

# Angie Stringer



**A**t the helm since August, 2015, she's seen the organization through a challenging stretch, but nonetheless Girls Inc. is stronger and bolder with new programs and renewed energy.

Bottom row on floor: Mary Kate, Essence, Journee, Lily. Second row back with Angie: Stephanie, Angie Stringer, Shelby, Bentley. Third row behind Angie: Aylah, Ashley, Azalea. Last Row behind Angie: Gabby, Sarriyah, Lyric



It's a sprawling epicenter of girl energy. Three o'clock and they start to arrive and the place vibrates with the sounds of girls moving about, headed to classes or to join activities. There's the refurbished gym that's offering jump rope classes. In another room, girls are having afternoon snacks. A yoga instructor is setting up for a lesson. An art class is starting soon.

At the helm is Angie Stringer who has been President and CEO of Girls Inc. of Sarasota County since August, 2015. She previously worked for Girls Inc. as the Director of Communication and Agency Resources, from 2004-2007. It was a sad day for her many fans when she left, but she went on to do great things, spending eight years as Director of Major Gifts at Children First.

When CEO Robin Rose left, Girls Inc. sought Angie out and the time was right for her to come back. Once on board, Angie looked at Girls Inc.'s programming. "From day one, I knew what I wanted to change," and that meant moving away from national programs and creating new ones. Thus came Dream Harbor, an after-school program, "where girls aged 5-14 have jobs, earn wages called Dream Dollars, pay taxes, and work together to build a thriving community... girls develop, market, and sell products and services that are sold at a monthly Market Day," according to their website.

They also created a Family Strengthening program and hired case managers and therapists - 6 in total. The program, Angie points out, "supports the whole family" and was funded by the Barancik Foundation. It's a program Angie is particularly proud of and it's now the model for other Girls Inc. affiliates.

The program was created to "meet the basic needs of girls" using, according to Angie, a "trauma-based approach" designed to deal with mental health issues, adding, "Most girls have trauma in their lives." All staff have been trained in the program as well.

Others began to take notice of Girls Inc.'s innovative programming. Last year, Girls Inc. was awarded the first ever *Pillar of Inspiration Award* from Girls Inc. National. The award is for an affiliate that is considered, "an inspiring, supportive leader within the network and highlights Girls Inc. of Sarasota's ongoing leadership efforts and ability to learn, adapt, implement new programs, while serving as an educational model for Girls Inc. affiliates across the nation." In 2019, Girls Inc. was named affiliate of the year (there are 78 affiliates across the U.S. and Canada).

And of course, there was Covid, which forced a major change in operations starting in March, 2020. "Staff switched all programming to virtual," Angie explains. Staff stood outside and gave out food to families. Case managers and therapists would also stand outside to be available for families needing emotional support.

They closed for a few months and, following CDC guidelines, limited capacity to only a quarter of their usual. And they charged no fees. In addition, "Some parents didn't want their kids in school, but couldn't care for them at home so they went to school here - about 50 girls."

Once back open, Angie and her staff found an unexpected outcome after Covid: behavior issues. The cause, Angie explains,

was the result of the girls "not being socialized...they didn't know how to be with other children—things like standing in line would cause fights. "It took a year to get these girls settled," Angie explains.

There was also needed work to be done on their building which opened in 1974-75. With 900 girls ages 5-18 in their programs, the signs are there that they need a bigger building.

In 2017, Girls In. began an outreach program in 20 schools (at no cost to families). Instructors would go into schools teaching life skills, media literacy, project bold, a self-defense class, drug and alcohol prevention. Angie points out they want to do more on the topic of anti-bullying, adding that bullying and social media are the biggest issues young girls face.

Add to the list of programs they created at Girls Inc. is Project Accelerate, newest program, which is all about college and career readiness which makes it easy to see why they won that award for their programming.

Along with her career-long experience working exclusively with nonprofits, Angie honed her leadership skills like so many other women leaders in Sarasota through her participation in the Junior League of Sarasota and has been a member since 2007 and is a past president.

Angie moved to Sarasota from North Carolina over 20 years ago after college. She worked at the then Sarasota Y where she also met her husband.

A first during Angie's tenure is the addition of male volunteers and male staff and one of their program directors is a man. There are 52 on staff with 10 being full time



Their mission at Girls inc. is simple, but vital: focus on the development of the whole girl. If you have any doubt as to why these programs are needed, consider a report that came out this Feb. 13. Around 1 in 3 high school girls in the U.S. have seriously considered attempting suicide, according to new results from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey from 2021, up from less than a fifth of teen girls in 2011.

And more than half of teen girls, 57%, reported feeling "persistently sad or hopeless" — a record high number. The statistics are among several mental health trends in high schoolers that have worsened most among girls over the past decade, according to data from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Overall, 22% of high schoolers said they have considered suicide. That is somewhat better than the 29% when the CDC first began its biennial survey in the 1990s, but is an increase from the record low 13.8% tallied in 2009 according to Kathleen Ethier, director of the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health.

As for goals: Angie has a lot: expand outreach, get into south county, build more community partners, get more into north country, a higher tech building and a teaching kitchen. Thinking boldly, add a new building to replace the current one opened in 1974-75. And if that's not a tall enough order, Angie's goal is to make all programming free. Of her job she says, "I love it..and adds we've put together an amazing team"

For more information, visit [www.GirlsIncSRQ.org](http://www.GirlsIncSRQ.org). 

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