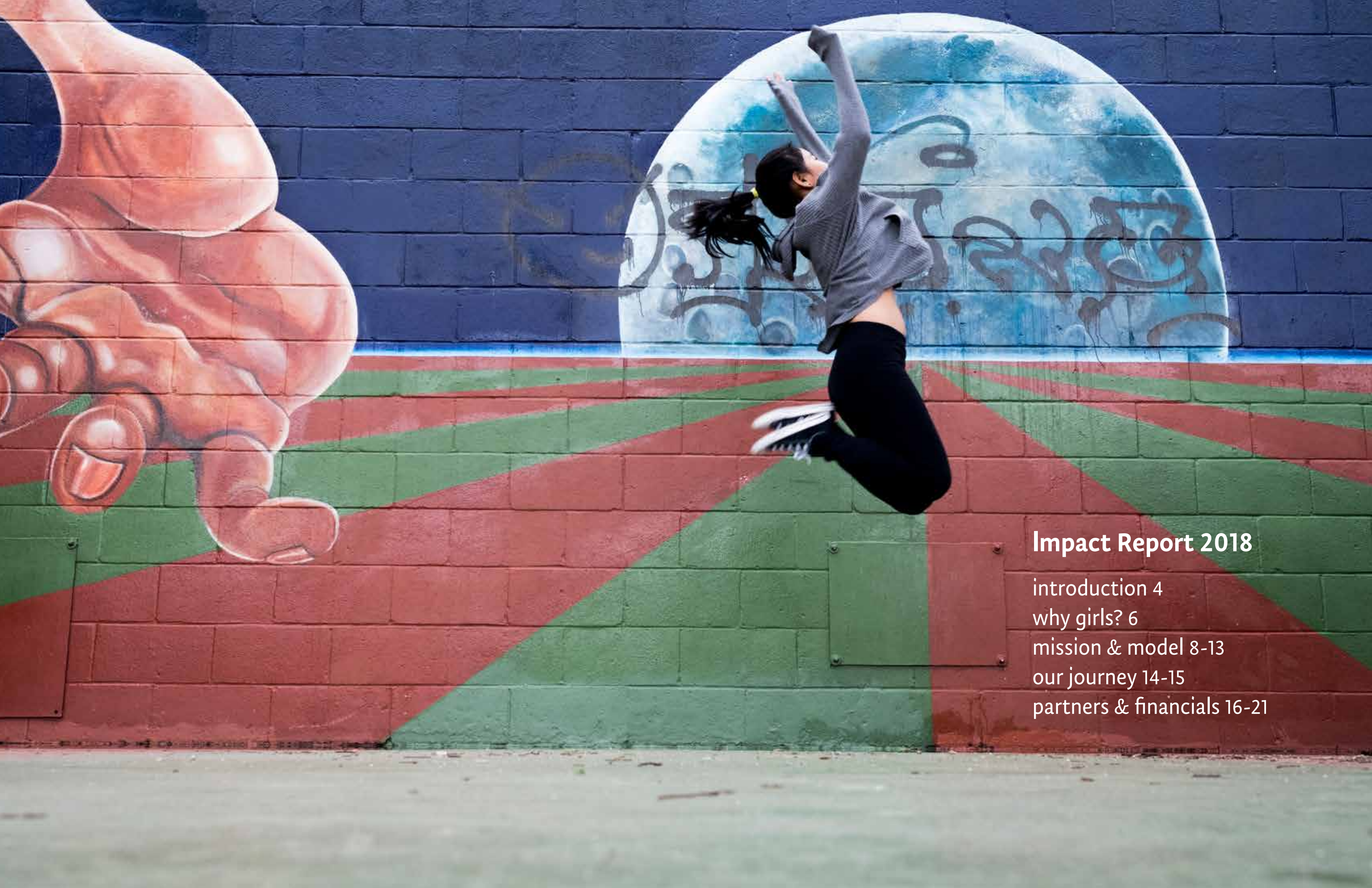




**gf** GIRLFORWARD



## Impact Report 2018

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One summer day, ten girls gathered in the grass near the Lincoln Park Zoo. It was one of those perfect, not-too-hot, not-too-cold days, the kind you have to make the most of in Chicago. We made the most of it by taking pictures - in the park, on the sidewalk, and on the bridge in front of the skyline. Taking pictures was a favorite activity of Girls Group.

