



2017 ANNUAL REPORT



Letter from the Co-Presidents

Persistence! That's the word that most defines our year. Not only have our youth activists persisted in our pursuit for solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems, they've done it all with an electrifying energy that just won't quit.

How?

Students with School Girls Unite (SGU) have pressured Members of Congress for over a decade and finally, the Education for All Act is now law. The lives of 75 girls in Mali are transformed forever because of scholarships provided by SGU's creative events and fundraisers held year after year. The relentless efforts of these young activists are featured alongside 14 other youth-led initiatives in *Wonder Girls: Changing our World*, which documents the journeys of girl activists, aged 10-18, who are change makers in their corners of the world. This book features our persistence that led to SGU's victorious grassroots campaign, establishing the International Day of the Girl.

Locally, our students have testified at multiple hearings and repeatedly emailed individual elected officials and these efforts contributed to the passage of two new county ordinances. In addition to collaborating with hundreds of young activists in Maryland, our national nonprofit amplifies campaigns across the country such as students who advocate for restorative justice to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Our "Youth Voice and Youth Vote" was chosen as the closing speech at TEDxYouth about unstoppable activists demanding suffrage for 16 and 17-year-olds for all school board candidates and local legislators.

Perhaps the most exciting development...our six-month strategic planning process, influenced heavily by the teen participants, set in motion a new direction for the Youth Activism Project. We seek to scale our impact to engage even more young activists around the world, like the many who've already participated in our programs. In the words of a School Girls Unite alum:

"The more young people see that they can have a positive impact, the more naturally activism will be part of their future."

We will continue to persist by sharing more stories and creating toolkits full of effective advocacy strategies so that all youth will believe it is normal and expected for young people to participate fully, at all levels of decision-making. With the rising tide of incredible youth activism across the US, we are excited for what's to come.

Thank you for your support,

Anika Manzoor & Wendy Schaezel Lesko, Co-Presidents



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School Girls Unite: 10+ Years of Impact

Since 2004, one generation after another of School Girls Unite persists as philanthropists and policy advocates. After 14 years of writing to Members of Congress and meeting with legislative staff, the Education for All Act became law in 2017. SGU’s middle and high school members organized successful fundraising events which allowed girls in Mali to attend school for an entire year.



Our sister organization, Les Filles Unies pour l’Education (FU), continued to serve as our steady guide in Mali, even amid the severe political and social instability in Mali. Live Skype and Facebook conversations persisted with FU about the students who receive scholarships. Fortunately, SGU’s diversity means this digital exchange is often enabled by one of our high schoolers who speaks French.

“My grandfather and my father encourage me a lot to continue my studies.” - Djéneba

As of October 2017, the remaining [23 SGU Scholarship Recipients](#) continued to move closer to completing lower secondary school. Our sister organization can take credit for delaying child marriages for at least three students and persuading the husband of another scholar to allow his wife to continue school. In the past three years, we are happy to say that 20 girls graduated from the ninth grade. This is outstanding since less than one percent of rural Malian girls usually reach this education level.

Although these girls still face extreme poverty along with adverse notions many still have about educating girls, they have seen a shift in attitudes because of their achievements.



“At my school, now the girls and boys are treated the same way, and in fact in my class the girls are doing better than the boys.” - Kadia



Art, Activism & Advocacy for Girls Worldwide

For International Day of the Girl, join Women Thrive Alliance, School Girls Unite, the Global Fund for Women, and famed photographer Paola Gianturco for an evening of hors d'oeuvres and wine.

