

# BEAM Girls and Por Su Salud

## 2011 Brody Scholar Summer Enrichment Project

By Stephanie Maxwell

“Our deepest *fear* is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are **powerful** beyond measure. It is our **LIGHT** not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be *brilliant, gorgeous, TALENTED, fabulous?*

Actually, who are you not to be?

....Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are **ALL** meant to **shine**, as children do...And as we *let our own light shine*, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are **liberated** from our own fear, our **PRESENCE** automatically liberates others.”

-quote by Marianne Wilson

This summer, I had the wonderful opportunity to create a service project with my fellow Brody Scholar and classmate, Stephanie Carrier. We were interested in creating this program because we saw a need to reach out to young girls in the Greenville Community. We named our project **BEAM** Girls, which stands for “**B**right, **E**mpowered **A**nd **M**otivated Girls.” In brainstorming ideas for a project name, we drew inspiration from the above quote which we found captured wholeheartedly what we wanted the main message of our program—that the girls are “Beams” of light who possess such unique and beautiful talents and characteristics. We wanted them to recognize their personal worth and empower them to share their talents with the world in order to empower other individuals.

It was meaningful to serve as a mentor and positive role model to the girls we worked with at Operation Sunshine and the Boys and Girls Club. Throughout the summer, Stephanie and I created various sessions for the girls that centered on empowering the girls to build high self-esteem by helping them develop the skills necessary to face life's challenges and lead a healthy, sustainable lifestyle. It was fun to help the girls discover and be proud of their strengths and attributes, develop healthy eating and exercise habits, and to be able to identify their core values and interests. This summer project proved to be an enriching experience because it helped me to understand better the needs of the Greenville Community and become an advocate for this lower socioeconomic population. In what follows is a description of the sessions Stephanie and I designed that chronicles my journey with these amazing young women.

June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011: *Capture who you are in a snap shot*  
Operation Sunshine

Today was our first session with Operation Sunshine. We worked with a group of about fifteen girls who ranged from ages 5-13 years old. It was a little challenging working with the wide spectrum of ages, but we tried our hardest to encourage all the girls to have fun and enjoy the activities. I observed that the younger girls were much more willing to participate at first while the older girls held back a little—most likely apprehensive about our presence. I know it will take more than one session to build the older girls’ trust so that they can open up to us, and I am excited to get to know them more in the future.

The first activity we did was an ice breaker game to learn everyone’s names. We gathered all the girls in a circle and played a fun game called “Linda Lemon” in which every girl had to state her name and describe an item that she would buy at the store that begins with the same first letter of her name. I was “Stephanie Strawberries.” Many of the girls were very creative, for example, “Yasminah Yo-Yo” was one of my favorites. Next, we handed out a survey for each girl to fill out so they could get to know each other a little better and discover similarities between them. The survey had questions that identified fun things about each girl’s interests, hobbies, values, and health habits. After each girl filled out her own column, we then gave them instructions that they had to go around the room and find someone who had a similar interest in each category. It was definitely fun to see the girls interact with each other.

After the ice breakers, we moved on to our big activity which was photography. We wanted to teach the girls about how taking photographs is an excellent outlet to express themselves creatively and capture what is important to them. I brought in some pictures that I had taken in my undergraduate photography class to share with them and teach them about the rules of photography. We gave them all disposable cameras and instructed them to go home and take pictures of the things that were important to them that would help capture who they were as a unique individual. We had them decorate their own picture frames that they would put their favorite picture in. The girls loved this activity and again it was fun to see their creative skills!



For our healthy snack, we taught them how making smoothies is both delicious and fun. Many of the girls were so enthusiastic about volunteering to help us whip the ingredients together. As we put in each ingredient into the blender, we taught about the nutritional value of each one: yogurt, orange juice, berries, and bananas. Although a little messy, many of the girls ventured out of their comfort zones to try our blend of something new. As a final note to this session, I think we had a great start! By the end, all the girls were calling me “Ms. M” and Stephanie C., “Ms. C” and many of them gave us hugs as we left. They are truly a precious group of girls.



June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011: ***Surround yourself with positive people!***  
Operation Sunshine

In our second session today, we focused on maintaining healthy relationships. We partnered with two of my fellow classmates, Demi Dawkins and Shannon Banks, who are recipients of the Tiana Nicole Williams Endowment. Tiana Nicole was a first-year medical student who fell victim to domestic violence and died as a result of abuse from her fiancé. As a result, the Tiana Nicole Project was developed to increase awareness of domestic violence in the community. For their project, Demi and Shannon wanted to reach out to young teens to alert them to the red flags of unhealthy relationships. Stephanie and I felt this topic was very valuable information for the girls to understand.

