



**The Valuable Girl Project
Program Evaluation Report 2005
(Academic Year 2004 – 2005)
Grant #S-EG-300-05- GR 027**

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 2004-2005, this program included 175 participants in two areas of Egypt: Ezbit el Haganna, Cairo, and El Barsha, Minya. The program was partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

The most significant impacts of the program during the 2004-2005 academic year were the increased sense of self-worth that the “big sisters” experienced, and the increased academic achievement of the majority of the “little sisters.” Eighty percent of the “big sisters” reported an increase in self-worth and the positive relationship between program participants as their favorite aspects of the program. Fifty-two percent of the “little sisters” demonstrated an increase in overall academic achievement, as compared to their previous year’s scores.

Based on the success of the program in 2004-2005, Coptic Orphans has decided to expand the Valuable Girl Project to 12 sites throughout Egypt, including 500 program participants and various national and local partners.

Program Impact:

- ***175 girls and young women participated.***
- ***80% of the “big sisters” reported an increase of self-worth.***
- ***53% of the “little sisters” increased their overall academic achievement.***



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 El Barsha, 2004.

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.

During the academic year 2004 – 2005, the Valuable Girl Project was carried out in two locations in Egypt: Ezbit el Haganna, a high-poverty area in Cairo, and El Barsha, a village near Mallawy, Minya. There were a total of 175 participants in the program. In El Barsha, there were 100 participants – 50 big sisters and 50 little sisters, and in Ezbit el Haganna, there were 75 participants – 25 big sisters and 50 little sisters. This is due to the unavailability of qualified big sisters in that area and the high need of small sisters.



Two “big sisters” in Ezbit el Haganna, 2004.

The U.S. Embassy in Cairo funded the in-country expenses of the Valuable Girl Project through a grant of 240,492 EGP for the academic year 2004 -2005 (U.S. Embassy fiscal year 2005). This is the second year the U.S. Embassy has funded this program in Egypt. The program was piloted by Coptic Orphans in 2002.



About Coptic Orphans

Our Mission

Coptic Orphans exists to improve the lives of orphans and other vulnerable children in Egypt by providing basic needs, education, and mentoring so that they may realize their potential to become productive members of society. Coptic Orphans also exists to raise awareness about poverty in Egypt and promote cultural understanding. Our vision is to see every vulnerable child of Egypt confidently face the future with a renewed sense of hope and a life enriched with education, health and equality.

Our Philosophy

Coptic Orphans programs include both development programs (Valuable Girl Project) and direct-service programs. (Child Assistance, Emergency Housing, 1001 Tales). Our direct-service programs allow us to enter people's homes, see patterns, and be in touch with the challenges of poverty at the very grassroots. The philosophy of our direct-service programs is that by nourishing and

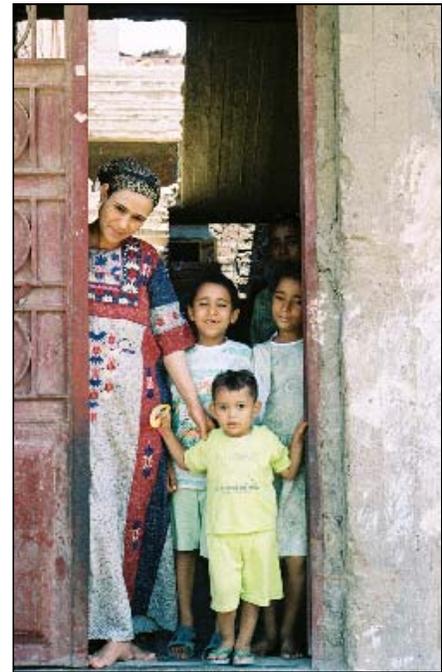
educating children, we will have provided them with means to improve their lives. Our development programs allow us to address the root causes of poverty that we are acutely aware of through our direct-service programs. Women's and girls' education and empowerment are the major focuses of our development programming. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable, and empowering them through education has been proven to break the cycle of poverty.

Organizational News

Coptic Orphans has submitted all its documentation for registration with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an international nonprofit organization. The documentation was submitted to the ministry on June 6, 2005. To date, we are still awaiting a response.

Coptic Orphans is pleased to have welcomed the following key staff on the Valuable Girl Project to its organization during this grant period:

Maha Magdy Anis, Field Director. Dr. Anis joined Coptic Orphans in July 2005 as the Field Director for all Egypt operations. She comes with 25 years of experience in development, focusing on training, on health and on women's programs, with organizations such as the USAID subcontractor John Snow, Inc., and the Bishopric of Ecumenical and Social Services (BLESS). In addition to participating in numerous workshops and trainings in the development field, she holds a medical degree. Dr. Anis's role in the Valuable Girl Project includes training, monitoring and general program oversight.



