

On my honor I will try, to serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout Law.



Girl Scouts®

**Girl Scouts of Nassau County
Focus Group Findings**

March 25, 2009

Locations: Hempstead, Rockville Center and Freeport

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Focus Groups

Focus groups will serve to inform the leadership in the Girl Scouts of Nassau County as to ways to engage more Hispanic/Latinos adults in volunteerism, ensure knowledge of volunteer opportunities and empower adults to be of service in the lives of girls.

This document defines the following:

- Focus Group background information
- Project purposes
- Goals and objectives
- Findings from Focus Groups
- Quotations to illustrate findings.
- Lessons learned

Background Information

The Girl Scouts of Nassau County touches the lives of thousands of girls throughout Nassau County each year. The success of programming, however, is very much tied to the efforts, interest and volunteerism of adults who choose to use their lives to make a difference in the lives of girls. As the economic need continues to grow throughout the County, the impact of difficult times on the development of our girls becomes even more important. As an organization, our outreach to engage girls in scouting is imperative, as is our ability to engage and nurture new volunteers.

After a series of discussions with internal staff, Yvonne Mowatt envisioned an opportunity to learn from Hispanic/Latinos adults in the community about the benefits and the barriers of becoming dedicated volunteers. With the assistance of leadership from Coordinating Agency for Spanish Americans (CASA), Hispanic Brotherhood of Rockville Center and Freeport Pride Inc., a focus group format was designed and this report includes the findings of three successful sessions.

FOCUS GROUP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals & Objectives

The aim of three focus group sessions is to:

- Conduct focus groups with adults across the County, representing diversity in age, culture, community and socio-economic status.
- Identify ways to engage parents in and provide them with resources, information and opportunities.
- Facilitate coordination and information sharing to the Hispanic/Latino Task Force.
- Visit and learn from adults in the community to create model practices that engage and nurture volunteers.



Focus Group Findings

Focus Group Findings

Thanks to support from the Coordinating Agency for Spanish Americans (CASA), Hispanic Brotherhood of Rockville Center and Freeport Pride Inc., focus groups were held with adults from the communities of Hempstead, Rockville Center and Freeport.

Focus Group Composition

- Focus groups included diverse groups of adults that include women with and without children, of varying economic circumstances and cultural background with a wide range of ages to include young adults, grandparents and ensure a wide range of opinion and experience.
- Focus groups included adults with and without English proficiency and focus groups were held in English and Spanish. Focus group formats included direct questions, open-ended questions and opportunities for spontaneous discussion in order to elicit as much information during these one-hour format meetings as possible.

FINDINGS:

1. **Memories of Adult Women active in their lives:** *In order to help facilitate the discussion, this question requires adults to think about their own experiences which helps create dialogue regarding what is desired for today's youth.*

All the memories shared focused on 4 categories:

- Adults who encouraged educational attainment and success.
- Adults who nurtured positive values and a moral compass.
- Adults who nurtured their spirituality.
- Adults who celebrated them and made them feel special.

"I remember my mom was very poor. My older sister took on the role of helping raise us so that my mom could work and be able to buy us the things we needed. My mom always told us that she was unable to get an education but that she would make sure that no matter what the sacrifices-that we were able to have a successful future."

2. **Ability to make a difference in the lives of girls:** *In order to get a sense of focus group participants sense of efficacy to impact girls in their lives, this discussion focused on their personal sense of how they impact the lives of young people.*

All of the responses focused on four categories:

- Listening to girls and making sure they feel heard.
- Preparing girls: for success, for life in society and to develop healthy lifestyles.
- Guiding girls to ensure that they develop spirituality and know God.
- Teaching girls problem-solving skills to address challenges.

“Listening to the girls makes a real difference in their lives. It is so important to find out what problems they face so that they don’t keep it inside of themselves.”

- 3. Challenges and Barriers that prevent volunteerism:** *In order to help shape volunteer opportunities for adults that interest them and proactively prevent challenges, this discussion enables us to learn about what the biggest challenges are.*

All of the responses focused on two categories:

- Self-esteem: feeling capable to engage girls and maintain their interest.
- Time: having limited time and many work-related responsibilities.