We started the session with a game in which statements were put in a hat and the girls had to identify if the statement that they pulled out represented a positive or negative sign of a relationship. For example, one statement was “Jealousy is a sign of caring and love,” which the girls automatically determined was negative. Based on their correct classification of these statements, the girls seem already very aware of what is healthy in a relationship which is encouraging. Next, we had another interactive activity in which the girls participated in a Reader’s Theatre. Demi and Shannon put together four different story scenarios that demonstrated female and male violence that the girls had to



volunteer to act out. After each scenario, we had a very good discussion about what was wrong with the relationship in the story. One important point that we stressed to the girls was who they could seek help from if they ever found themselves threatened by a significant other. The girls identified family, teachers, and mentors as trusted individuals that they could approach for help. At the end, we gave them handouts to take home which included the Teen Dating Bill of Rights, a Teen Dating Violence Power and Control Wheel, and a summary brochure that included definitions for different forms of dating violence, what they can do to help friends who are in unhealthy relationships, and contact information for groups in Greenville that can help.

After focusing on dating violence, we moved on to talking about how the girls could be good friends and good family members. This was again another informative part of the session that I hope the girls understood the take-home message that they should surround themselves with positive people who will support them and encourage them to feel good about themselves. At the end, we had them journal about someone in their life that motivates them in a positive way. For our healthy snack, we made “Ants on a Log” with celery, peanut butter, cream cheese, mini chocolate chips, and raisins.



June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011: **Healthy Relationships**  
Boys and Girls Club

Today was our first session at the Boys and Girls Club. We worked with a group of 12-15 year olds. We had Demi and Shannon do the same exact session on Domestic Violence that we had done previously at Operation Sunshine. This topic seemed to pertain more to this age group which was evidenced by the much more in depth conversation about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships. I really wanted each girl to get the most out of this session and realize that no one should try to control her by telling her what she can and cannot wear, who she can and cannot hang out with, or what activities she can and cannot participate in. Likewise, no one should ever use intimidation, coercion, or threats to exert power over her. Instead, a healthy relationship involves finding someone that supports her goals in life, respects her, and uses non-threatening behavior. I only hope that we empowered the girls to never

settle for less and always expect to receive the best treatment from others because each one of them deserves nothing but respect!

July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011: **Stress Busters**  
Boys and Girls Club

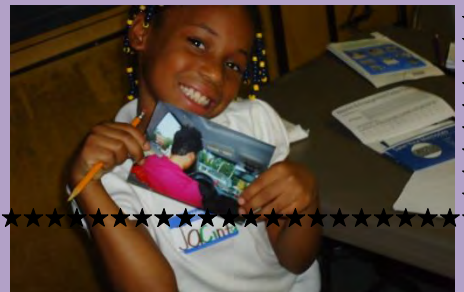
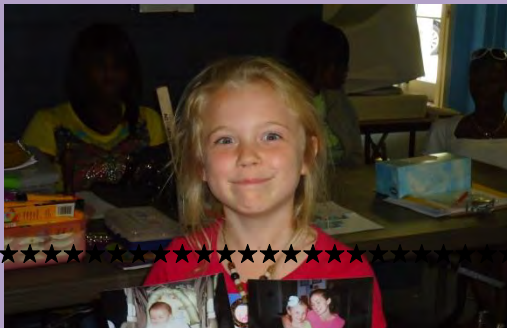
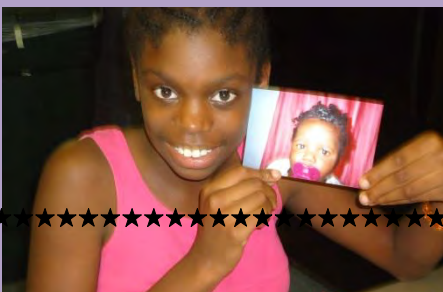
Today's session focused on ways to manage stress with certain relaxation techniques including meditation, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation. The first thing we had the girls do was fill out a stress inventory. The inventory was an informative survey that first assesses how much stress an individual has in her life and secondly educates the individual if the amount of stress is healthy or unhealthy. After every girl finished the survey, we talked about the results and gave them the opportunity to talk about the various stresses in their lives.

Next, we handed out yoga mats that we bought for the girls and told them to create their own sacred, personal space. To help set the mood further, we played some relaxing Mountain Stream music and instructed them through three relaxation techniques. First, Stephanie taught them how to do progressive muscle relaxation in which you progressively contract different muscle groups for 15 seconds and then relax them. After, I lead them through a guided imagery session. I had them close their eyes and we took a mental vacation to the beach; I described a relaxing scene at the beach that they had to use their imaginations to create using all five senses. The girls really loved this exercise! Finally, Stephanie led them through some deep breathing techniques.

For our last activity, we made healthy smoothies with berries, bananas, yogurt, and orange juice. The girls seemed to love the fruit smoothies and many seemed interested in making their own at home. I think the girls today, in general, learned many lessons that they can take home with them—as well as a yoga mat that they can always use on their own at home to practice the same relaxation techniques.