A mother and child in El Waraaq, Cairo, a community where Coptic Orphans serves, 2005.



Monette Nazmy, Program Associate. Ms. Nazmy joined Coptic Orphans in March 2005 as the Program Associate for the Valuable Girl Project. She is completing a master's degree in economics from the American University in Cairo, and has several years of experience in development research and community development with organizations such as Community and Institutional Development (CID) and the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from the American University in Cairo. She continues to actively volunteer in the development field through her university as well as her church community. Ms. Nazmy coordinates all aspects of the Valuable Girl Project with the area program managers, including program trainings, monitoring reports, and writing of evaluations.

Akram Yehia, Area Program Manager, Minya. Mr. Yehia joined Coptic Orphans in March 2005 as the area program manager in the Minya region. He has worked in the field of community development, NGO capacity building, health education, environmental awareness, literacy, and agriculture for over ten years, with organizations that included USAID subcontractor John Snow, Inc., CARE International, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), and Integrated Development Action of Minya (IDAM). He has participated in many development related trainings and workshops, and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Social Services from Cairo University. His role in the Valuable Girl Project is monitoring and evaluation of all project sites in the Minya region.

Bishoy Lamie, Area Program Manager, Cairo. Mr. Lamie joined Coptic Orphans in October 2004 as the area program manager in the Cairo region. Mr. Lamie has worked as a social worker among Sudanese refugees through a Caritas project funded by UNHCR. His responsibilities included meeting refugee needs through small projects, job placement, emergency medical services, home visits, restorative justice and rehabilitation, and HIV/AIDS counseling. His work with refugees extends to his spare time, assisting impoverished families with the Coptic Church. His previous experience also includes four years in biomedical engineering. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering from the 10th Ramadan Higher Technical Institute. His role in the Valuable Girl Project is monitoring and evaluation of all project sites in the Cairo region.



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 her “little sister” 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” assisted their younger ones with studying their school lessons, in addition to making revisions before exams. 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 practicing hobbies, crafts and reading books in-between studying sessions and during the mid year vacation.

U.S. Embassy funds enabled us to purchase books, educational materials, and arts and crafts materials to enrich the educational experiences of these girls and broaden their outlook. These materials included:



- 1- A library. Each site has a library with books addressing different issues such as water cycle, plant reproduction, genetics, geography (all in simplified terms) and child fiction.
- 2- Educational material and games. Each site is equipped with educational material and games that facilitate the learning process (such as putting letters together to form words) and develop IQ. Some of these materials also included learning technologies and educational software to increase the program participants' technology literacy.
- 3- Arts and crafts material. Each site has a variety of arts and crafts materials to stimulate the creativity of the girls, ranging from beads and coloring pens, to a musical keyboard.

U.S. Embassy funds also enabled us to upgrade the facilities of our program partners. For the Ezbit el Haganna site, this included painting unpainted walls, and purchasing durable plastic chairs and folding tables for the girls to sit at. El Barsha also got new tables and chairs for the girls to sit at, in addition to bookshelves and cabinets for the local coordinators to store project materials. These facilities upgrades not only created a cleaner and more comfortable learning environment for the project participants, but also created much good will with our local project partners.

Technology Literacy Initiative

In the Ezbit el Haganna site, we piloted a technology literacy initiative by training one of the local coordinators in computer skills. She took many computer and English language courses, and is now teaching a computer literacy course to the girls who are participating in the Valuable Girl Project. She teaches this course after the two hour biweekly mentoring sessions. A computer and educational software are available at the project site for demonstration and practice.

The reason for this initiative was to begin a small technology center at the project site that might eventually economically sustain the program. However, despite the many training courses that the local coordinator took, they did not equip her to teach computer courses that could compete with the market. Thus, a decision was made to keep this initiative an educational one, rather than one that might also produce income for the program. A more comprehensive plan for the economic sustainability of the Valuable Girl Project is being researched and will be discussed more thoroughly in the project proposal for 2006.



