

Project



Julesa Miller and
Kanisha Clemmons

Child Welfare Society

Since 1915, the Child Welfare Society (CWS) of Flint has been quietly helping the children and youth of Genesee County. For years thousands of children were lovingly cared for at Cedar Street Children's Center through the Child Welfare Society. In 2013 CWS gifted the Cedar Street Children's Center building and surrounding grounds to the Shelter of Flint.

The Child Welfare Society of Flint operates as a private foundation, which offers grants to nonprofit organizations that assist families and children with educational, health, and social needs. They continue to provide funds for programs that benefit children and youth in Genesee County including the Girls ASPIRE Leadership Program through the YWCA.



Wendy Jamroz, Linda Maxam, Barbara Young,

Girls ASPIRE Leadership Program

The Girls ASPIRE Leadership Program is a program for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls in Genesee County. For three consecutive summers, cohorts of 15-20 girls participate in a curriculum-based program that was developed by the One Circle Foundation. The strengths-based approach includes workshops, reflection, discussion, experiential activities, and fieldtrips, empowering participants to maximize their talents, their academic and career interests, love themselves, and engage in healthy relationships. Serving as a cornerstone of the YWCA's programming for girls, the Girls ASPIRE Leadership program offers three sessions each having its own theme as describe below:

6TH GRADE

"What it Means to be a Girl" and "Friendships"

Learning outcomes include:

- identifying positive qualities about self and building self-esteem
- awareness of one's own feelings and emotions
- celebrating the commonalities and differences among girls in the group
- developing goals for healthy living
- identifying role models
- identifying healthy relationships, friendships and addressing conflict
- honoring personal strengths and empowering one another

7TH GRADE

"Expressing my Individuality" and "My Family, Myself."

Learning outcomes include:

- exploring one's uniqueness and personal values
- affirming the importance of good self-esteem
- understanding where I come from and family values/culture
- exploring safe and unsafe family relationships and healthy boundaries
- understanding diversity and respecting people who are different
- identifying life goals/dreams and defining objectives for achieving them
- exploring teamwork and addressing conflict productively through communication

8TH GRADE

Curriculum and outcomes are still being developed for Summer 2024 and currently plan to include a discussion about high school and beyond, career options, and mentoring.

Some of the ways the Girls ASPIRE Leadership Program achieves these outcomes is through presentations by women working in different fields, college students, as well as experiential field trips. The seventh-grade curriculum includes a financial literacy workshop, facilitated by Huntington Bank. Last summer, the girls felt especially inspired listening to the panel of women speaking about their careers. One participant shared, "The opportunity to meet the women and hear about their work helped me to understand that I have options and can combine many of my interests into a future career." The overwhelming majority of the 6th grade girls also agreed the activities enabled them to identify their core strengths and understand what being a good friend means. One participant stated, "I know how to listen, and it's important to be open-minded about others and their feelings. That's not always easy to do."

The participants of the program, who are recruited from schools throughout Genesee County, build sister bonds that last beyond their time spent in the program; the girls create group chats and stay in touch throughout the school year. The groups are also invited to attend a Saturday session in the fall for additional opportunities to connect and learn. A participant expressed, "The program helped me to make new friends and learn that I am special—I am beautiful inside and out." According to program coordinator Kanisha Clemmons, building self-esteem and loving oneself is a big focus of the program. "We explore what it means to be a girl. We talk about why girls have to go through certain things. We talk about how it is okay to go through weird stages in life—we all do. We want the girls to learn to love themselves at an early stage."

In addition to the summer session, program participants, along with parents and family members, are invited to attend YWCA programs, such as the International Women's Day Program held in March. Continued outreach helps the YWCA stay connected to the girls and their families.