



The Valuable Girl Project Progress Report (Academic Year 2005 – 2006)

Executive Summary

The Valuable Girl Project is the innovative Coptic Orphans development program with the goal of empowerment of girls and young women in high-poverty areas of Egypt through the creation and provision of role models. It uses an educational mentoring model, through which young women in secondary school, the “big sisters,” become role models for girls in primary school, the “little sisters,” through a one-on-one mentoring relationship.

In 2005-2006, Coptic Orphans expanded the Valuable Girl Project to 12 sites throughout Egypt, including 530 program participants and various national and local partners.

The most significant impacts of the program during the 2005-2006 academic year were the increased academic retention for the “big sisters” and the “little sisters,” and increased number of national identity cards as well as health insurance cards issued for the program participants. Forty-two percent of the “big sisters” obtained their national identity cards from a baseline of fifteen percent. Thirty percent of both the “big sisters” and the “little sisters” obtained their health insurance cards.

Program Impact:

- ***99.5 % academic retention rate for both “big sisters” and “little sisters” in areas where drop-out rates for girls reaches 30%.***
- ***42% of “big sisters” with national identity cards – from a baseline of 15% in 2005.***
- ***30% of “big” and “little” sisters with health insurance cards – from a baseline of 22% in 2005.***



The Valuable Girl Project Overview

The Valuable Girl Project is the innovative Coptic Orphans development program with the goal of empowerment of girls and young women through the creation and provision of role models. It uses an educational mentoring model, through which young women in secondary school become role models for girls in primary school through a one-on-one mentoring relationship. The program focuses on high poverty areas of Egypt, where girls of all ages face a high risk of dropping out of school due to poverty and bias against girls. In the program, girls in high school and college are trained to be role models and academic mentors to girls in primary school. Through one-on-one mentoring and tutoring, these “big sisters” read stories and do homework and other academic activities with their “little sisters.”



A “big sister” with her “little sister” in Ezbit Khairallah, 2005.

All participants in the Valuable Girl Project become empowered. The “big sisters” realize the value of their education for their empowerment through the responsibility of assisting a younger girl in her schoolwork and serving as a role model. They receive a monthly stipend, which is given directly to them and which they are free to spend as they wish. They become leaders in their community and advocates for girls’ education. They find support in each other, as some of the few young women who have reached higher levels of education in their villages. The “little sisters” receive positive, educated role models in their “big sisters.” They receive academic support in an environment that, unlike their school environment, encourages them, respects them, and recognizes their immense value as girls who deserve access to all opportunities.

The Valuable Girl Project Program Activity

The Valuable Girl Project empowers girls through education by the creation and provision of positive, educated female role models and encouraging girls to continue their education. VGP establishes a one on one mentoring relationship between one girl in secondary school, the “big sister,” and one girl in primary school, the “little sister.” The “big sister” acts as a mentor to her “little sister” as she helps her learn her school lessons, practice her hobbies, learn through educational games, and read books, in addition to providing emotional support on personal matters.

The values transmitted through the program include a sense of self worth, role modeling, dynamic education and life long learning, appreciating individual differences, tolerance and respect of different religions, and the right to education and thus access to better opportunities.



Criteria for Program Participants

Program participants are chosen according to the following criteria: “Big sisters” must be in the age group of 15 – 20 years, must be enrolled in high school degree, technical high school, or university. They are chosen based on their risk of dropping out of school due to poverty or possible social pressures, such as early marriage. “Little sisters” must be in the age group of 7 – 13 years and must be enrolled in primary school. They are chosen based on their risk of dropping out of school due to poverty, poor academic achievement (evidenced by grade repetition or illiteracy), and/or social pressures such as child labor.



A “big sister” with “little sisters” in El Barsha, 2005.

Program Activity

Two weekly sessions, two hours each, were held at each site for the duration of one year. In the weekly sessions the “big sisters” carried out various activities with the “little sisters” that included arts and crafts activities, sessions about child rights, educational games, reading stories, studying school lessons, basic literacy classes, and exam reviews. The “big sisters” received stipends of 50 EGP per month for their participation in the program. Because helping the “little sisters” achieve higher grades in their schools is the parents’ main motivation for sending their daughters to the program, the local coordinators in that area ensured that enough time was devoted to cover the school curriculum. This is in addition to playing educational games, doing crafts and reading books in-between studying sessions and during the mid year vacation.

In addition to the above activities, we carried out in-depth trainings of the local coordinators. These trainings included “training of trainers” to equip them to train the “big sisters” and taught them about empowerment, human rights and child rights, leadership skills, dealing with young children, how to read a story, and how to do arts and crafts with large groups. These trainings ensure the sustainability of the program and its goals.

