

# Mentoring Girls in Leadership Programs

Upon graduating from university I was fortunate enough to travel to St. Lucia on an internship. I was placed at the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports. In this department, my task was to work collaboratively with netballers (Netball is non-contact sport that was derived from basketball. It primarily played in New Zealand, Australia and the West Indies. Over 20 million people play in 70 countries) in the Caribbean to develop a healthy lifestyle project. The program was twofold; create a sustainable program and train youth along with adults to implement the program.

In less than a year we were able to develop a program, and create a manual and youth workbook. The project was entitled The Healthy Lifestyle Project (HLP). Working closely with the youth netballers allowed me to gain insight on the needs and strengths of young active women. The girls were eager to acquire leadership skills and also have a platform to discuss issues affecting them.

I realized that the most integral part of the program was the training of the youth leaders. Time constraints did not allow for as much training as I would have desired, however the adult leaders in the Caribbean were able to work closely with the girls to give them assistance. This experience provided me with the necessary tools to come back to Canada and start a program partially designed by young women.

*She's Got that Vibe* dance leadership program ran for one year in the community of Regent Park. This dynamic program involved 'Big Sisters' from local high schools who worked closely with shy, inactive girls in grade seven and eight. On Wednesdays the program focused on leadership and workshops pertaining to adolescence. Then on Sundays we hit the studio and learned choreography from the *RUKUS* dance troop. The girls graduated with a certificate, made new friends, learned about themselves, and had a positive experience.

Unfortunately, due to lack of funding and limited resources the program no longer exists. I learned from working with shy, inactive females, that the traditional forms of advertising; flyers, emails, personal letters from organizations do not attract shy girls. Intense, recruitment in conversations, phone calls and parental permission were successful avenues used to convince girls to participate in the program. The program was not designed for the typical type of girls who come out to programs and activities, since the shy girls did not feel comfortable expressing themselves in their presence. Such factors are important to remember when creating program for young women.

Women have commonalities, however differ depending on class, ethnicity, religion, ability, and culture. The experiences I have gained in mentoring have demonstrated to me that flexibility and uncovering the individual identities of young women are strong determinants in the sustainability of programs.