In 2010, I met Domitira Nahishakiye at an after-school tutoring center for K-12 students who had recently arrived in Chicago through refugee resettlement. Domi was 18 and had been in Chicago for almost three years. I was 21 and had moved to the city earlier that year. We worked together on homework and English for a few weeks at the after-school center before it became clear that this arrangement wasn't really working for Domi, who needed to be home early for her younger siblings. So we started meeting at her home instead. As a tutor, I wasn't always the best. But while I couldn't do much in the way of graphing equations, there were other things I had to offer: time, familiarity with

the American college admissions process, and the conviction that nothing should stand in the way of a girl going after her dreams.

That was a belief shared by my coworker, Emma, who had discovered in her time as a refugee resettlement caseworker a gap in support for adolescent girls. Together, we formed "Girls Group," a Friday after-school program for girls in high school whose families had recently been resettled in Chicago. We talked and played games. One day, we made pizzas. Another day, a nurse (and friend of mine) gave a presentation on reproductive health. We planned our afternoons, as best we could, according to the needs and dreams of the girls. But just as quickly as we became a group, girls shared their individual challenges and questions. I thought about

the time I had spent with Domi, and how many other young women in Chicago could offer support, friendship, guidance. I knew, almost as soon as it began, that Girls Group was bigger than 10 girls in a church basement.

**GirlForward is what is possible when we dare to imagine a world far better than the one we have been conditioned to accept.**

It has been nearly seven years since we gathered in that park. **Since then, nearly 300 girls have found mentors, friends, and a safe space in what we now know as GirlForward.**

GirlForward used to be notes on a notepad on the Red Line. It used to be 15 women in my apartment, talking about what it could mean to be a mentor. GirlForward was a teacher spending her summer volunteering to lead English class in a third-floor classroom in a non-air conditioned building. And then, it was a check big enough to rent a 200 square foot space on Devon Avenue.

GirlForward is what is possible when we dare to imagine a world far better than the one we have been conditioned to accept. **Each high school graduation, each moment of laughter at Camp GirlForward, each connection between a girl and a mentor, each after-school dance party is the result of a community that has formed around the unwavering belief in the power of girls.**

The past several years have not been without challenges. The same year Reader's Digest called GirlForward the "Best of America," governors in states across the

country called for an end to refugee arrivals in their states. Months later, our country began an election year that fed off hate, fear and ignorance to put a cruel and careless administration into power.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2016 election, GirlForward saw an intense spike in volunteer applications, donations, as well as desire for education. People looked to GirlForward as a source of information and support as they struggled through difficult conversations with friends and family members. With a heightened awareness of not only the present political climate and historical inequity in the United States, but also our organization's role as a leader to individuals and organizations, **the GirlForward team is working harder than ever to ensure that girls are at the center of everything we do - that they are supported and affirmed and that their voices tell their stories.**

Through all of the joy and learning of the past seven years and in considering the journey ahead, I remain hopeful. I'm hopeful because of the people who have believed in, championed, and generously given in support of this mission, and because of nearly 300 girls.

With gratitude,

**Blair Brettschneider**  
Founder & Executive Director



# Why Girls?

We are in the midst of the biggest refugee crisis the world has ever seen. Over 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes.

In conflict-affected areas, girls are especially vulnerable to violence and being kept out of school. On average, GirlForward girls have had two years of schooling before arriving in the U.S., where they are placed in high school based on age. GirlForward focuses on girls because of the specific barriers girls have faced and continue to face.

In recent years, close to 80,000 people have been resettled in the U.S. annually. And despite recent drastic reductions in the number of people admitted through the resettlement program - particularly from Syria - GirlForward's programs are more important than ever. Hateful rhetoric and anti-refugee sentiment has made GirlForward an important place of safety and support for the girls we serve each year. GirlForward is strengthening and expanding core programs while meeting the evolving needs of girls in a challenging time.

