



## “PROMISING PRACTICE” FOR SUMMER 2009:

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### Girls Empowerment & Leadership Initiative (GELI)

#### Administering Organization

Sauti Yetu Center for African Women, Inc., whose name means “Our Voice” in Swahili, is a New York-based non-profit organization that empowers immigrant African women and girls to protect their human rights.

#### Program Objectives and Unique Needs Addressed

Our mission is to create conditions that inspire African women and girls to individual and collective self-empowerment. Girls Empowerment & Leadership Initiative (GELI) promotes safe and healthy transitions into adulthood for high school-age girls from immigrant African families through leadership training and academic tutoring.

GELI seeks to:

- Equip immigrant adolescent girls with the skills needed to acculturate into their newly adopted home country and excel in school; and
- Develop a replicable project for acculturating and empowering immigrant adolescent girls by adapting a successful model.

#### Program Description

GELI is offered every year and has two components: 1) a leadership group and 2) academic enhancement during the school year. We currently operate in two of New York City’s International High Schools—in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

##### The Leadership Group:

The leadership group meets as an after-school club for girls on a weekly basis for 60-90 minutes per week. Young women are introduced to GELI in an eight-week girls’ group. GELI uses a social theater arts-based curriculum, based on Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed. It focuses on leadership development (in school, community and at home), cultivating voice (encouraging young women to speak confidently and express themselves in and outside of the classroom), and culture negotiation (building skills to handle cultural conflicts with integrity). For example, girls complete a culminating project at the end of each group that may include developing a short film that visually represents their “I AM” Poems—declarative poems about who they are in the face of the misperceptions that others (such as peers, family, teachers, etc.) have about them as African immigrant girls

##### Academic Enhancement:

In the fall, students are matched with “coaches” who tutor, mentor and help participants develop a plan for their own academic, social and cultural growth. Where appropriate, we put girls on the path to college and support their participation in college prep programs. The coaches are all women and are recruited through word of mouth, local universities, community organizations and clergy members.

## **Resource Materials Used in Program**

Sauti Yetu is currently developing a toolkit for empowerment and leadership development for immigrant girls based on our work with African immigrant girls in New York City. The toolkit and an accompanying training will be available January 2010 and will be made available to community-based organization to support empowerment work with immigrant adolescent girls. More information will be provided on [www.sautiyetu.org](http://www.sautiyetu.org) in December 2009.

## **Groups Served by Program**

African immigrant girls of high school age in all 5 boroughs of New York City. Thus far, 40 young African women have participated, representing a wide variety of nationalities including Mali, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria. Participants are predominantly Muslim.

## **Program Funding**

The program is funded by the following organizations:

- New York Community Trust
- New York City Department of Youth & Community Development
- JP Morgan Chase

## **Program Staffing and Required Staff Training**

GELI is staffed by a part-time Program Manager. In addition the program's implementation relies on work with a Theater Arts Consultant and a program intern.

## **Program Evaluation**

As an organization, Sauti Yetu recognized that successful programs achieve objectives, have community buy-in, are sustainable and have impact beyond the project cycle. To determine whether these criteria are met, Sauti Yetu uses pre- and post-project tools such as client questionnaires and participant and staff focus groups. Data such as the number of calls for referrals and services or the number of new clients are also assessed. In addition, the GELI program manager is developing a new set of monitoring and evaluation tools to assess progress made by GELI participants.

Information collected from our monitoring and evaluation process, including program successes and lessons learned, are always discussed and assessed by the Sauti Yetu team. Through these discussions, Sauti Yetu continues to review and refine its programs to ensure that they are truly responsive to community-identified needs and achieving desired outcomes.

For GELI, our evaluation methodology is designed to incorporate the voices of young women participating in the program as much as possible and to incorporate their feedback into the reflective space of the program. Therefore, students are encouraged to write about their experience in the program. In addition participants from each group are asked to complete a session evaluation. Pre- and post- interviews are conducted with a sampling of participants, as well as filmed interviews with several participants talking about their experience in the program.

Participants' teachers and academic coaches also provide feedback on the young women's participation in class, including confidence in speaking, the ability to ask focused questions, greater engagement in their own education (seeking assistance with homework, etc.), and interest in post-graduation opportunities including college. Finally, other metrics assessed include monitoring participants' grades and program enrolment and session attendance rates.

## **Program Outcomes**

We are successful in creating an accessible environment for the girls to discuss their challenges, including running the sessions in the multiple languages spoken by participants. For example, we provide translation in French through a co-facilitator (other languages such as Bambara, Fulani, or Pulaar may be translated by participants to their peers.) The groups use a toolkit designed by Sauti Yetu that is culturally specific and relevant to African immigrant girls.

GELI is already reaping human gains in the form of young African immigrant women who are exhibiting greater self-confidence in the classroom, participating more in class and asking more focused questions; engaging more in their own education by seeking help when needed and inquiring about other opportunities for growth or continuing their education; and demonstrating more self awareness and a greater ability to manage cultural conflict in their lives.

We have received positive feedback from the girls, their teachers and their parents. One father, who was initially skeptical about the program, told Sauti Yetu how pleased he is with his daughter's academic progress as a result of GELI and that he wants her to continue participating in the program. Although most participants are still in high school, four of the program's original members have graduated, each attending college. These members continue to contribute to the program by volunteering for group outings and interning at Sauti Yetu in the summer months.

## **Program Contact**

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## **Program Dates**

This program began in the summer of 2007 and is still operating as of June 2009.