Books, educational materials, and arts and crafts materials were purchased to enrich the educational experiences of these girls and broaden their outlook. We also upgraded the facilities of our program partners. For the site in El Nubariya with our partner the Good Shepherd Community Development Association, this included purchasing durable plastic chairs and folding tables for the girls to sit at. These facilities upgrades not



“Big sisters” and “little sisters” in the Caritas Development Center in Ezbet el Haganna, 2005. They are working on arts and crafts activities.



only created a cleaner and more comfortable learning environment for the project participants, but also created much good will with our local project partners.

Evaluation of Impact

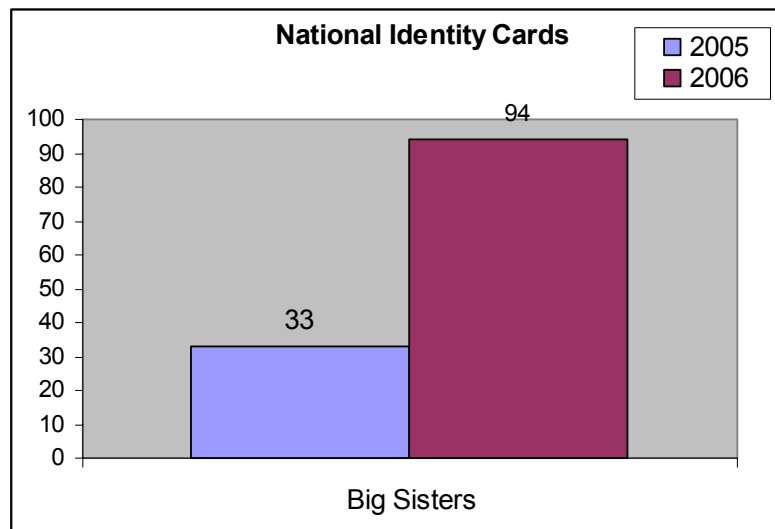
In assessing the impact and overall implementation of the Valuable Girl Project, it is worthy to highlight the success of *VGP in generating increased awareness among participants about their rights, which empowered them to gain greater access to some of these rights including national identity cards for “big sisters” and health insurance cards for both the “big” and “little” sisters.*

To assess the impact of the Valuable Girl Project, two surveys were distributed among 530 girls participating in all twelve sites of implementation. Of the total number of participants, 437 girls completed the evaluation survey. This is 82% response rate. The most significant impacts of the program were the increased number of health insurance cards obtained by both the “big sisters” and the “little sisters” and the increase in the number of “big sisters” obtaining their national identity cards.

Results Analysis

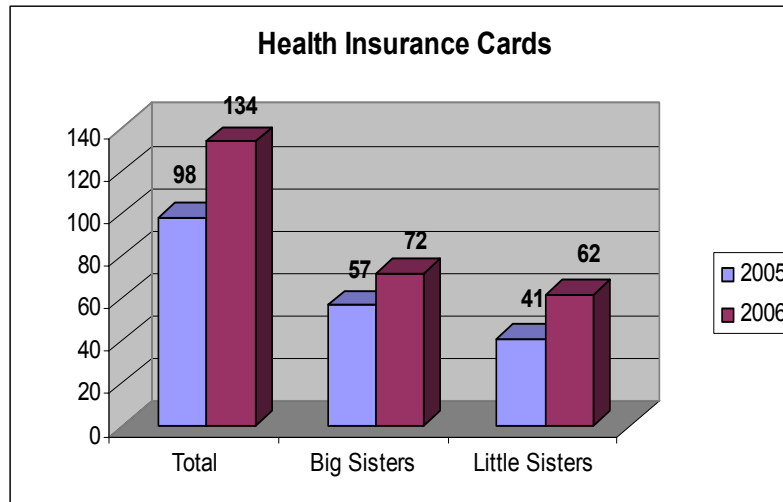
An assessment was conducted at the beginning of the project and data was compiled on the number of “big sisters” with national identity cards and the number of “big” and “little” sisters with health insurance cards to establish a baseline score for later results monitoring.

A total of thirty-three (33) “big sisters” (15%) participating in the Valuable Girl Project had their national identity cards when they joined the project. This number was then monitored at the end the project and a total of 94 “big sisters” (42%) with national identity cards was recorded. The following chart represents the number of “big sister” with national identity cards:



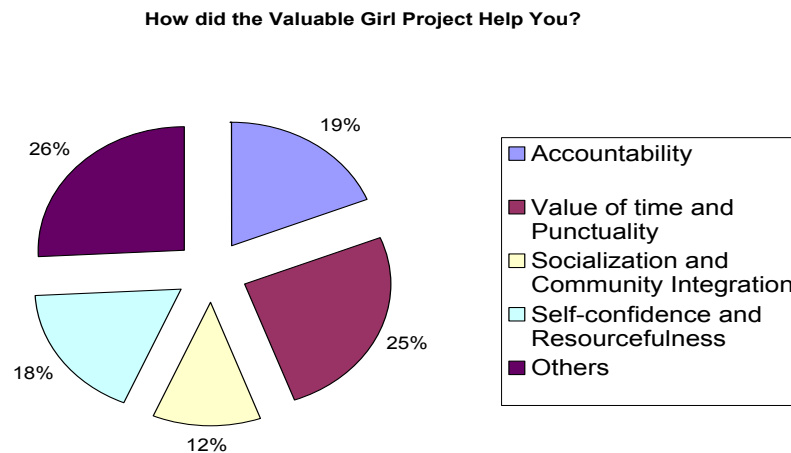


The next chart represents another outstanding achievement of the project, which is the increased number of participants with health insurance cards. The baseline assessment conducted in 2005 rendered 22% of all participants who have health insurance cards. By the end of the project, thirty-six (36) new health insurance cards were obtained by participants, “big” and “little” sisters, as a result of their increased awareness of their rights.



