

Where Hope Lives

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Hope. It's a small word that contains an entire world of expectations. Hope means something a little different to each person; however, for the scholars of Boys Hope Girls Hope, hope means opportunity.

Humble Beginnings

The organization began in 1977 when Father Paul Sheridan, a Jesuit priest and educator, began a program in St. Louis, Missouri to provide at-risk youth the opportunity to overcome their circumstances. The residential program took boys who were facing a lack of quality education, gang-run neighborhoods or family problems ranging from poverty and illness to absentee parents and homelessness, and gave them a home and the tools they needed to succeed in life. Sheridan implemented a holistic approach and called the program Boys Hope. In 1991, the organization became Boys Hope Girls Hope when it opened its first girl's home.

Spelling H-O-P-E

The formula for success at Boys Hope Girls Hope is spelled H-O-P-E, which stands for homes, opportunity, parenting and education.

It was important from the onset that the young people, or scholars as they're called, be provided a safe, family-style home environment in a non-institutional setting. Both the Boys Hope and Girls Hope homes closely mimic a traditional family environment - there are chores to be done, a time for homework, dinner is a meal eaten together as a family, there are bedtimes and curfews and scholars even receive an allowance, as long as all their chores have been completed!

The program affords scholars an opportunity at a better education, a stable home environment, a safe neighborhood and ultimately a better life. “We are building on the potential of young people whose environment is threatening the reaching of their potential,” explains Brian Hipp, executive director of Boys Hope Girls Hope of St. Louis, “we are their opportunity to level the playing field. We are convinced that if you give them an opportunity, surround them with love and nurturing and high expectations, they will grow and blossom.”

Parenting is a large part of the Boys Hope Girls Hope success formula. “We call ourselves an extended family,” says Hipp, “we simply compliment the family of origin of the children. We don't exclude them; we have a partnership relationship with them.” Parents and/or guardians are included in the planning and decision-making process. Staff members, together with the scholar and their guardian, meet regularly to develop a service

plan to help the scholar meet his or her goals in the areas of physical, emotional and social development, spirituality, academic, intellectual, civic and leadership development. It is important for the success of the scholar that their guardians agree to fully support the program.

It may seem like a heart-wrenching decision to allow a child to live away from home during the school year; however, Darlene Edwards, whose daughter is a Girls Hope scholar puts it into perspective, “Whatever betters her education. This was her way of getting to college, her way of getting an education. That was just a sacrifice we both had to make.”

A strong emphasis is placed on education, not as a finite goal but as a lifelong learning process. At Boys Hope Girls Hope, the expectations are high from the very beginning. “From day one we're talking about college and we're not putting it out there as a dream or a hope,” states Hipp, “it's a reality. The goal is that every child that graduates the Boys Hope Girls Hope program goes on to college.” And to date, they have been extremely successful in reaching that goal as Boys Hope Girls Hope boasts a 100% college admission rate among the scholars that complete the program.

A Different Type of Program

The Boys Hope Girls Hope program has a strong Judeo-Christian heritage. “We're different in the sense that we look at holistic development that includes spiritual growth,” explains Hipp. “Our approach to spirituality

Meet the Scholars



Seth, a Boys Hope of St. Louis scholar and middle school student, was 8 years old when his family immigrated to the St. Louis area from the West African nation of Togo. Despite speaking little English, Seth excelled in school which brought him to the attention of the school principal, who then told Seth's parents about the Boys Hope program. “She always had really high expectations for me,” Seth says of his former principal, “and I loved that about her. She was one of my favorite teachers overall and she's had the biggest impact in my life.” Seth has been in the program for three years and concedes the hardest part is being away from his family; however, as he puts it, “I come out ahead, when I add things up there are a lot more opportunities, there are a lot more pros than cons. I feel as though to become a bigger, better person, to become a stronger person, this environment really prepares me for real life.” Currently, Seth is living a typical middle school student's life, playing sports, doing homework and chores, studying, participating in and winning speech competitions. While there is still time for him to settle on a career path, he is sure of one thing, “my dream is to grow up and be able to support my family and be able to impact peoples lives.”