Evaluation of Impact

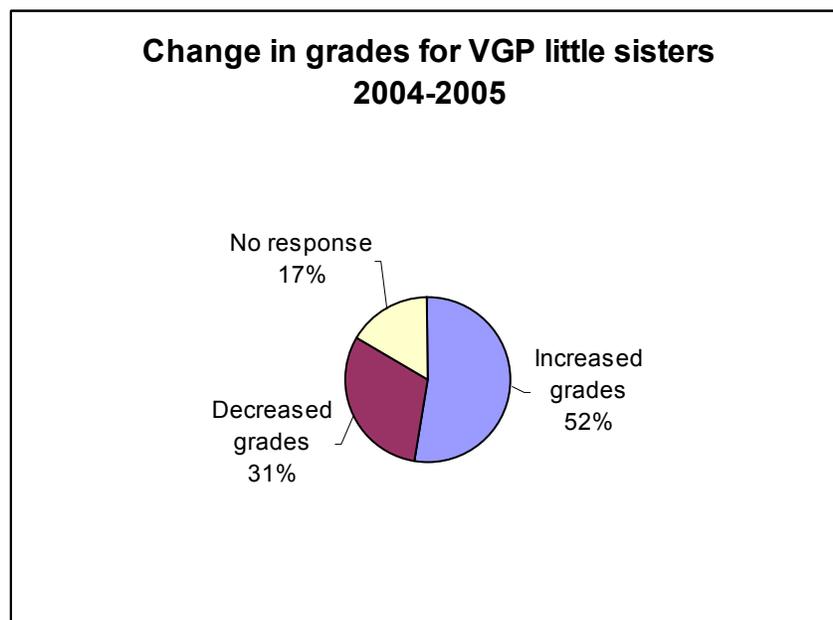
In order to evaluate the Valuable Girl Project's impact on the girls, a survey was distributed and filled out by all the project participants. *The most significant impacts of the program were the increased sense of self-worth that the "big sisters" experienced, and the increased academic achievement of the majority of the "little sisters."*

Survey Contents and Response Rates:

Two evaluation surveys were distributed: a short, two-question survey for the "little sisters," and a longer one for the "big sisters." Out of the 175 program participants, 117 filled out the evaluation survey. This is 67% response rate, and the response rate in El Barsha was much higher than the response rate in Ezbit el Haganna. This could be due to the fact that the survey was completed in the summer, when the program was not in session. El Barsha is a smaller village, where it is easy to locate and gather the girls to complete the survey, whereas the participants at the Ezbit el Haganna site are much more geographically dispersed.

Little Sisters' Results

The "little sister" response rate on the two-question evaluation survey was 57%. The most significant result was the increased academic achievement of the majority of the survey respondents. The following chart represents the responses from the little sisters who answered the question about their overall grades before and after the program:



According to these results, the grades of 52% of the "little sisters" improved, and this result can most likely be attributed to their participation in the Valuable Girl Project. Increased academic achievement prevents girls' drop-out at the primary level because low academic



achievement (and possible grade repetition as a result) is one of the major risk factors for girls dropout from school at the primary level.

The number of girls whose grades decreased, however (31% of the survey respondents) warrants further attention. Anecdotal evidence from site visits indicates that there are girls whose literacy levels were so poor that their “big sisters” abandoned their school curriculum in favor of focusing on functional literacy. Thus, while less time was spent “memorizing” their lessons (which would have resulted in higher scores but not necessarily increased literacy), more time was spent focusing on the little girl’s reading abilities, a much more important skill than higher school grades. Although, in the long run, better reading skills will result in higher grades, over the short term of one year, the correlation will not be statistically apparent.

The “little sisters” were also asked to mention anything about the program they did not like. A large majority, 76%, responded that there is nothing about the program they would change. Several “little sisters” requested a computer and additional games, books, and educational materials¹. A few girls, however, responded that they did not like the noise level. In both Ezbit el Haganna and El Barsha, a large number of girls gather in one place to carry out the program, and thus the noise level becomes high at times. In both locations, work is being done to expand the space where the girls gather for the program.