Date: October 9, 2017
Time: 7pm - 9pm
Location: Busboys & Poets
2021 14th Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

****Click here to RSVP****



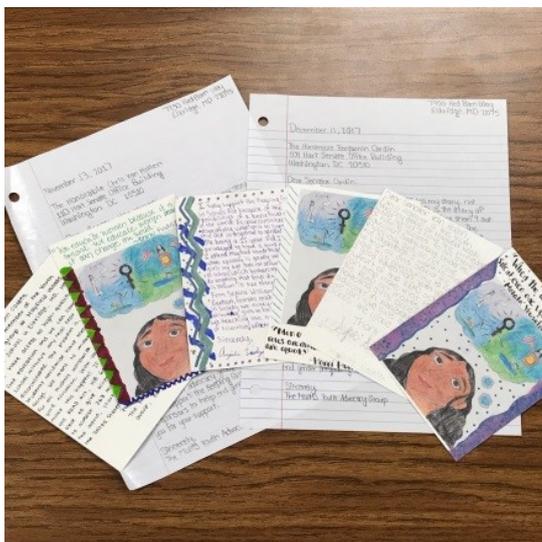
The Youth Activism Project is thrilled to highlight the high level of engagement, leadership and persistence of young activists with whom we coach.

In February, a team of middle school students in Columbia, Maryland organized a countywide summit. These young people hosted a dozen youth-led workshops for 100 School Girls Unite activists.

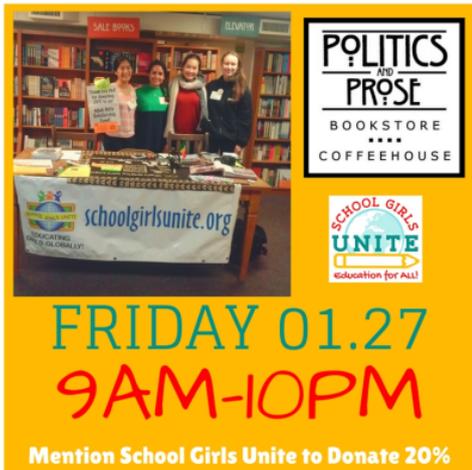
The interactive workshops offered creative opportunities for youth to learn how to lobby Congress, the role of fundraising and outreach, and how to build an effective website and fundraising campaign.



A member of the Mayfield Woods Middle School Youth Advocacy Group was pleased with the information she took away from her participation in the summit.



"We listened to other SGU members give presentations on what stands out to legislators. They said that handwritten letters and postcards stand out more than emails. Using these ideas, our group decided to write postcards for Keeping Girls in School Act. One of our group members, Anjali, designed a picture to go on every postcard. It shows a picture of a girl dreaming of all the things that she can accomplish."



The Bethesda Chevy-Chase High School chapter hosted a second successful event with [Politics & Prose](#) on a wintry day in January. This event resulted in donations from the bookstore of over \$500. School Girls Unite advocates also learned important lessons about the interpersonal skills necessary for fundraising to support their cause!

“It was a delicate dance of trying to make eye contact, smiling encouragingly and politely, but enthusiastically explaining the very simple steps to helping our cause.” - Mian

Another [middle school chapter](#) in Ellicott City, Maryland organized a film screening and discussion of the POV documentary, “What Tomorrow Brings,” about the first school for girls in a remote Afghan village. At this event in May, these students raised \$750 which will cover the cost of tuition, school supplies, books and mentoring for 10 scholarship recipients during the 2018-2019 school year.

Students at [Bay Shore High School](#) in New York organized an assembly for the International Day of the Girl in October with powerful speakers, including activist Naila Amin, who spent most of her childhood in Queens before moving to Pakistan in order to be married at 15. Although, she eventually managed to escape the abusive marriage and return to the United States, the ordeal greatly impacted her life. To continue our message of helping girls and bring attention to the work done by School Girls Unite, Bay Shore High School hosted a screening of the documentary, “Girl Rising.” This event ended with a lively discussion session regarding the challenges girls must face and the factors that impede success, such as child marriage and other harmful cultural practices, poverty, and war.

“The students at Bay Shore High School are committed to making a difference in the lives of girls everywhere.” - Juliette

Our successful grassroots campaign in 2012 to mobilize US support to establish the UN International Day of the Girl Child won recognition in Paola Gianturco's latest book, [*Wonder Girls*](#).



This award-winning photojournalist launched her book tour on this annual girls' rights day, October 11th. School Girls Unite students spoke at events hosted by the Women Thrive Alliance at Busboys & Poets in Washington, DC and the Women's Giving Circle of Howard County at the Community College in Columbia, MD.

