

# No Small Change

ONE ORGANIZATION; ONE GIRL; ONE DAY AT A TIME.

*Story by Christine Whitton*



**F**OUNDED IN 2002, Girls For A Change (GFC) began as a grass-roots nonprofit organization in San Jose, Calif. After three successful years, GFC branched out to Phoenix, where the young women affiliated with GFC are determined to make a difference in the future of their communities.

After expanding to Phoenix in early 2005, GFC welcomed Laura Valdo as the executive director of its Phoenix chapter in 2007. As a young girl growing up in Southern California, Valdo witnessed numerous acts of violence and racism in school. As a result, she believes strongly that today's girls need a positive outlet for their upbringing.

"Girls For A Change is a national organization empowering girls to create social change," Valdo says. "We invite young women to design, lead, fund and implement social change projects that tackle issues in their community." GFC guides, supports and affords the necessary tools for girls to implement these transformations. A pilot program that began with 100 girls in 2005, today welcomes 300 young women 11 to 18 years old. "What I always remember is that if I work hard enough and utilize my resources, I will always succeed," says Aline, a young member of GFC.

This year, Girls For A Change has partnered with 30 schools and community-related clubs to create an equal number of Girl Action Teams. Each team is made up of 5 to 20 young women who will represent one of the clubs. Action teams, supervised by two female coaches, meet twice a month for one to two empowering hours to develop relationships and explore each girl's concerns. Once bonds are formed, a project is crafted, created and carried out by each group. Past projects have addressed subjects like teen pregnancy, drug abuse and low self-esteem.

Additionally, each year GFC organizes a Girls Steering Committee for 15 to 20 high school girls who exemplify exceptional leadership attributes. This honorable recognition allows girls to be the organization's voice and to be acting members on the local advisory board or the National Board of Directors, taking on pre-professional duties like fielding media inquiries.

Furthermore, GFC has shaped an action network, a Web-based

interactive channel for girls to network with other girls across the country as they complete their GFC projects. In October, GFC representatives traveled from San Francisco to New York. There they assembled workshops and distributed social action kits to young women in five different cities who participated in GFC's online program—a Web site allowing girls to stay connected and share projects and resources. Upon returning, coordinators of GFC launched the group's Web-based National Girl Action Network.

With winter upon us, GFC is eagerly preparing for spring. This month, the "Spring Into Action" seminar provides a series of day-long workshops honing skills that include fund-raising, public speaking, event planning and digital storytelling. Moreover, these girls can meet, interact and socialize with other teams' members from across the Valley.

Young Phoenician women's determination to break down barriers is apparent from next year's lengthy waiting list for the program, which not only allows the young women of GFC to tackle key issues like racism and teen pregnancy, but also gives them the tools to begin changing and rebuilding their communities for a more prosperous tomorrow. ■

## *To Learn More*

**Girls For A Change**

602.677.9428, [www.girlsforachange.org](http://www.girlsforachange.org)