

# Strong, smart and bold'

Girls Inc. celebrates 50 years in Owensboro

- By Renee Beasley Jones Messenger-Inquirer



Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | [awarren@messenger-inquirer.com](mailto:awarren@messenger-inquirer.com) Zalaya Brison, 12, left and Kaliyah Green, 13, follow a dance routine on a tablet from Just Dance Boom Boom on Tuesday at Girls, Inc. at the Rolling Heights campus.

Alan Warren

Handwritten love notes cover every inch of Tish Correa Osborne's office door at Girls Inc.

One admirer drew a picture of Superwoman, along with a note that read: "Your [sic] Superwoman Ms Tish."

Another little girl's note read, "I love you Tish because you ceep me safe."

Correa Osborne, CEO of Girls Inc., tapes those tokens of affection on her door as a reminder of what matters most -- the girls.

Girls Inc. of Owensboro celebrates 50 years of helping girls become "strong, smart and bold." Its first board of directors met on May 21, 1969.

"I understand that we started out wondering how we were going to make payroll sometimes," said Correa Osborne, who has served as CEO since the mid-80s.

"Incredible volunteers, staff and donors gave so much of themselves, working tirelessly through the years to help build Girls Inc. into what it is today."

The nonprofit's first home was a Rolling Heights apartment. Then, it expanded to two apartments in the complex. In following years, Girls Inc. bounced from site to site.

Today, it leases two campuses -- a stand-alone building in Rolling Heights and space at Owensboro Christian Church.

Through the decades, Girls Inc. has "weathered tornadoes and fires but never stopped serving girls and their families," Correa Osborne said.

## **Changing lives**

Linett Brice grew up in a single-parent, low-income family. She was the youngest of four children. Her family lived in Rolling Heights.

Brice, now 44, attended Girls Inc. from fifth grade until she graduated from high school. She worked at the nonprofit one summer before heading off to college.

Girls Inc. changed her life.

"Growing up in an underserved community places a child at a disadvantage due to lack of resources and economic hardships, which can lead to educational and health

disparities," Brice said. "A child can become a product of their negative surroundings, putting them at risk of continuing in a cycle of poverty. Girls Inc. was my outlet."

Its family atmosphere fostered the belief that all girls -- rich or poor -- deserve a fulfilling future, she said. Through education and personal development, the program taught her how to dream big and reach goals.

Today, Brice works as a clinical adviser at Humana.

She is a product of Girls Inc.'s focus on science, technology, engineering and math. Brice earned a nursing degree at Galen College of Nursing, a bachelor's in biology from University of Louisville, a master's in public health from University of Louisville and is working on her doctoral degree in public health.

"Girls Inc. exposes girls from vulnerable communities to different cultures and experiences they may have never encountered -- camping, horseback riding, canoeing, archery, etc. Girls who may have never left Kentucky before are exposed to travels, which can enhance their sense of adventure, spontaneity and understanding of diversity."

Brice is just one example. Owensboro Girls Inc. girls, as they call themselves, are spread throughout the region and U.S.

Correa Osborne rattles off some of their accomplishments as if they are her own babes. At least two former members are working on doctorates. One just opened her own interior design firm. One works at Independence Bank. The list goes on.

Their reach is far and wide. And everywhere they go, they carry deep appreciation and lessons learned from Girls Inc.

**'Just for girls'**

On Tuesday afternoon, younger girls turned somersaults and cartwheels on two gym mats. A couple of girls danced in one corner. Some teens huddled in a corner.

One girl, wearing a red Girls Inc. T-shirt, walked across the room, packing three hula hoops around her waist. Girls played Foosball, studied in the library and played on computers.

One afternoon last week, 80 girls attended the Rolling Heights after-school programs. More than 60 were at the Owensboro Christian Church site.

Kaliyah Green is a 13-year-old student at Owensboro Middle School's North Campus. She joined Girls Inc. about five years ago.

Kaliyah comes almost every day after school. A Girls Inc. van drives her home after the program ends.

The all-girl atmosphere empowers her, she said, because boys tend to be more aggressive and can steal a lot of thunder. At Girls Inc., it's easy -- and expected -- for girls to shine.

"Before I came to Girls Inc., I wasn't the type of person who spoke in front of people or did interviews (with media). Now, I'm a Girls Inc. ambassador," Kaliyah said.

Being part of the nonprofit expanded her horizons. At 13, she's already thinking about possible careers. She has considered becoming a lawyer, doctor, fashion designer, singer or actor since coming to Girls Inc. Ideas like that seem possible now, Kaliyah said.

Courtney Calhoun is the Girls Inc. campus manager at Rolling Heights -- and a former Girls Inc. girl.

Like Correa Osborne, Calhoun's office door, file cabinets and walls are plastered with photographs and art from girls associated with the program. To Calhoun, these are her children.

She came at age 8 and stayed until 13. Calhoun was raised by a single mom, like many of the young girls she cares for.

"When I was a member of Girls Inc., I was very shy," Calhoun said. "Girls Inc. helped me to build confidence in myself. It also taught me that you should make everyone feel special."

Working at Girls Inc. is a continuation of what she learned there as a child. Girls she shepherds today make her feel special with notes of appreciation and love. And the girls at Girls Inc. inspire Calhoun to be strong, smart and bold.

The nonprofit deserves credit for providing stability and connectedness to generations of girls who didn't grow up with those advantages at home, Brice said.

"Girls Inc. provides a sense of family and sisterhood," Brice said. "It is a safe haven for all girls, even those who may feel out of place or misunderstood. It is a place that nurtures a girl's dreams while shaping her reality for success. It is a place that allows girls to discover their strengths, display their smartness and embrace their boldness."

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