Much attention focused on 13-year-old Julia Moyer, one of the activists profiled in the chapter about School Girls Unite in *Wonder Girls*, who created, [Writing a Letter to a Senator or Representative How-To Guide](#), which can be viewed on our website.



Since 2004, School Girls Unite students have been collecting signatures on petitions, writing to their legislators, and meeting with Members of Congress on several related issues. Some of these human rights demands included preventing child marriage and securing additional educational resources for girls in refugee camps.

"What a fantastic evening! I met so many supportive people and that gave me even more energy to keep on moving forward and fighting. This book gives me happiness especially as we live in a very corrupt world; it gives me hope and shows there is good going on out there!" - Julia



During 2017, SGU focused energy on US Senator Ben Cardin, a senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee, to push for a final vote for the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development Act (READ). Originally called Education for All, this bill, signed into law in 2017, establishes a permanent Education for All Coordinator at the US State Department.

These activities represent the breadth of tangible social change actions that School Girls Unite activists have pursued over the last 14 years. 2017 also represents a big year because we were able to finally measure the impact School Girls Unite has had on our youth activists.

Student Testimonials



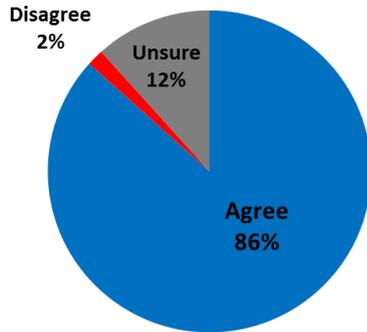
“I think cultivating that collaborative and supportive environment is what makes SGU so special. It really gives people a comfortable space to grow their community organizing skills, and I think building that community is what keeps people coming back.”

“Being a part of School Girls Unite has helped me make the difference I have always wanted to. Before SGU, I always wanted to help out the world and women around the world but had no idea how to get in touch. SGU has provided me the opportunity to really push for change.”

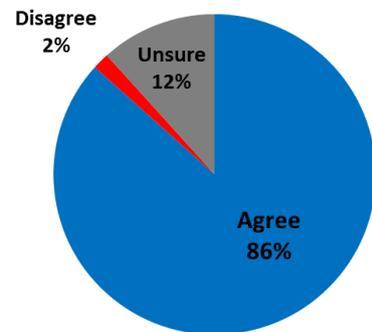
Check out our blog posts on our website for highlights on many newsworthy developments about youth-driven efforts and multi-generational collaboration.

Impact Data

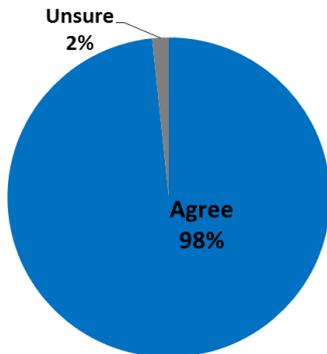
School Girls Unite helped me improve my self confidence



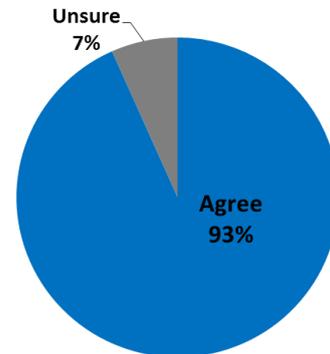
School Girls Unite helped me identify as an activist



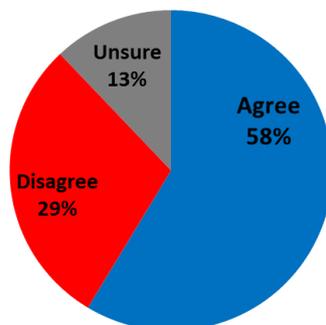
School Girls Unite helped me become interested in global issues



School Girls Unite helped me to contribute to "real" social and political change as a young person



School Girls Unite helped me discover what I want to study in college



Spotlight on Other Young Advocates

Health Activists on the Rise!

