



20 stories
FROM
20 years
OF INSPIRING CONFIDENT LEADERS



Girl Talk

was founded in 2002 on Haley Kilpatrick's dream of helping middle school girls, like her sister, through the challenging pre-teen and teenage years.

20 Years Later

Girl Talk has positively impacted over 70,000 girls and inspired multiple generations of leaders.



In honor of our 20th anniversary, we asked leaders from over the years to share how Girl Talk has impacted them...

*these are
their stories*



hannah onley

Hannah was introduced to Girl Talk while playing guitar at a local pizza shop, and she knew it was fate. With the encouragement of other leaders, she found her voice and learned to refine her gifts and talents. The skills Hannah gained during her time in Girl Talk have allowed her to transition to a male-dominated career - without forgetting the value of her voice. When reflecting on the 20-year impact of Girl Talk, Hannah says "over 70,000 of us are taking the world by storm and pouring into others in our communities!"

setareh khani



Setareh was introduced to Girl Talk programs through her older sister, Darya, and the two supported each other throughout their leadership journeys. Setareh attended camp each year, served as an Ambassador, and went on to lead her school's chapter. Setareh credits Girl Talk for providing her with substantive relationships with other girls who also see and value their self-worth. She believes Girl Talk taught her to stay true to herself, and for that reason, she vows to pour into others just as older girls poured into her. She has kept this promise to date, returning after graduation as an intern and volunteer.

dori kaufman

Dori found Girl Talk while overcoming self-esteem challenges and being bullied in school. Girl Talk quickly became a safe place, where they felt like they could be themselves and there was always a group of people who cared about them. Dori developed skills to manage their emotions, learned about self-acceptance, built confidence, and became who they are today - uplifting others along the way. They now have their dream job as a flight attendant and continue to support Girl Talk on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee!



MY ANCHOR

GIRL TALK ALUMNA, SIA PATEL

I went through a very rough time sophomore year, especially when COVID hit, and Girl Talk was like my little anchor. I had lost a lot of my friends during that time and the Girl Talk community really became my safe place. No matter what, I can always go back to my Girl Talk training and revisit lessons I've learned, whether that was from when I was a Camp Counselor or just learning from the Ambassador Program about what it means to be a leader.

I can't imagine what my life would have looked like if I hadn't been a part of Girl Talk because it changed the way that I lead, and I've also become a better friend. Girl Talk taught me a lot about listening to others and what it means to be caring and kind to everybody. Since joining the Girl Talk community, I've learned that my confidence looks different everyday and everyone has unique strengths. Some people like to put themselves in positions where they can be a leader, and some people like to lead from the sidelines. And I've learned that's okay.

I'm not the same leader I was three years ago. I wouldn't even consider myself the same person I was three years ago, but Girl Talk taught me that's okay. It's okay to be a different person, and we're all growing. If anything, it's what makes you who you are. You can be a different person in different stages of your life. And that's okay too.

One of my favorite Girl Talk experiences was watching my sister become a Camp Counselor for the first time this summer. On the drive to camp and back each day, I got to learn more about her. I got to get closer to her and watch her grow as a leader. Camp has allowed me to keep making stronger connections within the Girl Talk community and the people that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

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*I'm not the
same leader
I was three
years ago.*





MY SAFE PLACE

GIRL TALK AMBASSADOR, ZADA

Three years ago, my mom signed me up for Girl Talk Camp and truthfully, I didn't want to go. She dropped me off kicking and screaming (quite literally) and she let me go into the wild and I haven't looked back since. Not only did I return each day for camp that summer, but I continued to come back every year and stayed involved with Girl Talk by becoming an Ambassador in 2020. After being involved with the organization for three years, I have co-led Girl Talk's 2022 Camp, returned as a third-year Ambassador, and been recognized as the 2022 National Leader of the Year.

Being able to serve as a face for Girl Talk in my community has been so rewarding, and I am excited to continue that as I go into my senior year.

Girl Talk has given me mentors, mentees, and many connections with girls around the world that I cherish. The community has also ingrained the need to be vulnerable. The act of vulnerability has become such a normal part of my relationships in my everyday life that I must attribute it to Girl Talk and all the mentors who made me feel like my vulnerability was okay.

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Girl Talk is my safe place. It is a place where I feel I can be whoever I am, happy or sad, and still feel the unconditional love and support my middle school self yearned to feel.

