A Case Study on the Black Girls Equity Alliance

GOAL: FIGHTING AGAINST SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES FACING BLACK GIRLS IN OUR REGION THROUGH RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

In 2016, Dr. Goodkind, Associate Professor at the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work, in partnership with Gwen’s Girls, authored a report published by the FISA Foundation and the Heinz Endowments highlighting the systemic inequities affecting Black girls in our region. The report shows that Black girls living in the city of Pittsburgh face many challenges-- 55% of Black girls are living in poverty, those attending Pittsburgh Public Schools are 3 times more likely to be suspended than their White peers, and Black girls in Allegheny County are 11 times more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system, despite small or no differences in “delinquent” behavior (Goodkind, 2016). In an effort to address these disturbing findings, Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA) was formed. As part of this work, the Black Girls Advocacy and Leadership Alliance (BGALA) was created to engage Black girls in community participatory research.

PARTNERSHIP: UNIVERSITIES & COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION JOIN FORCES

The Black Girls Equity Alliance is a partnership between the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work, Office of Child Development, Point Park University, system professionals, community members, and Gwen’s Girls, a local non-profit that empowers young girls and women. These partners bring together their varied expertise to implement an annual Equity Summit that guides the yearly work as community stakeholders come together to discuss ways they can fight structural inequities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: FIRST ANNUAL EQUITY SUMMIT AND WORK GROUPS LAUNCHED

The Black Girls Advocacy and Leadership Alliance, run through the Black Girls Equity Alliance, gives Black girls the opportunity to play a key role in this work through community based participatory action research. Girls who are members of BGALA are leaders in this work: they attend a weekly program where they not only learn critical consciousness and advocacy skills, but also develop and implement plans to enact social change. In addition, in 2016, the Black Girls Equity Alliance created, implemented, and hosted its First Annual Equity Summit. This event brought together community stakeholders to learn about and combat the inequities facing Black girls in our city. Feedback during this summit inspired the creation of the Alliance’s work groups which focus on: child welfare, juvenile justice, education and health and wellness. Each work group, which includes members from Pitt, community organizations, and service providers, are responsible for setting research and advocacy goals and developing and implementing a plan to accomplish them.
The work of the Black Girls Equity Alliance has had a profound impact on its collaborators. The research and leadership of this initiative have deepened the University of Pittsburgh’s equity work, especially in relation to Black girls. The girls are exposed to opportunities at Pitt while students from the University have the opportunity to engage in this research, gaining valuable experience.

The Alliance has also raised tremendous awareness of the inequities Black girls in the region face as Dr. Goodkind, from the School of Social Work, speaks regularly at events. Elevating consciousness of this critical issue has led to the creation of mutually beneficial, impactful relationships and an energy around this work that was not present before. It has also allowed Gwen’s Girls to become a national and regional leader giving them the research and expertise needed to advocate to make our region and country a more equitable place for Black girls.

“One of my goals [for] Gwen’s Girls was...to build on our strong tradition of service provision for Black girls in Pittsburgh to become a leader in research, advocacy, and training on working with Black girls and addressing the systemic inequities they face...and the work with Pitt faculty and students has been instrumental in this work”
- Kathi R. Elliott
Chief Executive Officer
Gwen’s Girls

MUTUAL BENEFITS

The Black Girls Advocacy and Leadership Alliance is a great example of how research that includes community based participatory action fosters a “collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners...and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings” (W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Health Scholars Program as cited in Griffith, Citrin, Jerome, Bayer & Mebane, 2009, p.338). It therefore adds deep value to work and research results. By engaging Black girls as leaders in this research, the Black Girls Advocacy and Leadership Alliance can lead to unique and promising strategies to fight the inequities that are specific to this population, while also training the next generation of researchers who will be poised to continue to drive this work forward.