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Meet the Scholars



"The best part to me is a new life," relates **Wykisa**, Girls Hope of St. Louis scholar and high school student, "because if it wasn't for Girls Hope, I'd probably still be on the street." Raised by her grandmother and the middle of five children, Wykisa was a good student who struggled to marry her personal life with her school life. "I always tried to get my homework done but I couldn't because there was a lot of arguing in the house and it was really loud." It was her grandmother who started the process for Wykisa to become a scholar at Girls Hope, shortly thereafter, her grandmother passed away. "I came here, met a lot of people and they cared for me, they were willing to be there for me and push me," admits Wykisa, "because I wanted to give up sometimes." Wykisa is living a typical teenage life at Girls Hope, studying for tests, worrying about homework, taking pride in good grades, attending school dances and talking with friends about fashion and boys. She dreams of helping children, whether that be working in child development or as a pediatric nurse in Africa. She works with special needs children on a regular basis as a volunteer at the Children's Home Society of Missouri. "I like seeing the kids," she explains, "and working with them because I feel good inside when I'm helping them." Missing her younger brother and sister can be hard at times, but she realizes it's worth it, "I'm going to take this opportunity and be somebody. I'm going to finish high school and go to college. It's just a happier life now. I can't say anything else but thank you because they've done so much for me."

is that it's just as essential as physical development." It's important to note that scholars can be of any faith or religious background; however, Boys Hope Girls Hope requires them to attend a worshipping community of their choice, on the weekend. According to Hipp, "Their families are deeply involved in the choice of religious community and sometimes the scholars worship with their families."

Weekends also include time for community service, an opportunity for the entire house to give back to the community. The Boys Hope house in St. Louis spends much of their community service time volunteering at KEEN, Kids Enjoy Exercise Now, a nonprofit organization that provides one-to-one recreational opportunities for children with developmental and physical disabilities. Their Girls Hope counterparts spend time with the Children's Home Society of Missouri, a social service agency that provides services for children with significant developmental disabilities.

Recognizing Potential

In a day and age when many schools are over-burdened and under-funded, the need for a program like Boys Hope Girls Hope is obvious. But with such a large pool of candidates, how does Boys Hope Girls Hope choose scholars with the greatest potential for success? According to Jarita Lindsey-Carter, house manager for Girls Hope of St. Louis, "I look for academic capability, I look for the need and at the student's overall character. Also, motivation on the part of the student and parents is very important."

Aside from a student being within the age range of 10 to 15, Boys Hope Girls Hope has three criteria that each scholar must meet, beginning with ability. A student must demonstrate the ability to live in a family-like, out-of-home placement and be a positive member of the Boys Hope Girls Hope community. Just as important is academic ability. The student must have the ability to succeed, with extra support, in a rigorous college preparatory high school or middle school without being overwhelmed. "Many of our kids have gaps in their learning," explains Hipp, "so we do a comprehensive psycho-educational assessment to ensure that we can help the child and they have the ability to be college-bound."

The second criteria, motivation, is something both the student and their guardian must demonstrate. The student must be motivated to not only leave a difficult situation, but have hopes and dreams that they can visualize. In addition, their teachers need to believe they would thrive and excel, if many of their obstacles were removed. The guardians must also be motivated to fully support the program and be able to demonstrate a commitment to education.

Need is the final criteria. A student must demonstrate financial need, a need for stability in their living situation, a need for a safe environment and a lack of access to quality schools. The core challenges for many of these students continue to be poverty and family disintegration.

Over the last 33 years, Boys Hope Girls Hope has expanded to 15 locations within the United States and 4 in Latin America. They have given many children a stable living environment, a solid education and the tools necessary to get into college and be successful in life. But most importantly, Boys Hope Girls Hope has given its scholars a warm, safe place to hope and dream.

The scholars themselves sum it up best. "It brings me joy to know that I'm not on the streets anymore or I'm not trying to beg somebody for something," confides Wykisa, "just knowing that there's somebody there that's caring about you, you've got somebody there pushing you, brings me joy." Seth agrees, "What

brings me joy about Boys Hope is the atmosphere of people that care about you. Now that I'm in the program, I have a lot more people who are looking out for the best for me and will do whatever it takes to help me reach my ultimate goal in life."

As anyone can plainly see, Boys Hope Girls Hope is certainly a place where hope lives, and indeed thrives. ☀

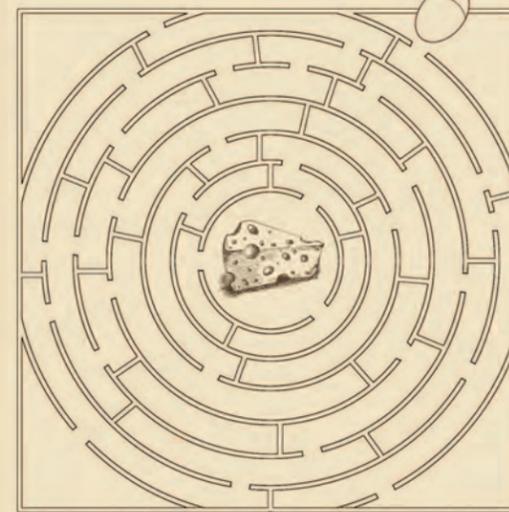


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