The biggest lesson Girl Talk has taught me is that it's okay to not be okay. It's okay to make mistakes, to mess up a little, to stumble. That's what makes us human and it's what we do after we stumble that matters most. Girl Talk has been my light at the end of the tunnel. I am so endlessly grateful for Girl Talk and all that it's brought to my life. It has helped my confidence and leadership abilities exponentially and created a safe place for me to express who and what I want to become. I have been able to do things like being in student leadership positions at my school because of the leadership qualities Girl Talk has brought out in me these last 3 years.

Looking back, I would tell my middle school self to keep going even when times get rough it always gets better. Learning how to be a leader showed me that leadership is always evolving. No matter what position you are in or what company, your leadership skills can always improve and get better, and I wish I could've told my middle school self that even though you don't feel like a leader now, keep pushing, keep growing, keep building and those leadership skills will come.



gauri

Girl Talk has given Gauri two of her best friends, and now she recommends the programs to everyone she knows! Gauri feels safe to express herself and to discover her passions while serving her community. The biggest lessons she will take with her when she graduates are conflict management and the ability to recognize toxic friendships. Through the Girl Talk Community, Gauri has found her authentic self and realized what healthy relationships look like from other leaders. As she approaches graduation, she is so proud to see others in her chapter connecting and supporting one another! Gauri has continued to support Girl Talk through her school's chapter, as a Camp Counselor, and an Ambassador.



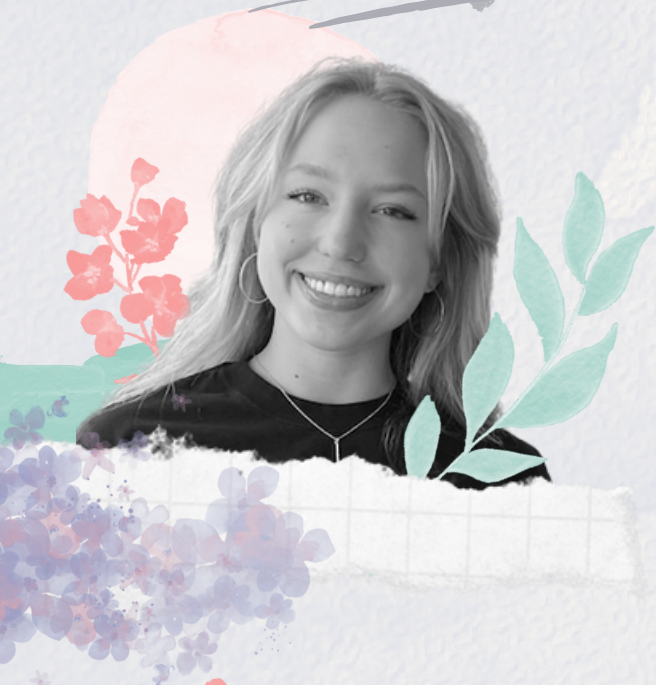
meredith head

Meredith started one of the first Girl Talk chapters and was awarded National Leader of the Year in 2007. As a chapter leader, she learned the power of connecting with others and utilizing resources to get them the support they need. The diversity of her Girl Talk chapter opened her eyes to the adversity her peers faced, allowing her to become an advocate and big sister for others. Meredith is proud to have watched Girl Talk continue to inspire girls and grow beyond Georgia. She is now the Director of Marketing and Communication for Enrollment Services at Kennesaw State University. Meredith shares that if she had a daughter, they would be in Girl Talk TOGETHER!

madison auchincloss

Madison learned about Girl Talk Camp through their babysitter, who had been a Camp Counselor. Girl Talk has taught them about leading by example, having empathy for others, remaining open-minded to trying new things, and embracing their authentic self. Through Girl Talk programs, Madison realized they are not as introverted as they previously thought. Each summer, Madison feels like they are returning to family when they get to camp, and will continue to return to meet rising leaders after graduating.

mia haglund



Mia realized how damaging the obsession with self-image can be online, and she sought a way to help young girls with this same struggle. After discovering Girl Talk, she started a chapter at her school with the goal of inspiring young girls to be confident and build leadership skills while safely navigating social media. She has used her own experiences to shape how she mentors others, helping hundreds of girls recognize their self-worth and become confident and compassionate leaders in their communities. Mia hopes to continue inspiring others throughout college.

caleigh + cathy leutz

Cathy remembers watching her daughter, Caleigh, endure hardships throughout middle school and feeling relieved when Caleigh got involved in Girl Talk. Caleigh was quickly embraced by the Girl Talk Community as part of the first chapter in Albany, Georgia, where she developed the confidence she needed to thrive. This allowed her to transition to college out-of-state. Caleigh carries the skills she learned from her chapter into her career in the sports industry, where women are underrepresented. Girl Talk still plays a part in both of their lives as they mentor others. They believe Girl Talk is important now, more than ever, for young girls to navigate the challenges they face.