“What prevents me from helping girls and volunteering is a sense that I need help myself. I’m a single parent raising a thirteen year old girl and it can be hard. I guess I’m not sure I that I can help others when I’m struggling myself.”

- 4. Benefits of volunteering:** *In order to ensure that we advertise the opportunities to volunteer in a way that engages adult volunteers, an understanding of their personal benefits from volunteering was explored.*

All of the responses focused on one category:

Personal satisfaction and the positive feelings that come from knowing you’ve supported young people in the community.

“It really feels good to know I’m sending girls on the right path. With this economy, kids need even more support than they used to and I feel such satisfaction in helping.”

- 5. Past success in volunteering:** *In order to ensure that adult volunteers feel efficacious and empowered, this discussion aimed at understanding what factors help to promote a sense of success for volunteers.*

All of the responses focused on three factors:

- Personal benefit: feeling good about “me” for doing something positive.
- Knowledge of benefit to others: Understanding of the benefit
- Ability to see/map the progress of those being served.

“It made me feel special to give of myself and help others.”

- 6. Keeping Girls in Our Lives:** *This discussion focused on what focus group participants felt we need to be giving to girls.*

Responses generally focused on the importance of making quality time for girls that is predictable and able to be counted on by girls, the importance of showing girls love, teaching them and speaking with them in a positive manner about their futures and opportunities.

“My aunt taught me as if I was her own daughter---she always sent me blessings and made me feel special. We need to all be there for the girls in our lives and support them. It doesn’t matter if they are our daughters, stepdaughters, nieces, or neighbors—we should show them that they are loved.”

- 7. Awareness of Opportunities and benefits of becoming a volunteer with the Girl Scouts Nassau County:** *Given the diversity of focus groups, this discussion had several aims. First, this discussion sought to understand how successful our outreach is in informing adults of opportunities to volunteer. Second, this discussion aimed to determine whether participants understood the opportunities for them when becoming a volunteer with the Girl Scouts of Nassau County.*

Responses focused on the following important themes:

- No-a lack of knowledge about both opportunities and benefits.
- Yes-a knowledge that when becoming a volunteer, free training opportunities become available.
- Yes-a feeling that the benefits are largely intrinsic: feeling good about connecting kids with nature and making a difference in the lives of girls.

“I think it’s valuable to volunteer with girls to help them maintain a sense of their culture and to value where their families come from. I’m not very aware of opportunities to volunteer with Girl Scouts and I’m not a parent, but I would like to be a volunteer.”

- 8. Suggestions and Advice:** *Before closing the sessions, it was important to give parents the opportunity to share any ideas, thoughts or feelings that we may not have elicited from our questions and discussions.*

Adults talked about how important it is to encourage girls to talk about themselves and to share information about their experiences at school and in life. They shared concerns about how many girls experience social isolation and a sense of “aloneness” and that

vulnerable girls will search for love in the wrong places if they aren't receiving it from caring adults in their lives. They also spoke about the sense of disconnectedness for students who are new in the country, community or town and the need to connect them with Girl Scouts and institutions that support their well-being. Finally, the value of sharing cultural practices and exploring culture and encouraging the next generation to understand their value and feel a sense of purpose was deeply considered and shared throughout the focus group sessions. In each of the three focus groups, adults also shared their own sense of social isolation, a sense of being alone and a deep gratitude for the opportunity to be heard and hear stories from other parents.

"I feel very alone sometimes as a parent. I'm a single mom and my own mom never told me she loved me. I didn't tell my kids because I didn't know any better. As my daughter got older she was very mad at me and then I explained what my childhood experiences were. We have repaired our relationship and now I know that she won't make the same mistakes with her kids. Girls need opportunities not to feel alone and to feel heard: we as parents need this too."



