesenia Duran

Media Smarts

This Summer we offered the Media Smarts Program for the third year. During the month of July, we served 110 5th and 6th grade girls at Sherwood Elementary School in Salinas, Gabilan Elementary School in Soledad, Frank Ledesma Elementary School in Soledad, and Oak Elementary School in Greenfield. We met with the participants twice a week after school for a total of eight sessions. The program focuses on encouraging and equipping girls to think critically about how media messages are constructed and provides opportunities for them to craft their own media messages. They expressed their creativity through role-plays, creating their own commercials and television shows. We would like to give special thanks to everyone who helped us make this program such a success: The City of Greenfield, Mr. Jamie Mumau, Principal at Frank Ledesma Elementary School, along with the principals of all Soledad Elementary Schools, and Katie Venza Balesteri with the Salinas Elementary School District.

Another Unforgettable Summer: Media Smarts



Hi my name is Vanessa Luna and I have been in Girls Inc. since I was in the 5th grade. This summer I joined the Media Smarts Program at Frank Ledesma Elementary School in Soledad.



I liked the program because it was fun and we had a lot of conversations about the media. I learned a lot about the media that I did not know, like the purpose of the media is to inform you, persuade you, and entertain you. I really liked that in the program I was able to learn that looks don't always matter because everyone on TV always says you have to look skinny. I also learned that what we see on TV or in magazines is not always reality. Girls Inc. taught us that the media is all around us. We learned about slogans and logos, teambuilding, advertising, stereotypes, beauty, and how we can make media of our own.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed the program. It showed me how to be strong, smart and bold.

Thank you to everyone that worked together to have this program available to us. I am going to be a 7th grader this year and I can't wait to be a part of Girls Inc. again!

Smart Choices

This was our 5th summer holding the Smart Choices Summer Program at CSU Monterey Bay. Thanks to our many generous sponsors, 57 girls from 7 Monterey County cities (North County, King City, Greenfield, Soledad, Salinas, Marina and Seaside) were able to attend.

This year was our most successful yet. We had a great team of 9 Counselors, Girls Inc. Alumni currently attending different colleges throughout California. They did a great job of planning, organizing, and implementing the program. The program is an intense week full

Another Unforgettable Summer: Smart Choices



My name is Angelica Perez, I'm going to be attending King City High School this year, and I was one of the lucky girls that got to go to the Smart Choices Program this year. At first when I heard about the program I knew that I wanted to go, and thanks to the help of our sponsors a lot of the girls like me got the chance to attend.

I couldn't wait. I remember when the bus came to pick us up at Chalone Peaks Middle School, my counselor Paty, who at that time I didn't know she was going to be my counselor, looked at me and said, "You're on my floor. I remember your face." Right then I knew that she was going to be a great counselor, and I was not wrong. She was really funny and always there for us. I couldn't have asked for a better counselor.

When I first got to CSUMB I thought the campus was beautiful, but I felt nervous because I had never been to a place like that before and actually stayed there like a real college student. I'd never been away from home before, but I felt safe at that campus.

We had a great time doing all the activities. We learned how to prepare for high school and how to manage our finances. We had people from Junior Achievement come and explain how we should use our money wisely. Paty, our counselor, talked to us about high school and what we should expect from it. I learned that there are many different activities and clubs to join and many classes to take in order to go college.

All the other activities we did were really fun too. We played balloon tag, did yoga, and role-played. The role-plays were one of my favorite activities because I am really shy. I am very quiet in class and don't talk to a lot of people but looking at all the girls at Smart Choices that were just having fun and being themselves, I got the courage to go in front of everyone and act. It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I think that really helped me become more outgoing and less shy. Some of my other favorite activities were self-defense and the Beach Olympics. Self Defense taught me the importance of protecting myself with some easy moves. I loved doing the Beach Olympics because it was the first time I ever went to the beach.

Although Smart Choices was just a week long I had an amazing time. This experience was incredible and when it was time to leave I didn't want to go home. I missed my whole family but I was happy that on the last day we had a ceremony and our parents were able to see where we had stayed all week and learn about all the things we did during the week.

Thanks to the Smart Choices Program I had one of the best weeks ever. This was an unforgettable experience.

of workshops about goal setting, high school and college preparation, economic literacy, physical fitness, peer and media pressure, drug and alcohol prevention, and refusal skills.

We are also very grateful to all the speakers who donated their time to share their abilities with our girls. Thank you to John Larsen and Auvria Hampton from CSUMB Admissions and Records, Junior Achievement and the HSBC Volunteers, Dr. Lisa Hernandez, Julio Toribio and the Seibukan Jujutsu instructors, Mike Dove and his volunteers, Rebecca Nestor with CSUMB Student Activities and Leadership Development, and the wonderful Staff with Conference and Events Pat Clausen and Lianne Minemoto. We would like to give special thanks to the CSU Monterey Bay Alumni Association for sponsoring our beautiful closing ceremony.

The participants all had a great experience.



Growing Together



Seventy-four families participated in the Growing Together[®] Program. This special workshop is designed for girls, ages 9-12, and their mothers or guardians. The purpose of the workshops is to increase positive communication between parents and daughters about information and values related to puberty and relationships. Topics included anatomy, physiology, health care and hygiene; adolescent development and feelings; and values and expectations for teen behavior. The program also

provides opportunities to practice decision-making and problem solving skills by including games, role-plays, and round-table discussions. The workshops use fun, interactive exercises to help participants learn information, strengthen their skills, and to think about how they will apply what they learned to their own lives. Growing Together[®] was such a success that several parents have requested a follow up gathering. One mom said, "I've been wanting to talk to my daughter for so long about this, but I didn't know how to start. You gave me what I needed. A daughter said, "I enjoyed spending time with my mom. It helped me understand her more than I did before. I know I can trust her and talk to her about my problems."

