

Madison SOS: *Speak Out, Sister!*



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PROGRAM LAUNCHED FOR ACTIVIST TEEN GIRLS

MADISON – Today, Girl Scouts of Black Hawk Council, YWCA Madison, the Wisconsin Women's Network and Girl Neighborhood Power introduced a new leadership training program for high school-aged young women. Beginning in August, "Madison SOS (*Speak Out, Sister!*): The Young Women's Leadership Forum" will bring together students from across Madison to discuss issues that most matter to them and to develop leadership skills.

Madison SOS will include six 90-minute workshops on issues like representation of women and girls in the media, identity politics, body image, global politics and local social justice causes. Participants will develop leadership skills for community activism, such as issue-oriented letter-writing, public speaking, and lobbying.

After conducting listening sessions at local high schools and community centers, this group will work with local organizations to create a publication on the status of Madison teen girls. This report will feature the stories of local girls, data and statistics, and suggestions for community groups on how to best serve this population. It will also include a comprehensive resource guide for teen girls and the adults who work with them. Madison SOS youth leaders will then conduct community meetings and trainings to help implement the report's recommendations.

Madison SOS is accepting applications until June 1 from girls currently enrolled in grades 9-11 at Madison high schools. Program information and applications are now available at www.girlscoutsofblackhawk.org.

West High sophomore Natalia Thompson, who is coordinating the project as part of her Girl Scout Gold Award project, developed the program in response to her own research and observations on the community engagement of local teen girls. She cites a landmark 2000 study by The Body Image Project, which found that the percentage of girls who are "happy with the way I am" drops from 60% to 29% between elementary and high school, explaining the strong correlation between self-esteem and the feeling of empowerment fostered by community engagement.

Natalia adds, "The Madison community has so much to gain from listening to the voices of its youth, including teen girls. Madison could also benefit so much from a stronger, more active community of teen girls. As teens, we're tomorrow's leaders, so we shouldn't wait to get engaged in our communities.

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