

WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

Girls' self-esteem and empowerment

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is committed to providing and advocating for activities and the appropriate space to empower girls and young women to discover their full potential. As the voice of girls and young women, WAGGGS has identified issues of self-esteem and empowerment as priority issues on which to take a stand and speak out.

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 144 countries, our vision is to be the voice of girls and young women to build a better world through advocacy and action. We aim not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.

Girls' Self-Esteem and Empowerment Globally

- Girls' empowerment entails a process whereby girls gain more control over their lives, become active members of their communities and are able to make informed choices about issues that directly affect them.¹
- Supporting the empowerment of girls entails addressing the barriers that prevent them from developing their full potential, and providing girl-friendly spaces for interaction with their peers². Discrimination against girls and young women can be based on class, race, ethnicity and age. Barriers include unequal power relations, limited opportunities for education, inadequate access to health care and services, cultural biases and poor economic conditions.
- The third UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) focuses on gender equality and empowerment as central to meeting the needs of the world's poorest people.³ It will not only increase girls' and young women's participation in society, but will also contribute to global poverty reduction efforts.
- In the WAGGGS' Adolescent Health Global Survey, 82 per cent of girls surveyed feel under pressure to look and dress in a certain way. Thirty six percent of girls began caring about how they looked before the age of 12 years old.
- In its publication, the State of the World's Children, UNICEF has identified that involvement in girls' organizations over extended periods has been identified as having a positive impact on girls' civic participation and counteracting societal pressures, which can undermine self-esteem and self-confidence.⁴

¹ UN Secretary General's Report, Commission on the Status of Women, 51st Session

² The State of the World's Children 2007

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to help girls and young women develop self-confidence and self-esteem by:

- **Providing** a safe and supportive environment in which girls and young women can cultivate their own set of values and grow in confidence
- **Supporting** girls' organizations which create a safe space for girls and young women and foster positive, close relationships with adult mentors and peers
- **Increasing** commitment and action on empowering girls and young women as a priority
- **Advocating** that the media, including new communication technologies, promote positive images of women and girls
- **Involving** men and boys in dialogues on gender roles and encouraging positive interaction with women and girls
- **Tackling** cultural gender discrimination and promoting gender equality

WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:

- **Work** in partnership with other NGOs, including boys' groups, faith-based organizations and the media
- **Continue to develop** age-appropriate activities that are effective in girls' empowerment, such as sports and vocational training. These activities may not only increase self-esteem, but also develop critical life skills, including teamwork, communication and respect for others
- **Encourage** Girl Guides and Girl Scouts to get involved in IT, science, maths, sports and technology. Build these subjects into the programme and find ways to motivate girls and young women to participate.
- **Critique** and challenge the harmful stereotypical use of images in the media, that negatively affect girls and young women
- **Provide** diversity training for leaders to help them to better meet the needs of all girls
- **Provide** leadership training and opportunities for girls and young women.
- **Lobby** governments to emphasize the importance of organizations that enable girls and young women to develop their fullest potential
- **Listen to girls!** Create a safe space where girls are empowered to share their views and experiences with respect and dignity

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How WAGGGS is supporting girls to discover their potential:

- The World Association provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence, life skills and leadership.
- WAGGGS' vision is to be the voice of girls and young women to build a better world; and one of our key messages is for girls to *discover their potential*.
- WAGGGS aims not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.
- WAGGGS supports girls and young women to discover their potential through non-formal education based on the four pillars of lifelong learning⁵:
 - WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to know*, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth in a few subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities all forms of education provide throughout life.
 - WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to do* in order to acquire not only occupational skills but also a broad range of life skills including inter personal and team relationships.
 - WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to live together*, developing an understanding of other people, an appreciation of interdependence, skills in team work and conflict resolution, and a deep respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace and justice.
 - WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to be*, so as to better develop one's character and act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect in the development of a young person's potential.

⁵ The Education of Young People, A statement at the dawn of the 21st century, WAGGGS, WOSM, YMCA, YWCA, IFRC, IAA

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CASE STUDY

Girl Scouts of the USA - DOVE Self-Esteem Programme

- A study by the Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say about Healthy Living* found that girls define their health in holistic terms, and place equal value on emotional and physical well-being. *Uniquely ME!* GSUSA, DOVE self-esteem programme helps girls to feel better about themselves by helping them develop the skills necessary to face life's challenges.
- Forty-eight percent of *Uniquely Me!* participants were from low-income families
- Girl Scout Councils worked in collaboration with more than 550 organizations and individuals in their communities through *Uniquely Me!*
- Sixty-four percent of *Uniquely Me!* participants felt better about themselves after the programme than before.

“If we do not encourage others to find their own meaning, their own voice, we will never be able to sustain our own.”

Peter Block, Author and Consultant on Empowerment