Awful school lunches, nasty tasting water and ads for unhealthy snacks and beverages marketed to teens are some of the health issues bugging students today. Working with the Youth Activism Project, students channeled their grievances by gathering evidence through surveys, sending emails to county councilmembers and meeting with these representatives.

Over many months, Wendy Lesko collaborated with students from several high schools in Prince George's County, Maryland who played a significant role in the passage of the Healthy Vending Act that took effect on September 18, 2017.

Two of these activists testified at a committee hearing and a third before the full county council on this bill to increase choices other than sugary-sweetened iced teas and sodas in machines at public libraries, recreation centers and other community spaces.



Multiple emails to legislators and testimony by two other high school students in neighboring Montgomery County were credited with the passage of a similar ordinance, requiring machines be stocked with healthy options that are less expensive than sports drinks and other sugar-loaded beverages.

Four of these student activists received a standing applause after speaking about their experiences and their needs from adult allies at a national conference of policy advocates during July in Baltimore, Maryland.



“I was so nervous. It is amazing my speech helped get a law passed.” - Katherine

“I believe that adults should be open to input from the youth because the youth of today can help better our tomorrow.” - Francis

“We want a seat at the table in this movement, so we can make sure our generation does live just as long as our parents.” - Vanessa



Restorative Justice Advocates

We continued to research [student-led campaigns](#) across the country to end the school- to-prison pipeline and replace zero tolerance policies with restorative practices.

Our [2017 Student Listening Project](#) focused on building circles which serve as a pro-active process to restorative justice circles. Verbatim quotes by students interviewed and our online scan of 15 states revealed reflections and recommendations.



“We talk about the school-to-prison pipeline and racial injustice in class. We give chances for students to talk about a problem. And suspensions are really crazy...It makes me really upset that students are pulled [out of school] because of their beliefs or the color their skin. Here [restorative justice class] we actually talk it out and that’s what makes the school really good with discipline.” - Myra

“In my opinion it doesn’t matter how welcoming the school is, I think you never can get through a time period or get to a place when you don’t need community building things. I have a lot of classes where there is a positive energy that don’t use circles, but that doesn’t say they are not necessary.” - Tara



Lower the Vote Campaigns

Lower the voting age to 16? The typical reaction from adults is negative. Young people often agree that their peers are too immature to vote. The Youth Activism Project helped spark debate about youth-led campaigns across the country to lower the voting age.

Wendy Lesko’s TEDx Talk on [“Youth Voice AND Youth Vote”](#) reflected the Youth Activism Project’s sustained support to [extend voting rights](#) for school board and city council elections.



More Youth Activism Project Highlights

Anika in Morocco and India

Anika presented workshops at the 2017 International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) Conference and Youth Summit in Marrakesh. Her interactive sessions emphasized reciprocal collaboration based on the theory of change that when youth around the world look to each other for support on local issues, they become more intentional and inclusive champions for global change.

Youth Activism Project is advising girls from Prerna Girls School in Lucknow, India, who—for the first time—are developing community change initiatives in their low-income community. To combat the pervasive sexual harassment and assault in their lives, they have created the We Will Not Tolerate campaign, which involves leading workshops to raise awareness about this issue in surrounding villages. These international partnerships are part of the Youth Activism Project's newest initiative, Activism Across Borders, to eventually promote more cross-border collaboration between our activists around the world.





“They [the students] are thinking critically and they want to learn something from this. Before when we started talking with these girls, they were very quiet and they were not giving answer. When we started talking, they slowly started to open. They decided to continue because of the discussions they were having.”
- Preeti, adult ally of the We Will Not Tolerate campaign

Wendy in Florida and Ohio

The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence contracted with the Youth Activism Project for a third time to facilitate a workshop at its statewide summit. Building on this interactive session, Wendy contributed to the new publication titled, “Youth Leaders and Social Change: A Toolkit for Mentorship, Gender Equity, Anti-Oppression, and Activism.”

The Kettering Foundation in Ohio invited the Youth Activism Project to participate in a series of roundtable discussions on innovative approaches to increase youth community engagement outside of school which aligns with our philosophy about the importance of experiential education beyond the classroom. We will share the Foundation’s forthcoming report.