**Mission: GirlForward is a community of support dedicated to creating and enhancing opportunities for girls who have been displaced globally by conflict and persecution.**

Through 3 core programs, we address the biggest challenges faced by refugee girls: poverty, limited and disrupted education, language barrier, social isolation, and trauma.





## Mentoring Program

Our Mentoring Program pairs girls with mentors to engage in “4W” activities (Wellness, Wisdom, Wallet and World) in order to explore their passions and graduate from high school.

### wellness

The Wellness category encourages girls to think about physical health, mental health, self-esteem, and positive body image. Mentors and mentees may take a yoga class, meditate, or go on a long walk for Wellness.

### wisdom

The Wisdom category is all about working the brain. Mentors and mentees spend time doing homework, reading books, researching new topics and learning. Mentors provide guidance related to academics, extracurricular activities, and options after graduation, including colleges and careers.

### wallet

Mentors and mentees learn to make budgets, calculate tax, or make a grocery list. Mentors provide essential guidance related to jobs and finances, helping girls to create resumes, apply for jobs, and manage their finances.

### world

Global citizenship is taken to the next level in the World category. Mentors and mentees share their cultural identities, explore the neighborhood, and learn about the world for this category. Girls learn not only how to benefit from resources in their communities, but how to give back using their skills and interests through volunteerism.

**“My mentor is an amazing, sweet, kind, lovely person. My mentor is my hero. GirlForward is such a big community where girls can become confident and raise their voices.”**

Fatima

## Camp GirlForward

Camp GirlForward provides a space for girls to simultaneously build their English skills while exploring their identities and learning about the world around them.

Camp GirlForward takes place for six weeks over the course of the summer. For four days each week, girls are in the classroom with a head instructor and several teaching interns. Each Friday, Camp GirlForward takes a field trip. Throughout the program, girls use public transit to familiarize themselves with the transit system and their new city. Like all of our programming, transit passes are provided to girls at no cost.

**“At Camp GirlForward, I thought about my future.”**

Razia

**“I want to be a doctor to help my grandma, my friends, and people in the United States. I want to pay back my community for how they have helped me.”**