GIRL TALK ALUMNA, JATHUSHA MAHENTHIRARAJAN

LEADERSHIP EMBODIED



When my 12-year-old sister was struggling with confidence and bullying, I noticed a pattern of common challenges amongst girls in her age range. Motivated to sustainably address these problems, I founded the first provincial chapter of Girl Talk in Canada. With the input of 11 mentors I selected from diverse ethnic, religious, and sexual identities, I adapted the curriculum according to the specific needs and issues for girls of color in our surrounding communities. I co-developed original lesson plans on topics like intersectional feminism, intergenerational trauma, racial violence, and LGBTQ2IS+ sexual health to affirm identity. Recognized for my efforts, I was flown out to Atlanta to support Girl Talk's annual camp programming, and later to Ohio to speak on the impact of creating safe spaces for young girls to explore their authentic selves, build positive and trusting relationships, and engage in community action. Honored as the first International Girl Talk Leader of the Year, I felt reaffirmed in my mission to establish peer-to-peer knowledge sharing spaces where girls of color are empowered to take charge of their own conditions and to challenge power systems.



Following the launch of my Girl Talk chapter, I realized the number of young people who were also able to spot opportunities for change in their communities but were not equipped to act on them. Having witnessed the severe shortcomings of existing adult-led civic education, I set forward with a new vision: to establish an incubator for youth-led innovation where marginalized youth can mobilize collective efforts to co-create their desired futures. This vision gave birth to L.I.G.H.T. (Lead Inspire Grow Hope Transform), a youth-run organization in Canada that has trained, supported, and funded nearly 1,000 young people in delivering novel projects that speak to the issues they care about most. In my time as Executive Director, I directly supported the implementation and evaluation of dozens of simultaneous local community initiatives every year such as free S.T.E.A.M. camps and tutoring programs for low-income, newcomer and Syrian refugee children, critical reading buddy programs to promote literacy and positive self-identity, and sexual consent and self-defense education events. L.I.G.H.T.'s initiatives arise from my conviction that sustainable social change is possible at the intersection of grassroots collaboration, systems leadership, and liberatory education.

After completing my undergraduate degree in Human Rights and Equity Studies in Canada, I have relocated to the US to complete my graduate studies at Stanford University in Learning, Design and Technology. Girl Talk taught me the power of community-based education and I look forward to using the knowledge, skills, and wisdom I have gained to continue to teach, inspire, and act in service of social change.

Girl Talk taught me embodied leadership. To me this includes: embracing the messiness of the human existence, expressing our fullest selves, taking the risk to be vulnerable, cultivating a deep knowing of who we are (self-awareness) in pursuit of inner wisdom, and ultimately, intentionally living in harmony with our values every day.



A SENSE OF BELONGING

GIRL TALK ALUMNA, ZOË FORT

When I first got involved with Girl Talk in middle school, I had just moved from northwest Arkansas to Atlanta. I didn't have many friends or a strong support system, and Girl Talk not only gave me community but a sense of purpose and belonging. As a Girl Talk girl, I really began to develop my confidence and self-esteem. Between being a mentee in middle school and a camper during the summers, I gained confidence in myself to become a mentor and to serve on the National Teen Advisory Board in high school.

One of the mentors I had from Girl Talk, Amber Abernathy, continued to support me in undergrad when we both studied at Brandeis University. She helped sustain me through one of the most difficult chapters in my life, and her friendship has been priceless. The experiences I had through Girl Talk Camp and while serving on the National Teen Advisory Board were invaluable as we were exposed to women who were high-level executives in their fields. Surrounded by such strong role models, I felt comfortable embracing my authentic self and believed that as a girl, I could do anything.

The confidence and lessons I learned have stayed with me over the years, and I carry it with me now as a medical student at Emory University. I look forward to continuing to do the work of empowering others as a future OBGYN.

