

*"I think sports and girls go together. Bridges brings girls together and teaches them how much fun sports are. Sports are for girls."*

Corinna, age 10

**A**lthough the number of female athletes is growing, too many girls still sit on the sidelines watching boys slam dunk or sprint toward the finish line. As spectators they miss the chance to develop skills that will help them succeed and habits that can keep them healthy:

- Children ages 9 and 10 who participate in sports rate higher on perceived physical competence and general self worth than those who didn't do sports.
- In a study of high school students, young women who participated in sports were 40 percent less likely to drop out of high school and 33 percent less likely to become teen mothers than their non-athletic counterparts. Young women who participated in sports were also less likely to have smoked cigarettes than those who were not participating in sports.
- Research shows that adolescent girls who exercise regularly can reduce their risk for obesity, coronary heart disease, and osteoporosis.
- Girls who are athletes in high school are more likely to have higher grades and standardized test scores, and are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to attend college.

Girls Incorporated aims to make sports an integral part of girls lives and recognizes that girls have much to gain by early participation in sports. According to one expert, if a girl does not participate in sports by the time she is ten, there is only a 10 percent chance that she will be athletic when she is 25. Sporting Chance provides girls with opportunities to have fun; to learn basic movement and sports skills; increase their coordination; consider the career opportunities connected to sports; learn about successful athletes and the history of women in sports. They learn how to be both cooperative and competitive, how to discipline their bodies and their minds.

## PEER COACHES

In the Sporting Chance program older girls and teens develop leadership skills, provide assistance to adult coaches and gain work experience as peer coaches.

## STEPPINGSTONES<sup>SM</sup>

**Ages 6-8:** Steppingstones is a motor-skill development program that gets girls running, jumping, leaping, twisting, bending and balancing as they utilize a variety of sports and movement related equipment, including jump ropes, balls, scooters, bats, bowling pins, nets, hoops and scoops. They begin to move more confidently and skillfully, get used to structured physical activity, learn about the positive connection between physical activity and health related fitness, and learn that sport is a legitimate activity for girls and women. The movement skills girls develop in Steppingstones may later apply to the formal movement in a variety of games, sports, dance and fitness activities.

## BRIDGES<sup>SM</sup>

**Ages 9-11:** Bridges picks up where Steppingstones leaves off, enhancing girls' motor skills while introducing them to the world of organized sports. Girls focus on the skills and strategies of four sports: softball (throwing, catching, and striking); soccer (kicking and agility); basketball (shooting and teamwork); tennis (striking and individual competence). Girls learn the concepts of offense, defense, and teamwork, and develop skills in a progression that leads to game readiness. The four sport specific skills can be applied to many other activities and provide a foundation for lifelong participation in sports.

## RESULTS

During the Steppingstones field test of four skills (jumping, underhand throwing, catching, and kicking) skills improved in 92 percent of girls who completed the program. During the Bridges field test participation in the program produced skill improvements in 91 percent of girls. Ninety-five percent reported that they would participate in recreational or interscholastic sports if the opportunities were available.

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