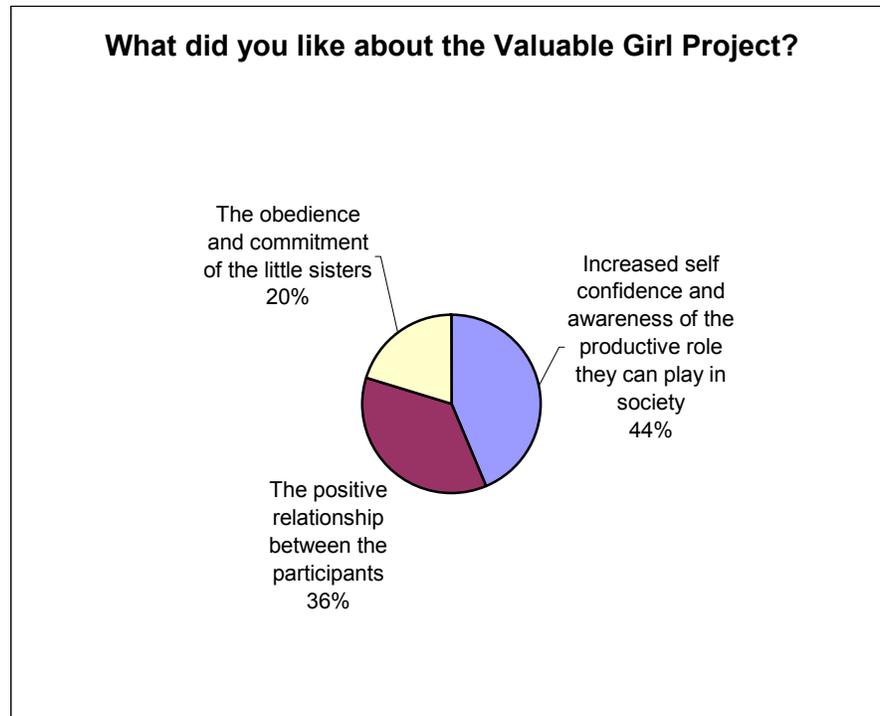
Big Sisters’ Results

The “big sisters” response rate on their seven-question survey was 80%, a much higher response rate than the “little sisters.” ***All the survey respondents spoke positively about the program, and a great majority reported that the program increased their sense of self worth.*** An increased sense of self worth is an indicator of empowerment, and thus, these responses showed that at least among the “big sisters,” the most important goal of the Valuable Girl Project was achieved. The following chart illustrates the “big sisters” responses to the question, “What did you like about the Valuable Girl Project?”



One of the “big sisters” in Ezbit el Haganna presenting her opinion during a training session, 2004. Behind her is a “little sister” doing arts and crafts.

¹ Books, games, and educational materials were purchased for the program participants in September 2005. These evaluation forms were filled in July 2005. Although the grant from the U.S. Embassy was approved in October 2004, first check was received in September 2005, which explains the delay in the program participants’ receiving these materials.



The following statements exemplify the increased feeling of self worth among the “big sisters”: “Helping the little sister become successful,” and “feeling productive and doing something fruitful” are two direct quotes from their responses.

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. Sixteen said that it helped them develop a sense of self worth. Thirteen mentioned that the program helped them develop their general knowledge and encouraged them to study more (although overall, no significant improvement in the big sister school scores was achieved). Eleven said it helped them develop their social skills, and eight mentioned that it helped fill their spare time.

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.

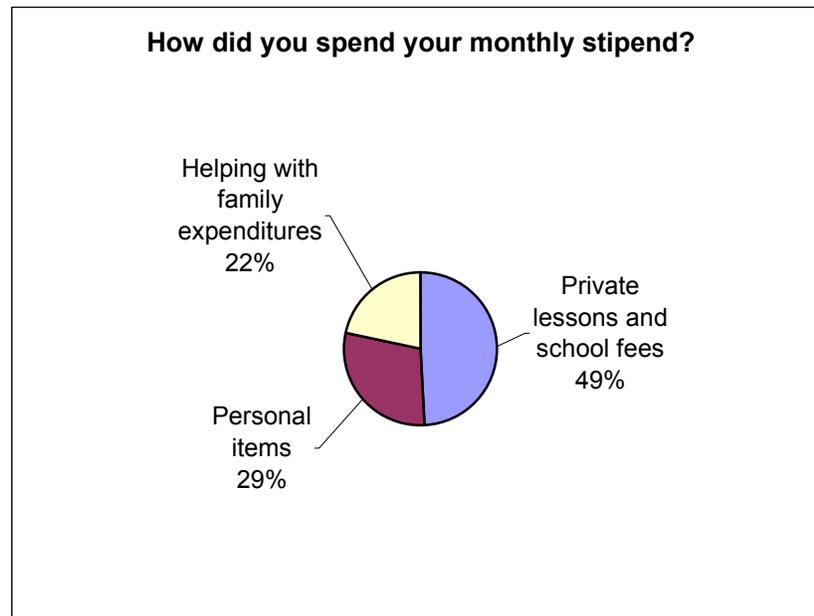
The big sisters also had constructive feedback for improving the program. Many suggested providing the sites with more games, toys, and books². Many suggested moving the sessions to

² Books, games, and educational materials were purchased for the program participants in September 2005. These evaluation forms were filled in July 2005. Although the grant from the U.S. Embassy was approved in October 2004, first check was received in September 2005, which explains the delay in the program participants’ receiving these materials.



bigger sites due to physical constraints and much noise. Finally, many girls suggested more trips, activities, and contests. Other criticisms of the program included lack of punctuality on the part of the “little sisters.” Some complained of attitude and interaction problems among the girls, and a few mentioned that the time of the sessions was not suitable for their own schedules.