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If I ever have a daughter, she will be a Girl Talk girl.

Girl Talk has always met the times with addressing relevant issues that teenage girls face, and that has always been so important to me. Seeing the organization engage with diversity and inclusion before it was popular speaks volumes about the Girl Talk Community.

Now that Girl Talk has a strong presence in the digital space, alumni are able to stay connected to how the organization is growing and how we can give back. I have been proud to watch the mission continue to reach girls and meet their needs in ways I never could have imagined. If I ever have a daughter, she will be a Girl Talk girl.

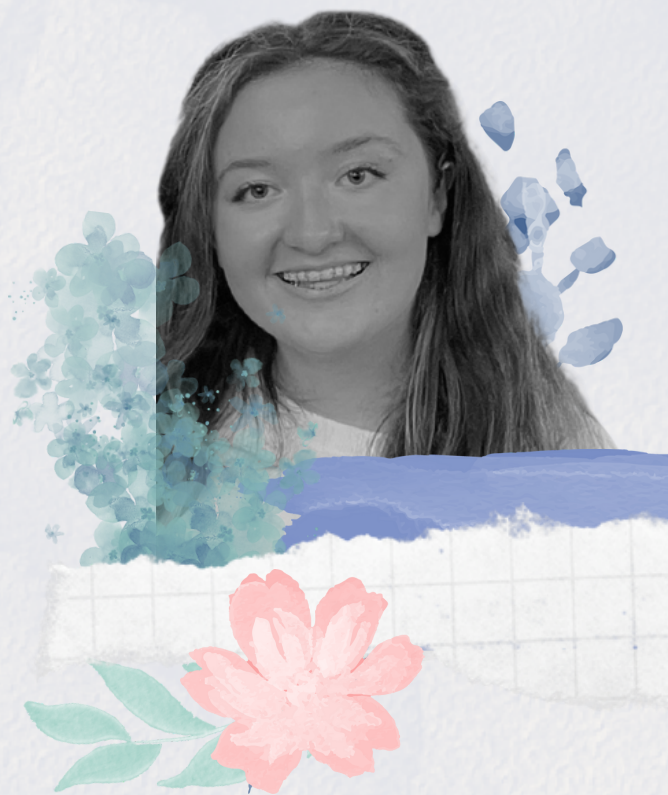


amber + ariel abernathy

The Abernathy sisters have been fierce advocates for Girl Talk in their communities and have become role models to countless girls. When they experienced loss and hardship, they leaned on the Girl Talk Community. Amber has carried the confidence she learned from Girl Talk into her career, finding her voice in a male-dominated field. For Ariel, Girl Talk has been a safe space for her to open up and be her authentic self. Ariel looks up to her big sister as a strong role model and supporter in her life, and despite age, Amber shares the same feelings about her younger sister! Amber has been proud to watch Ariel blossom into the leader she is today while bringing out the best in others.

maggie

In middle school, Girl Talk gave Maggie the support she needed to make friends and advocate for herself, providing the space she needed to figure out who she is and who she wants to be. As a leader during the pandemic, she has stepped outside of her comfort zone and been a champion for others. More than anything, she believes Girl Talk has taught her the importance of creativity and adaptability. Maggie plans to enter a S.T.E.A.M. field after graduating, crediting the women in her life who have pushed past barriers and paved the way. She hopes to take advantage of opportunities they were not given.



claire bacarella

Claire stumbled across Girl Talk on the search for inspiring and uplifting social media accounts. She served as an Ambassador and Camp Counselor and is the creator of the Girls Lifted Up Podcast and Social Impact Initiative, where she allows girls to share how they navigate the challenges in today's society, especially on social media. Through Girl Talk, she has gained a family of girls who advocate for themselves and others and who serve as mentors for other young women around the world. Claire hopes to stay involved with Girl Talk now that she has graduated and to see chapters in every school across the country.

katie + doug brown



Katie grew up around Girl Talk. Her dad, Doug, supported the organization in its early days, and she began attending camp each summer before starting her own chapter. Eventually, Katie would serve on the Teen Advisory Board and become a Camp Counselor. Doug was so proud to watch his daughter learn valuable skills from Girl Talk and grow into a strong leader - being named Inspirational Leader of the Year in 2018. The confidence Katie gained through Girl Talk allowed her to take on opportunities like interning with the Latin American Association and working at a youth hospital in Mexico. Reflecting on her time in Girl Talk programs, Katie remembers how special it was to have her dad's support and to share these experiences with him.

