



# **Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois Selected for Strategy Team Studying New Anti-Bullying Program**

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Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois (GSSI) has been selected as part of a strategy team that will work collaboratively to maximize the success of a new anti-bullying program created by Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). GSSI will join Girl Scouts of Green and White Mountains, Girl Scouts of Montana and Wyoming and Girl Scouts of Western New York, who will work in partnership with GSUSA to implement and evaluate the BFF (Be a Friend First) program in order to document and share best practices with all Girl Scout councils.

BFF (Be a Friend First) has been designed by program experts at GSUSA to integrate seamlessly into a school's current curriculum to help girls develop healthy relationship skills, understand relational aggression and learn how to resolve conflicts and prevent bullying. BFF (Be a Friend First) targets middle school students who are at a crucial transition period to develop ethical values and critical social and leadership skills – and also the age when bullying tends to be most prevalent.

Through extensive research, Girl Scouts found that around one-third of all girls worry about being teased, bullied or threatened at school. More than 160,000 students miss school each day out of fear of being bullied. Girls who are bullied tend to have higher rates of depression, eating disorders, substance abuse and suicide. Bullies themselves also have a higher dropout rate and are more likely to bring weapons to school. BFF (Be a Friend First) considers bullying from a girl's perspective – including addressing examples of bullying that are less obvious to adults than physical violence, such as unwanted teasing or cruel behavior in social media forums. The program gives girls the social and leadership skills necessary to prevent bullying before it happens. Girls learn how to build self-confidence, identify and avoid bullying behaviors, resolve conflicts constructively, build trusting relationships with both peers and adults and feel empowered to create a culture of peace.

GSSI is rolling out BFF (Be a Friend First) in schools throughout southern Illinois through its Outreach Program, which works to bring the Girl Scout Leadership Experience to underserved communities. The first school served was Lincoln Middle School in East St. Louis, where 117 girls received programming. As part of the strategy team, GSSI will receive cross-functional coaching and other resources to support long-term success for the program, which includes extending the program effectively, securing funding and recruiting community volunteers to make the programming sustainable. At the end of the summer, GSSI staff will report progress and evaluation of the series to GSUSA in order to co-design a plan to help the BFF (Be a Friend First) program succeed nationally. To learn more about BFF (Be a Friend First), to volunteer or to implement the program in your school, please contact GSSI Outreach and Community Development Manager Toni Goodwin at 800.345.6858, ext. 1125.

The Girl Scout Mission is: ***Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place.*** Today's Girl Scouts not only enjoy camping and crafts, but they also explore math and science and learn about diversity, good citizenship, leadership and teamwork. Girl Scouting is the place where girls experience the fun, friendship and power of girls working together.

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois serves 14,000 girls and 4,800 adult volunteers in more than 40 counties in southern Illinois. Girl Scouting has inspired more than 50 million girls and women since its founding in 1912. Girl Scouting is focused on providing a premier Girl Scout Leadership Experience for girls in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while ensuring the traditions and values that have been core to Girl Scouting since its beginning remain strong and relevant.

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is a not-for-profit organization supported by various United Ways throughout the region. Girl Scouts is a Proud Partner of United Way.

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