

The list of non-profit organizations with which our staff members are involved is unbelievably long. Of these organizations, two caught our eye because of their unique focus on girls. Here, staff members involved with these girl-centric organizations share their stories of involvement.

Three years ago, **Laura T. Pitsikoulis**, Atlanta, GA, was introduced to **Girl Talk** through her friendship with the group's founder, Haley Kilpatrick. At the time, Laura recalls, "Haley was working her way through college while trying to get this non-profit off the ground." Girl Talk is a no-fee, student-to-student mentoring program that pairs middle school girls with high school girls who serve as mentors. At weekly meetings, held before or after school, the high school mentor conducts valuable lessons that address issues common to most middle school-aged girls.

The mother of two sons, Laura initially "stayed on the fringes" of involvement with Girl Talk: many of the organization's volunteers have daughters and are involved for *their* betterment. The gender of her children did not matter when, "after being involved in several of Girl Talk's community events and getting to know members, I realized how great it would have been if *I'd* had a program like Girl Talk when *I* was in middle school."

Laura immediately began volunteering and working to further Girl Talk's efforts to help shape the next generation of women into confident, successful, compassionate women. Recently, Laura saw first-hand the reach of Girl Talk. On a fateful plane ride from Atlanta to Philadelphia, she sat by a woman serving on the Delaware State Mentoring Board who had just attended a conference in Atlanta where the keynote speaker was the founder of Girl Talk. "This board member just happened to sit next to *me*. *And she* wants to bring Girl Talk to Delaware. It blew me away!"

Now a dedicated Girl Talk board member, Laura is determined to expand the organization's presence and, buoyed by her recent chance encounter, she has her eye on Delaware. As she says, "Girl Talk feels like the place for me to be."

Her business connections and long-held interest in female-focused organizations (she's been a Wilmington Women in Business member and board member of Fresh Start Scholarship Foundation, a non-profit organization that awards scholarships to women returning to school to better their financial opportunities), led to **Pat Ponzio's** (Wilmington, DE) involvement with the board of directors for **Girls Inc.®**, a non-profit organization that strives to inspire girls, provide them with the tools to be strong, smart, and bold and achieve success in their lives. Through programming provided by Girls Inc., young women from all economic backgrounds are able to build their confidence, learn new skills, set and reach goals that help them grow, and develop positive relationships.

After touring the Girls Inc. facility and meeting several of the young Ambassadors for the group, Pat was impressed by the success of the mission. "Those girls (the Ambassadors) promptly introduced themselves, maintained eye contact, and gave me a firm handshake. I was hooked. The girls' confidence was impressive!" While Pat believes that both girls and boys are equally equipped to succeed, girls are often more susceptible to negative societal messages, which can, in turn, cause them to be less likely to live up to their full potential.

Today, Pat, an active member of the Girls Inc. personnel committee, is, “profoundly affected by the girls’ achievements. As someone who often has jitters before presentations, I watch in awe as eleven year olds speak in front of large audiences with all the self confidence in the world.”



Laura Pitsikoulis (left) passes a Girl Talk spirit stick to Haley Kilpatrick, founder