The 50 EGP monthly stipends that the big sisters received went mainly towards their school expenses: private lessons and school fees. Some also mentioned personal items, and a few mentioned helping with family expenses. The chart below illustrates these responses:



These results indicate that school presents a financial burden to the families of these young women, and that their participation in this project helps to alleviate this burden.

To assess the surrounding community’s views on the Valuable Girl Project, we asked the big sisters, “What are people saying about the program, and how are you responding?” While almost all the Ezbit El Haganna girls responded, “there are no criticisms,” the El Barsha girls did mention a few criticisms. Among them were, “the project is a waste of time,” and “the project is done by girls, therefore it will fail.” Some girls wrote that they respond to these criticisms by explaining success stories of how the program helps girls in different ways. These criticisms, however, show clearly the discrepancy between the society’s reaction to the program in Ezbit el Haganna and that in El Barsha, and that more might be done to increase community awareness, especially in Upper Egypt, and advocacy of the need for girls’ education and empowerment.



Lessons Learned

Based on the evaluation results above, it is clear that the Valuable Girl Project achieves the goals it sets out to achieve among the participating girls. Self-esteem and academic achievement, two very important indicators of empowerment, increased among the participants in this project, according to the survey data.

The survey response rate indicates that the timing of the evaluation survey is important for a better response. This year, the surveys were distributed over the summer, when the program was not yet in session. This made it more difficult for the local coordinators to collect the surveys, especially the local coordinators in the Ezbit el Haganna area.

In 2006, the evaluation survey will be made available before the program ends for the year and the girls begin their end-of-year exams. Better survey data and monitoring will help us more accurately assess the impact of this program among the participants. Currently, new monitoring forms have been designed and are being tested for their effectiveness in generating data and appropriate program indicators. These monitoring forms will track the change that happens in the girls' attitudes, their reaction to their program, and other significant trends. In addition, a more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan, with more frequent visits to the sites and more detailed monitoring reports are being created.

The results regarding the surrounding community's impressions of the project indicate that we must make additional efforts to engage the local community so that we gain its support and advocacy. Local community stakeholders that we can engage include families, neighbors, and community leaders, particularly in the Upper Egypt area. In addition, partnerships with other leading organizations in Egypt in the developing field, which we began for 2005-2006, will strengthen engagement with local stakeholders because these organizations have deep relationships with such stakeholders. These organizations include the Association for Upper Egypt Education and Development (AUEED), the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), and other local community development associations. In addition to strengthening local community ties, these partnerships also enrich the program, and ultimately the beneficiaries, with each organization's varied experiences and expertise.

Many of the participants' requests for games and educational materials indicate that not only do the girls want the materials, but that the program also needs an activities structure or schedule aimed at exposing the girls to different cultural activities. This schedule should be designed to ensure the fulfillment of the program goals and effectively influence the girls' lives in a positive way.



Future Plans

During 2005-2006, the Valuable Girl Project expanded to 12 sites throughout Egypt, and now includes almost 500 participants. We are partnering with many national and local nongovernmental organizations to achieve this expansion and enrich the program. These organizations include AUEED and CEOSS.

Part of the expansion includes more regular trainings for the program local coordinators, which will help us effectively reach the goals of the program by equipping the local coordinators with the skills they need to perform their roles as program implementers and catalysts for community change, and their responsibilities for empowering the “big sisters” to fulfill their mission as positive role models. Similarly, an improved and more structured training for the “big sisters” is also being implemented. The proposal for the 2005-2006 program will include more information about this process.



A breakout session during the local coordinator training in 2005. There were 25 participants at this training from the 12 sites in Egypt.

In addition to improving our training and evaluation process, we will be researching and creating a comprehensive sustainability plan for the project, including both impact and economic sustainability. Impact sustainability plans include increased involvement with community stakeholders to increase their support for the program, and for girls’ empowerment more generally.

Over the long term, we have many exciting plans to bring the Valuable Girl Project to scale in Egypt. This includes additional partnerships, as well as through comprehensive documentation of the project as a resource for other organizations. In addition, we will be researching possibilities of investing in the current program participants when they graduate from the program, to continue to capitalize on these girls and young women as change agents in their communities.