

Envision Lead Grow Prepares Young Girls for Business Leadership Roles

By Sharon Riddick Hoggard ('04)

It's still a man's world – at least when it comes down to business and the statistics prove it.

The sobering facts:

- Approximately 58 percent of the U.S. workforce is comprised of women
- According to *Business Insider Magazine*, only 25 women were CEOs in the top Fortune 500 companies in 2018
- An all-time high of 32 women were CEOs in 2017, but the number dropped by 25 percent last year, and
- Black women make up less than two percent of middle managers in Fortune 500 companies

“Minority women are double outsiders. They struggle to achieve mentorship and sponsorship opportunities like men and white women,” according to business research analyst *Catalyst*. The research company also reports that many women in upper management become demoralized at work as they continually get passed over for promotion.

Angela Reddix, Ph.D., adjunct professor in Norfolk State University's School of Business and CEO of A. Reddix and Associates (ARDX), understands the obstacles women face in the business world. After a long career in healthcare and government contracting, she made the decision to start her own company. ARDX is an award-winning healthcare management, and IT consulting firm dedicated to improving the lives of the nation's most vulnerable populations. After starting this company, Reddix created Envision Lead Grow (ELG), an organization that targets young girls providing them with the tools to create and run their own businesses. “After achieving a measure of success with ARDX, I decided to step out on faith in 2017, and created three additional entities: Envision Lead Grow, ARDX Health Solutions and the ARDX Foundation,” stated Reddix during an interview after the second annual fundraiser event for Envision Lead Grow. The CEO explains that the philosophy and mission of ELG is to break the cycle of poverty by developing and implementing comprehensive entrepreneurship programs for middle school girls across the country. “We are creating Girl Bosses!”

Reddix says that Envision Lead Grow was inspired by research she was conducting while preparing to complete her doctoral dissertation. “As a result, my desire was to create an organization that focused on developing the entrepreneurial skills of young girls in areas of high-poverty, to transform their communities, their cities, states and ultimately the nation,” said the founder and board chair of ELG. Reddix discovered through her research that, “fundamentally, young girls just want to be validated and loved. And when successful adults begin to pour into these young women, we are able to build their competency, their self-efficacy and their confidence. That's the ultimate the purpose of Envision Lead Grow.”

ELG staff and volunteers plan to have reached 1,000 girls by 2020, providing them with the foundation to become business owners.

Here's how it works: Young girls are introduced to entrepreneurship through a five-day summer immersion program using Reddix's *Eight Seeds of Success* entrepreneurship curriculum. Norfolk State University will be the one of four sites for this summer's ELG training camp. "We introduce topics ranging from banking, marketing and business operations to STEM-related training in coding, application design and development," she explained. During the second part of the program, the girls are assigned to mentors — professional women in their local communities. Mentors work with the girls for an entire year building on the business plans they developed during the summer. "In addition, once a month, we host virtual training sessions for the girls. We check on their progress and introduce new business topics and strategies." The final stage in the process is called the *Entrepreneur Institute*. The most motivated of the girls earn an all-expense-paid trip to Maryland where they spend two and half days working with Fortune 100 female executives. "At the institute, we see the fruit of our labors with these impressive young women, who have fully taken advantage of every opportunity they had to learn during the ELG program."

As the mother of two daughters and a son, and being the daughter of a single mother, Reddix believes that she has a particular empathy for and a connection to the struggles young girls face. "As the product of a single mother, I was, statistically, the picture of someone that society said could not become successful. So my desire was to create an organization designed to empower young girls by encouraging them to pursue their dreams while providing them with very practical skills to help them do so."

During the 2nd Annual Young Girls Rule fundraiser and awards event, held at the end of March, Reddix announced to the audience that the organization was expanding to Nigeria and Canada. The announcement was meant with rip-roaring applause. "This is so exciting," she exclaimed. "I was approached by a research professional from Nigeria, who is currently living and studying in the United States." The researcher also spends part of the year in Canada. "She understands the value of the organization and is working to create stakeholder groups for ELG to partner with in Canada and Nigeria. We are now in the process of planning our research approach for these countries, which we hope to launch in 2021." The ELG founder expressed that the goal was always to start "at home" first, and then share the program with girls throughout the states. "We recognize the value and importance this program could have for girls beyond our borders, and we are looking for strategic ways to expand the program internationally. After we develop sound and effective protocols for delivering our training, we will be ready to take Envision Lead Grow worldwide!"

If you'd like to become a part of the Envision Lead Grow movement as a mentor, donor or sponsor, contact the organization at 757-321-1474 or visit the website at envisionleadgrow.org. You could change the life of a young girl who is patiently waiting to make her mark on the world.