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Strong Women, Strong Girls wins Boston Club Advancement Award

Strong Women, Strong Girls, which mentors at-risk girls in grades 3-5 using college and middle school mentors and focuses on the study of contemporary and historic female role models, has received The Boston Club's 2017 Advancement Award. The Award will be used to expand a training program developed with the YW to build mentors' racial awareness and leadership to maximize the effects of the work.

Kathy Collins, the award committee chair, said SWSG's Mentor Diversity and Inclusion Training Program was a great match with the theme and focus of the Award because it "offers programs to develop leadership skills that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance in girls and young women." The organization was one of 14 seeking the award.

"It's a huge honor to get the award," said Siiri Morley, executive director. "It will allow us to have an impact on a larger scale and attract more ongoing sources of funding," she said.

SWSG seeks to build girls up before they get a sense that their opportunities are narrow.

"If you don't understand all that women can do, you begin to opt out at a young age. We are trying to give these girls a sense of female support so they can move forward."

Victoria Glover remembers her experience as a mentee in SWSG and the fun of learning about impressive women in history and going to the Museum of Science and sleeping under T-Rex. Later, as a Simmons student, she served as a mentor and was able to intervene in situations by calling on other girls in the group. In one case, there was a girl who was being bullied and isolated. Some other girls volunteered to sit with her at lunch and that changed the dynamic.

“Working with them through real life scenarios was truly rewarding,” said Glover, now Senior Operations Specialist, Corporate Actions at Brown Brothers Harriman.

SWSG has mentor chapters at six local colleges and universities, most recently adding Tufts and UMass Boston, and serves 700 to 800 girls a year in 56 schools and centers in Boston neighborhoods, Cambridge, Somerville and Revere. Since the nonprofit first won The Boston Club’s top award in 2008, it has nearly doubled in the number of girls served in the Boston area. It also has developed a junior mentor program that brings middle school girls into the program.

As a Harvard freshman, founder Lindsay Hyde came across the data point that a girl’s self-esteem peaks at the age of nine. She was moved to do something to combat that so she created Strong Women, Strong Girls, which was incorporated as a foundation to serve the Greater Boston Area and now six local colleges have chapters of mentors. In 2006 it expanded to Pittsburgh, starting with Carnegie Mellon, also expanding to six chapters.

Executive Director Siiri Morley said, “It’s almost like a Trojan horse of a program because there’s some radical stuff going on, really important life-changing work that looks really cute and really fun.” The secret sauce of the program is that the girls are learning while they are having a lot of fun.

“They feel really special and really heard. We have a high ratio of mentors to girls, and they are like older sisters to the girls,” she said. Mentors spend 10 to 20 hours a week on the program and many participate for two or more semesters.

The \$10,000 Award will help to build on a program that helps the mentors, who tend to be white, relate to the life experiences of the participants who are African-American, Hispanic and from other communities of color.

- SWSG locations include:
- Allston
- Brighton
- Charlestown
- Chinatown
- Dorchester

- East Boston
- Hyde Park
- Jamaica Plain
- Mattapan
- Medford
- North End
- Roslindale
- Roxbury
- South Boston
- South End