Miriam

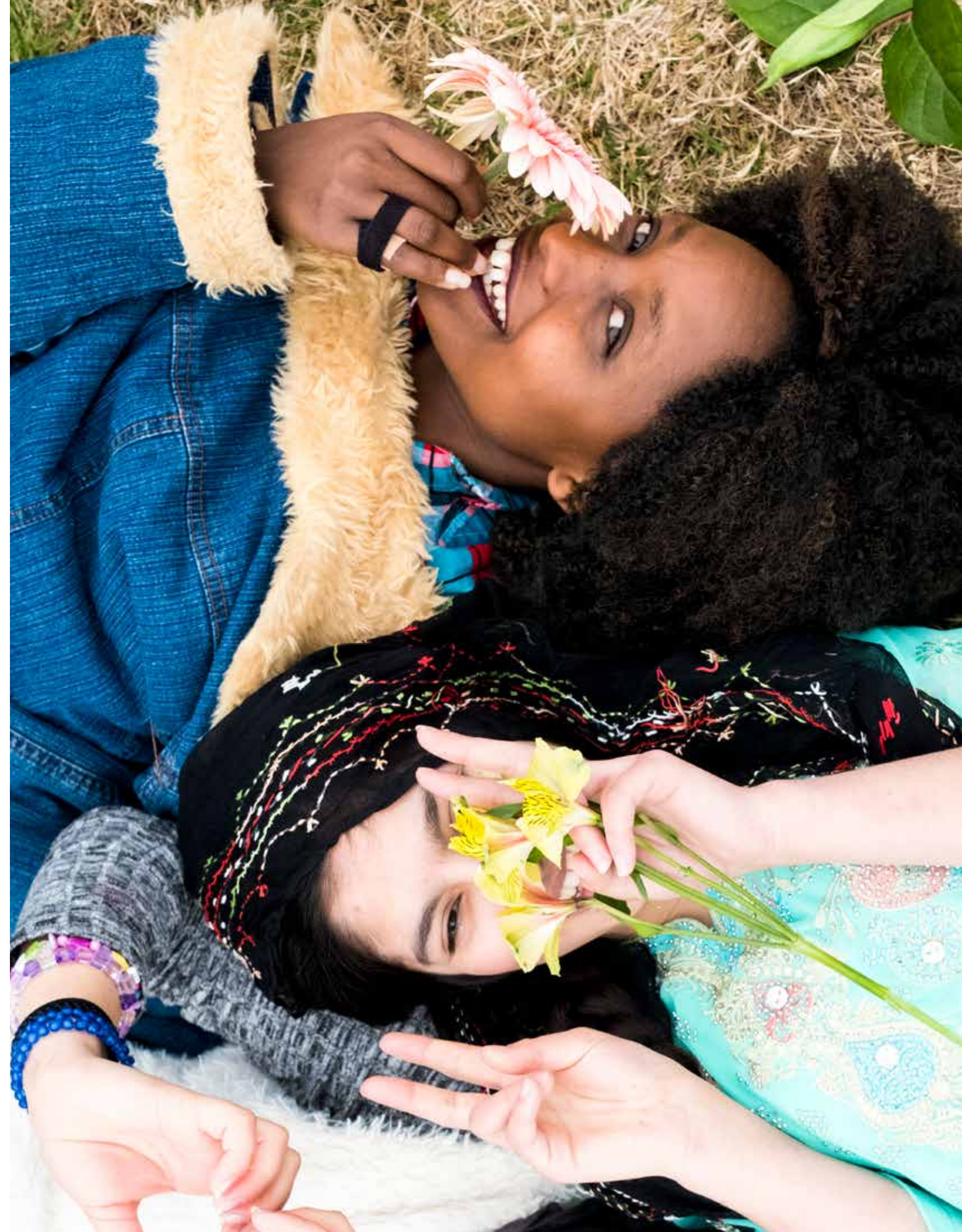
## Safe Spaces Program

The Safe Spaces Program provides safe spaces for girls to explore their identities, connect with other girls, and access the resources they need.

Safe Spaces includes a combination of in-school and after-school tutoring, support groups, and regular workshops and field trips. Safe Spaces is the largest GirlForward program.

**“I love GirlForward because of a lot of reasons, like they have helped me do my homework and improve my English and mathematics. Also, I got some information about universities and scholarships.”**

Fereshteh





### Aug 2011

GirlForward founded in Chicago



### Aug 2012

GirlForward moves into a home on Devon Avenue, in the heart of one of Chicago's most diverse neighborhoods



### June 2013

NoVo Foundation becomes a partner of GirlForward, giving us the resources we need to begin to build a team and strengthen our programs

NoVo Foundation  
create. change.

### Aug 2013

CNN Heroes shines a spotlight on our mission



### Feb 2014

GirlForward moves east on Devon into a home big enough for our growing programs

### April 2015

Reader's Digest buses GirlForward to Washington, D.C. for a photo shoot and features us in their "Best of America" issue



### June 2012

Our very first grant from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) launches the first summer of Camp GirlForward



# gf moving forward since 2011...

### Nov 2015

Chicago Magazine names GirlForward one of the best charities in Chicago



### Jan 2016

GirlForward launches our second chapter in Austin, TX

### Nov 2016

Morton Salt partners with GirlForward for #WalkHerWalk



### Jan 2017

Forbes 30 Under 30 features GirlForward executive director, Blair Brettschneider



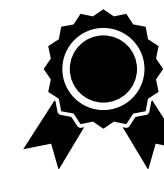
### Dec 2017

GirlForward publishes our first-ever zine, Girls Like Us



### Dec 2017

Chicago votes GirlForward "Best Charity" in the Chicago Reader







## **Our Partners**

**NoVo Foundation**

**MacArthur Foundation**

**Morton Salt**

**Chicago Foundation for Women**

**Springboard Foundation**

**Salah Foundation**

**Conant Family Foundation**

**Shield-Ayres Foundation**

**Irvin Stern Foundation**

**Seawell Elam Foundation**

**GO Campaign**

# Our Girls



So far, our girls have come from 16 different countries!