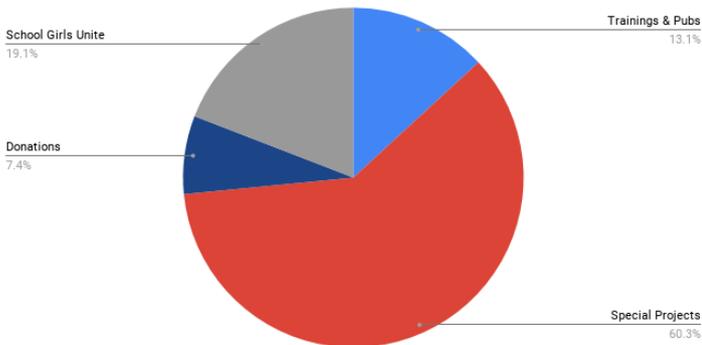


Financial Snapshot

Nearly 90 percent of our budget is dedicated to supporting young people who gain real world leadership skills and apply their talents and passion in mobilizing public support and advocating to elected officials and other decision makers. Our administrative expenses are bundled to include website development that total only about 15 percent of our lean budget of \$12,800 that delivers concrete results.

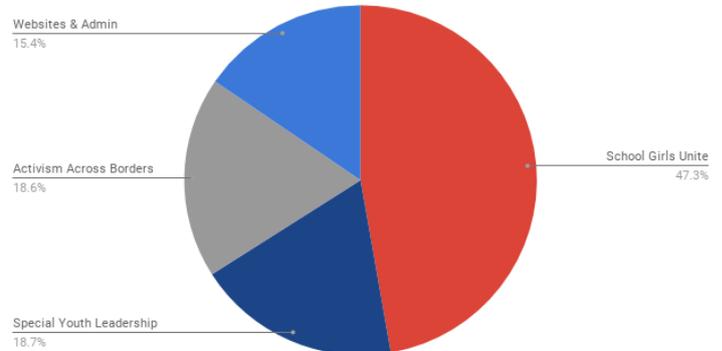
The majority of our income comes from training and consulting, including Sugar Free Kids Maryland. Most donations support School Girls Unite and 100% of these contributions are invested in our Mali Girls Scholarship Program. Publications such as our \$65 toolkit for adults on effective multigenerational collaboration are now free downloads so this revenue is no longer significant. With a reserve of \$17,380, income totaled \$52,761, resulting in a balance of \$40,000 as of December 31, 2017. Pro bono services and in-kind donations are estimated at \$121,500 with total assets approximately \$160,000.

2017 Income



Trainings & Pubs	\$4,647.00	13.1
Special Projects	\$21,340.00	60.3
Donations	\$2,631.00	7.4
School Girls Unite	\$6,764.00	19.1

2017 Expenses



School Girls Unite	\$6,049.00	47.3
Special Youth Leadership Projects	\$2,394.00	18.7
Activism Across Borders	\$2,381.00	18.6
Websites & Admin	\$1,977.00	15.4

Our Vision for the Future

Our track record in 2017 is full of accomplishments and our history is notable. When volunteerism was the prevailing norm, the Youth Activism Project stepped out in front and trained hundreds of students across the country in community problem-solving. When school districts adopted student service-learning requirements for graduation, our national organization equipped thousands of young people to build on their service-learning experiences and advocate for systemic change in the public policy arena from city councils to the US Congress.

As we look ahead, the Youth Activism Project is starting to develop an interactive playbook brimming with tools and strategies to spark more youth-driven systemic change campaigns around the world and at scale. We also will continue to advance Activism Across Borders at this critical time when we are witness to the largest youth demographic seen in global history. These international partnerships are part of our newest initiative to eventually promote more cross-border collaboration between our activists around the world. We envision a future where it is normal and expected for young people to be involved in every level of decision-making. Together, we will continue to shift the narrative to say that youth CAN make a real impact. We hope you will join us by sharing your ideas and talents. Thank you!



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