jessica rao

Jessica's love for volunteering led her to Girl Talk and her passion for the mission has made her a champion for the organization for years. After her first day at Girl Talk Camp, she felt welcomed into a family that was radiating positivity. She continued to attend camp as a counselor and later as the Camp Coordinator and intern, as well as serve on the Teen Advisory Board and as an Ambassador while in high school. Jessica's involvement with Girl Talk taught her that everyone has the ability to lead and she found herself becoming the best version of herself, gaining confidence in her own abilities. Her ongoing work with Girl Talk continues to inspire the next generation of leaders!

nia stitt



Nia discovered Girl Talk through her older sister and became a leader in high school, while also serving on the National Teen Advisory Board and as a Camp Counselor. She believes Girl Talk has taught her valuable lessons that she has carried into her adult life, including embracing her authentic self, learning to form strong relationships, and that she is not alone. Nia has continued to stay true to herself after graduating as she follows her passions and unapologetically takes risks. She has been proud to watch the organization remain resilient and persistent in the face of adversity!

A close-up portrait of a young woman with long, dark, wavy hair, looking slightly to the side with a gentle smile. The background is a solid teal color.

FINDING PURPOSE

GIRL TALK ALUMNA, ARIEL HENLEY

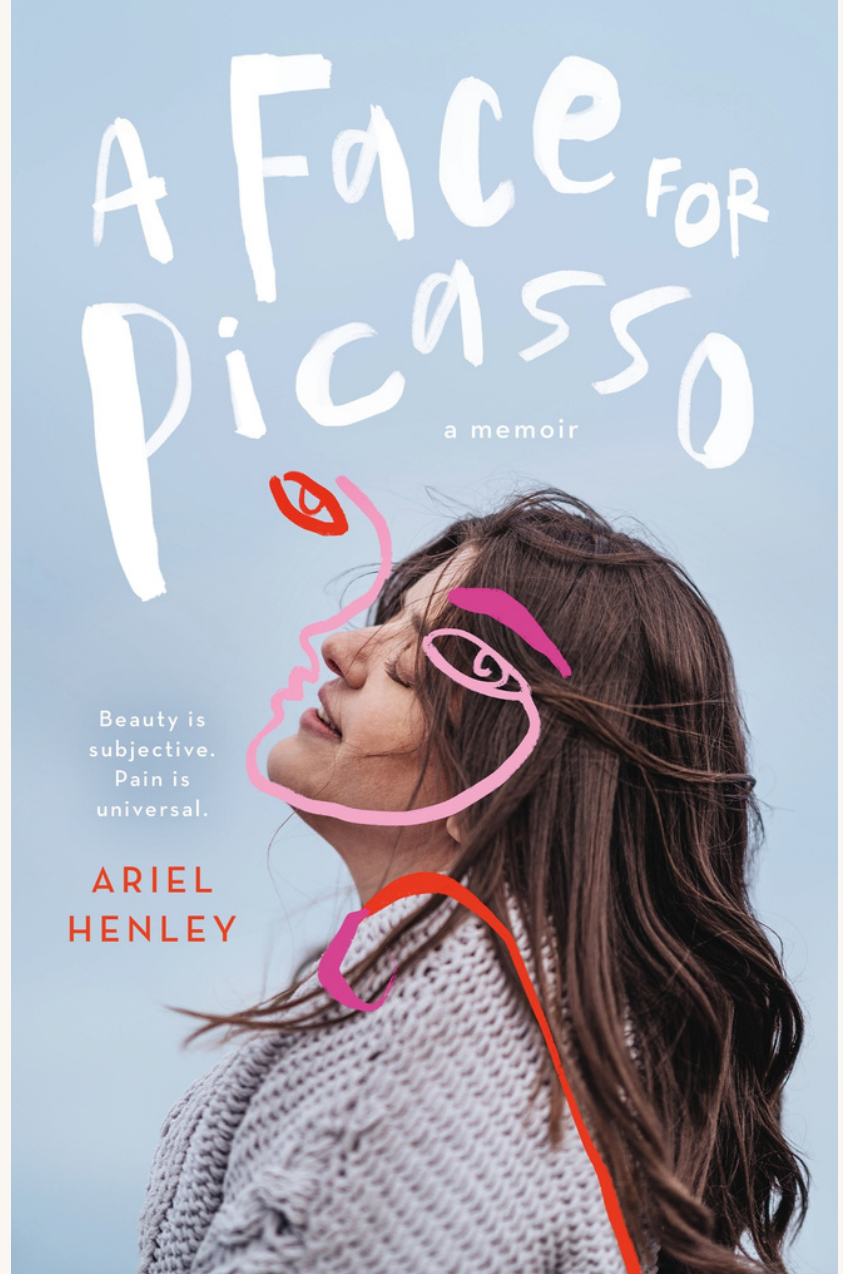
As a teenager, I felt that I lacked a purpose and thought there had to be something I could do to change the experience for girls in middle school and high school. Growing up with Crouzon Syndrome, I often underwent medical procedures and had to miss school for stretches of time. During absences, I would hear stories from a close friend about how difficult it was being a teenage girl among peers. When a friend of mine died by suicide, I knew something had to be done.

