



Media Contacts: Amy Carr, 512.695.9621; Ana Juarez, 915.888.1650

Texas Bar Foundation and Women & Girls Development Fund Join Forces, Back Girls Empowerment Network's Expansion of Girl Connect into San Antonio

Girls Empowerment Network helps girls stay in school, get on track,
and reach their full potential

AUSTIN — November 19, 2021 – Girls Empowerment Network today announced it will expand its unique school-based Girl Connect intervention program by establishing services in Bexar County and San Antonio. A \$7,500 grant from the Texas Bar Foundation and a \$10,000 grant from the Women & Girls Development Fund (WGDF) provide the seed money for this expansion.

In partnership with schools, Girl Connect groups are customized to meet the unique needs of high-risk girls ages 8-18 with the goal to ignite each girl's self-efficacy or their internal belief they can be successful. Girls may be referred to the Girl Connect program for disciplinary issues, exhibiting outbursts in class, fighting, self-harm, anxiety, involvement with the juvenile justice system, frequent truancy, and more. Some girls are referred directly, and others are recruited by school partners who identify them as high risk and in need of support.

"Our expansion into Bexar County is building on the conversations we've had with several school districts in the San Antonio area that are looking for a partner who can help girls adopt a growth mindset, advocate effectively for themselves and change the trajectory of their lives," says Julia Cuba Lewis, executive director of Girls Empowerment Network. "Our ultimate goal is to increase girls' self-efficacy by developing what we call the Six Cs – critical thinking, creativity, communication, coping skills, collaboration and confidence – all essential tools for long-term well-being and resilience."

Girls Empowerment Network's Girl Connect program has been proven to reduce and prevent girls' disciplinary issues; increase their self-efficacy, bonding and prosocial behaviors; and improve academic achievement, attendance and behavior so that girls can build happy, healthy futures. The program currently takes place at schools in the Greater Austin area, Houston and Dallas.

Girls Empowerment Network first piloted the program in partnership with Travis County courts in 2010. It has since branched out to serve girls in four Central Texas counties. The program was launched in Harris County in 2018 and expanded in 2019 to serve more girls in the Greater Houston metropolitan area. In 2020, the program launched in Dallas County. With the grants from Texas Bar Foundation and the Women & Girls Development Fund, Bexar County will be its newest service area.

“Girl Connect fills the gaps for thousands of at-risk girls across Texas, meeting them where they are, teaching important socio-emotional skills and providing a safe place to practice them among a small group of peers and supportive role models,” says Cuba Lewis. “Whether girls join the group voluntarily or are referred, they soon treasure the activities and supportive community, which helps them persist in their academic and life goals.”

Girl Connect groups meet weekly for 8-20 weeks, creating consistency and a sense of safety for girls. Historically, girls who are referred come from low-income households and report tough situations at home.

One 12th grader shared what participating in Girl Connect meant to her: "Group gave me a reason to look forward to school. It gave me a chance out of class to relax and feel comfortable working with other people and learning about my feelings. It helped me feel less stressed and let me express my emotions better."

With funding from the Texas Bar Foundation, Girls Empowerment Network has had success in establishing Girl Connect in Travis, Williamson, Hays, Caldwell, Harris and Dallas counties. While the grants from both the Texas Bar Foundation and Women and Girls Development Fund will seed the expansion of Girl Connect into Bexar County, the Texas Bar Foundation funding is specifically for Girl Connect Referral Groups.

Recent outcomes for Girls Empowerment Network programs include the following:

- 96 percent of girls believe they can achieve their goals.
- 93 percent of girls are comfortable working with others who are different than them.
- 91 percent of girls can now use critical thinking to find solutions to a challenge.
- 89 percent of girls learned to be kind to themselves when going through a tough time.
- 95 percent of girls would recommend Girls Empowerment Network services to others.

About Girls Empowerment Network:

Since 1996, Girls Empowerment Network has been helping girls discover they are powerful. Through school-based programs, camps, events, workshops and Spark Kits, Girls Empowerment Network ignites power in girls ages 8–18 by teaching them skills to thrive and believe in their ability to be unstoppable. The organization is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year with an advocacy and activism theme.

www.girlsempowermentnetwork.org

About the Texas Bar Foundation:

Since its inception in 1965, the Texas Bar Foundation has awarded more than \$23 million in grants to law-related programs. Supported by members of the State Bar of Texas, the Texas Bar Foundation is the nation's largest charitably-funded bar foundation. www.txbf.org

About Women & Girls Development Fund:

Since 2012, the Women & Girls Development Fund has distributed more than 200,000 to charitable programs in San Antonio serving women and girls. The WGDF is a community outreach fund of the San Antonio Area Foundation that promotes philanthropy and supports non-profit organizations serving women and girls in the San Antonio area through leadership development and mentorship to empower them and help them reach their full potential. www.wgdf.org

###