Lessons Learned

Through the inspiring stories and expression of three diverse focus groups of engaged community members, the following themes emerged that impact programming and work of the Girl Scouts of Nassau County:

1. **We must consider new venues of outreach to engage new volunteers:** Volunteers don't need to be parents although that is generally the route to engaging volunteers. We need to consider creative, alternative routes to engage volunteers that both serve our girls and help nurture civic-minded adults. We should consider partnering with pediatricians and clinics to 'advertise' information not only about opportunities for girls but also about volunteer opportunities for adults. We should also consider advertising volunteer opportunities for adults through the following venues:
 - a. Libraries
 - b. Colleges and graduate programs (particularly schools of Education)
 - c. ESL classes where we can encourage volunteers to come teach girls about their home countries and the values and cultural experiences they developed.
 - d. Schools: Sending home information for parents through schools (or presenting at PTA meetings at schools) to ensure that adults know about opportunities for

them, grandparents and others to volunteer in many different capacities to support the development of girls in their community.

2. **We must consider new methods of outreach to adults that clearly define the benefits and wide range of opportunities to volunteer:** Some of the incorrect information identified through these focus groups is the pervasive belief that to volunteer and impact the lives of girls requires a large time commitment. We must repackage how we talk about volunteerism to include opportunities for those who want to make a large time commitment and for those for whom time is a limited commodity. Furthermore, we must better describe the many benefits associated with volunteering which include leadership opportunities, training opportunities, resources and materials, magazine subscriptions, connections with other adults, social opportunities and resume development, in addition to the more intrinsic benefit of feeling good about oneself for volunteering.
3. **We must consider the impact of parenting on the well-being of girls and think of new ways to nurture parents who are raising girls in our communities:** One of the surprising outcomes of these focus groups was the quick sense of cohesiveness and desire to share and support one another within the sessions. The parents felt that they gained so much in hearing the challenges and circumstances of others. Through participation in these sessions, adults shared a sense of being less isolated in their challenges and felt truly heard for whom they are. In our long term strategic plan we should consider ways to develop support systems and leadership training opportunities to engage and nurture parents who are the girl's first and continual teachers.
4. **We must consider including reflective practice as a part of our training of new leaders:** Adults who participated in our focus groups truly gained greater insight by being asked to explore the impact that caring adults had in their own lives, growth and development. As we train leaders in skills that we believe will help them become strong role models for girls, we should include reflective practices that allow them to connect their new experience as volunteers to their experiences as having been girls themselves. By doing so, we will ensure that training of leaders is an active-learning experience, meaningful and viewed as a valuable use of limited time.
5. **We must consider the value of engaging non-traditional volunteers:** Many of the focus group participants we met with shared a strong desire to better the lives of girls and yet they were not yet (or not going to become) parents themselves. Traditionally, Girl Scouts has gleaned volunteers from mothers who want to teach their girls about the values of scouting and consider volunteering. Yet, in this day and age of emerging families that are non-traditional and communities with various economic hardships, there is tremendous value to engaging adults to volunteer who are not parents, but want to support parents, support girls and provide service. In addition, nontraditional families are more and more common and many participants in our focus groups shared experiences about living in blended families, being raised by stepparents, sisters, and non-relatives and it is important that our outreach speaks to the value of all different kinds of families and all kinds of volunteers. In addition, we had one father participant who spoke enthusiastically about what he wants for his daughter. While Girl Scouting is traditionally a female enterprise, we should think about ways to engage the men in our County who touch the lives of girls as fathers, teachers and community members. Further focus groups that engage participants on

non-traditional practices and volunteer opportunities may shed light on future goals for strategic planning. While families differ in shapes and sizes, the importance of valuing and loving girls is universal and so we should consider ways to engage new partners.

6. **Cultural competence is the ability to work effectively within the Hispanic Latino Community.** It is important that the outreach to the Hispanic Latino community includes individual, family and community cultural values, beliefs and behaviors. Meaning when translating we identify the sensitivity to the linguistic and cultural needs to identify its changes in translating the meaning of an English word. For example the following word “*Volunteering*” does not have a direct translation to those that are not proficient in the English language, Therefore, we would use the words “*Helping others*” to describe that action. The Task Force is a valuable source in assisting in the review of Spanish materials or communicating the message to those less proficient in the English language.