I realized that growing up wasn't just challenging because I was different - the people around me also faced adversity. My junior year of high school, I was on extended medical leave after surgery and started researching ways I could create a supportive environment for girls when I stumbled across Girl Talk. The resources were already created for me to run with and in 2008, I started a chapter at my school in California.

I grew up in a family that really lived by the rule “if you care about something, show it.” I brought that energy to my Girl Talk chapter in a way that encouraged others to take action for the things that they cared about. Every month, we hosted a bake sale for a charity the group had selected and were able to tackle tangible problems from supporting animal shelters, sending shoes to those in need, or providing school supplies to underserved communities. We were able to make a difference in our own way in the community and that gave me a sense of direction and purpose when I needed it the most.

I can't hide my physical differences. I bring them into every room with me. Girl Talk gave me a space where I could embrace who I was and have honest conversations with the other students about what we were going through. Meeting with them each week gave me my spark back so that I had the drive and the energy to step outside of my comfort zone in college.

After high school, I graduated from the University of Vermont and eventually found my voice through work in disability advocacy, DEI consulting, and as an author. I have remained connected to some of the girls from my chapter over the years and it has been so rewarding to see where life has taken them.



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We were able to make a difference in our own way in the community and that gave me a sense of direction and purpose when I needed it the most.



BECOMING BUTTERFLIES

GIRL TALK ALUMNA, HANNA MEYERS

Summer 2010 was the first summer that I got involved with Girl Talk as a camper. I was nine years old and incredibly shy and introverted. I was too shy to ask any of my friends to join me so I went by myself to camp and that was the first time that I truly saw the Girl Talk magic. In those five days, I was able to start breaking out of my shell and feeling like I belonged. I really began to see the metaphor that Girl Talk Founder, Haley Kilpatrick, always used at camp unfold before me; I went into camp as a caterpillar and emerged as a butterfly.

I started my school's Girl Talk chapter in the fall of my sophomore year so that I could share the Girl Talk magic that changed my world at nine years old. I led the chapter for three years and continued to return to camp each summer as a camper and as a counselor, even co-leading twice. I served on the Teen Advisory Board for two years and was honored to receive the Ron Bell Inspirational Leader Award and Scholarship in 2017. After graduating from high school, I continued coming back to camp as a volunteer and Girl Talk intern, keeping the tradition going for the next generation.

Girl Talk helped me to evolve in the way that I carried myself through school and navigated socially. The leaders were able to tap into my potential and help me see it in myself. Girl Talk changed my perspective on what leadership looks like because I was able to see these role models with all different personalities, but they were all very effective leaders in their own way. This helped me realize how I can be a better leader myself without pushing myself too far outside of my comfort zone.

If Girl Talk has taught me anything it's that even as an introvert, I can still do hard things. I can lead camp and mentor younger girls, and that has given me the baseline of confidence that I needed to really succeed in college. Since Girl Talk, I have had that extra sense of self and belonging that I carry with me.

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Girl Talk has instilled in me not only an unconditional love for others but also for myself.



thank you

20TH ANNIVERSARY PARTNERS

GIRL TALK MENTOR

**Bell Family Foundation
for Hope**

GIRL TALK ADVOCATE

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THE
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Our work at Girl Talk is possible thanks to your support. We hope to have you join us for the next 20 years and beyond.

www.mygirltalk.org