Big Sisters' Results

The “big sisters” positively rated the overall impact of the program, and a great majority reported that the program increased their self-confidence and resourcefulness, boosted their accountability, helped them appreciate the value of time, and better equipped them for community integration. The following chart illustrates the “big sisters’” responses to the question, “How did the Valuable Girl Project Help You?”





When asked if anything in their lives changed because of their commitment to the Valuable Girl Project, the “big sisters” responses were also all positive. Thirty-three of the girls responded that participating in the program helped them become more punctual. Twenty-three said that it helped them become more self-confident and developed their general knowledge, and twenty-four said it helped them become more accountable. Among other things the “big sisters” acquired by participating in the program are: facing problems rationally, experience in dealing with younger ones, and discipline. ***These responses indicate that the Valuable Girl Project provided these young women with important skills for their empowerment.*** Punctuality, study skills, and social skills are important for future employment, which increases their social and economic empowerment.

The big sisters also provided feedback for improving the program. Many suggested more trips, and activities. Others suggested providing computer classes. Finally, many girls suggested increasing the number of sessions and moving the sessions to bigger sites due to physical constraints.

Success Stories

The Valuable Girl Project is full of success stories for all the participants that demonstrate the real change this program is making in their individual lives. The following three success stories demonstrate how the program has prevented girls from dropping out of school, increased their self-confidence, empowered them to advocate for their rights, and gave them skills in leadership and community participation.

At one of the program locations, the family of one of the “little sisters” intended on pulling her out of school once she completed sixth grade (the last year of primary school). She joined the Valuable Girl Project in August 2005, at the beginning of grade six. After one year in the program, her family decided not to pull her out of school. This success story demonstrates the success of the project in preventing girls from dropping out of school and empowering them to continue their education.

In another program location, one of the “little sisters” got a low grade on one of her exams despite the fact that she studied well and felt that she did well on it. She showed her marked exam to her “big sister,” who reviewed it for her and discovered that the “little sister’s” exam was marked incorrectly and she was entitled to more points than were given to her. The “big sister” encouraged her “little sister” to go speak to her teacher about the exam. The “little sister” gained the confidence to do so and spoke to the teacher about the exam and her right to a higher grade than what was given to her. The teacher told her that because she had the courage to come speak to him, he will review the exam again and make sure that she gets the grade she deserves on it. This success story demonstrates how the mentoring relationship increases the self-confidence of the girls in the program to the point that they feel empowered to advocate for their own rights—and successfully do so.

One of the “big sisters” in the Cairo area gave this testimony about her experience with the Valuable Girl Project:



My name is Ghada Alaa and I'm at the second level in the Secretarial Institute located in El Roda district. My life before the project was limited in my morning attendance to lectures and my night memorizing. Then I met Mrs. Azza [a local coordinator], who informed me about the project and how important it was. It was because of my apparent ignorance and disinterest in the project that Mrs. Azza insisted that I should visit the *gama3aya* [community-based organization] and learn more about it. And she was right; I really showed great interest about my participation in the project as one of the staff told me about its benefits and through the five day training that I passed through. The training was very beneficial as it gave me the opportunity to know how to approach a girl and start a friendship with her and also learnt some new games. In addition to the income that I earn, this project changed my concepts and attitude in life as I understood the importance of being cooperative and supportive to other people rather than being self-centered. My benefit from the training and the various programs of the organization helped my in all aspects of life.

This success story demonstrates how the Valuable Girl Project has built skills of leadership and community engagement by creating mentors and role models out of the young women participating in the program.

Future Plans

In the program year 2006-2007, Coptic Orphans plans to increase the number of program participants in the 12 current program sites from the 530 to 800.

In addition to continuing the program activities mentioned above, we will be implementing an initiative to engage the community more fully in the program. This will be done by starting with the families of the participants, carrying out home visits and monthly seminars, workshops, or town hall meetings. Home visits will focus on engaging the girls' families, especially the "little sisters" families, in the decision-making process of the program. Topics of the monthly seminars, workshops, or town hall meetings for the parents will stem from what is learned during the home visits and can include issues like the importance of girls' education, child abuse, female genital mutilation, hygiene, home safety, nutritious eating, etc. Local coordinators and "big sisters" will be trained on how to carry out home visits and workshops.