# Board of Directors

Hadeel Abdulkareem

Anjali Johnson

Katherine Kaufka Walts

Molly Keelan

Shala Khan

Katie Lennox

Priya Nalkur-Pai

Dimitra Tasiouras

Carla Tresslar

Jennifer Wagner

Val Weiss

Rebecca Wheeler

Anne Wilson

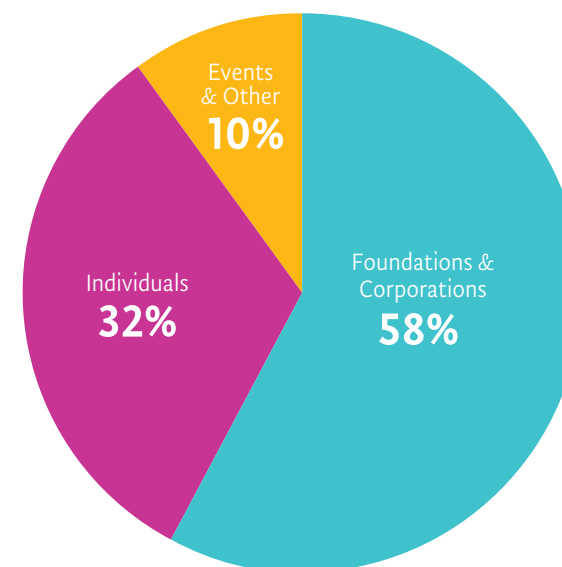
Katie Woods

# By the numbers

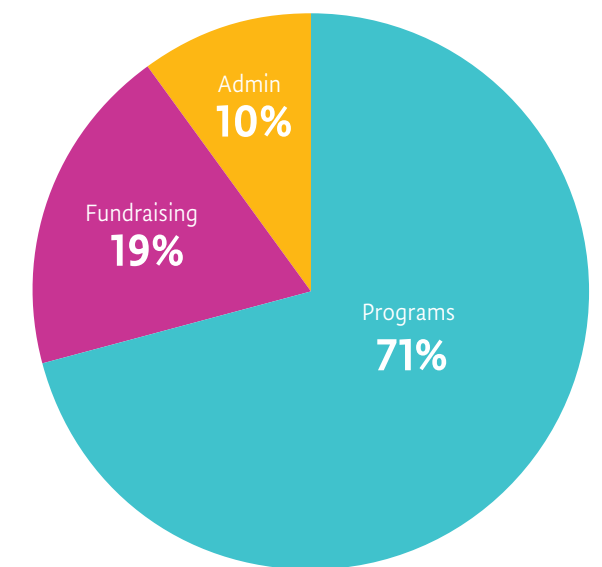
<b>FINANCIALS</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>SUPPORT &amp; REVENUE</b>		
Foundations & Corporations	\$294,492	\$196,105
Individuals	\$170,881	\$101,566
Events & Other Income	\$53,671	\$30,809
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenue</b>	<b>\$519,044</b>	<b>\$328,480</b>

<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Programs	\$286,996	\$219,952
Fundraising	\$82,467	\$49,890
Administrative	\$48,279	\$27,126
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$417,742</b>	<b>\$296,968</b>

Revenue (2016-2017)



Expenses (2016-2017)





**Each year, 100% of our Mentoring Program seniors graduate from high school.**

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**Close to 90% of Mentoring Program graduates go on to attend college.**

**100% of Camp GirlForward girls increase their English skills over the course of the six week program.**

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**On average, girls jump ahead by one grade level over the course of the summer.**







GIRLFORWARD

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773 856 0598 [girlforward.org](http://girlforward.org)