July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011: **Stress Busters**  
Operation Sunshine

This week at Operation Sunshine, we focused on stress management. But before we began that activity, we had a great surprise for the girls---we had their pictures developed from the cameras we sent them home with on their first session! The girls were ecstatic to see the pictures finally. We made everyone go through their pictures and pick out two that meant the most to them. We then had them partner up and describe the significance of the two pictures they chose to each other. After, we circled them up so they could share their pictures with the entire group if they wanted to. I learned so many touching things about who these girls were, including stories about their mothers, brothers, sisters, grandparents, and friends!



Next, we jumped into the three same relaxation techniques that we had done at the Boys and Girls Club before. First, everyone took the Stress Inventory Survey followed by the progressive muscle relaxation, the beach guided imagery, and the breathing techniques. The girls really seemed to like these activities just as much as the other group of girls. Unfortunately, we did not have yoga mats to give to the Operation Sunshine girls, so we were forced to be a little creative with having the girls get comfortable and creating their own personal space. For our healthy snack, we had a table full of various snacks that the girls could make their own trail mix. It included roasted peanuts, pretzels, dried fruit, raisins, m&ms, popcorn, and goldfish. The girls kept begging for seconds! This session overall was a success in teaching them how to relax, to always make time for the things they love, and to be creative in making healthy snacks.

July 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011: ***You Are What You Eat!***  
Operation Sunshine and Boys & Girls Club

This week was all about nutrition and eating healthy. We invited my friend, Abby Lancaster, who is a public health major and who works at the Pediatric Healthy Weight Clinic. She brought some really great handouts and education tools for the girls. Before Abby presented, Stephanie and I had some fun games to get the girls thinking about food! At Operation Sunshine we played a “20 Questions” type of game in which we printed off pictures of fruits and vegetables and taped one to the back of one of the girl’s back. The girl then had to go around to each table asking “yes or no” type questions to the other girls in order to ultimately guess what type of food she had. The girls really enjoyed this game because it was interactive and fun. At the Boys and Girls Club, we designed a different game since the girls are a bit older. Here, we did a recipe game in which the girls had to guess the ingredients that went into making certain dishes like caesar salad, lasagna, and meat loaf. The girls seemed to like this game too and Stephanie and I got to see the little chefs we had in the room!

Next Abby presented her nutrition material. She gave them two main handouts. One was a red light, green light food guide that gave them lists of foods they could eat all the time, those they could only have 2-3 times per week, and those that they should limit to maybe once a week. This worksheet also split up the foods into food groups, so Abby had all the girls go through and circle items in the Green Light list for each group that they could eat every day. I think many of the girls learned that some of their favorite fruits and vegetables fell in that list! Then Abby taught them about portion sizes. She had a demonstration plate that had the portion sizes you should eat of protein, carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables. One main point that Abbey certainly emphasized was the need for them to get exercise—even on rainy days by doing simple things like playing Wii active games, for example—and the importance of limiting soda and juice intake.

To end the session, we made our healthy snack for the day which included apple slices with peanut butter and sugarfree popsicles. Having good nutrition and exercise is so important to being healthy but also to building self-esteem. One thing that Abby also stressed that I really appreciated was that being healthy does not by any means signify being a certain weight on the scale nor looking like the

women they see in entertainment; instead, being beautiful is living an active lifestyle in which you nourish your body with the right energy that it needs in order to prevent diseases in the future.



July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011: **RESPECT and Show Your Appreciation!**  
Operation Sunshine

Today's goals were two-fold: first, we wanted to talk to them about showing respect to others and how sometimes our actions speak louder than our words, and secondly, to decorate cookies for someone in their lives that they respect and appreciate. So for the first part of the session, we focused on the importance of body language and how non-verbal communication can affect our relationships with others. We played a fun game of charades in which we split the girls up into two teams which took turns with having one girl from each team acting out a particular emotion for their team to identify. We had many great little actresses who communicated many different emotions by their sheer actions. Our goal was that we wanted the girls to connect how their emotions can be conveyed through their body language. For example, we really stressed the positive quality of attentive listening—if you are really showing your interest in what someone is saying, your body language will display that you are interested like actively listening and providing feedback. This activity was important because it taught the girls how to effectively communicate their emotions and express themselves to others around them, especially their friends and family. Most importantly, we taught them about holding their heads high and always having confidence in themselves!

Next, Stephanie taught them about cookie decorating: one of Stephanie's favorite hobbies that she identifies as a fun stress reliever. The girls loved learning the art of decorating and using the different, fancy tools—and of course they loved eating the finished project! Each girl decorated an additional cookie that we wanted them to give to someone in their lives that they really treasured and wanted to show a sign of appreciation for. I was encouraged by the many positive descriptions that the girls gave of this person and how that person had positively impacted her life.



July 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011: ***Fiesta!***  
Operation Sunshine and Boys & Girls Club

I am so sad because this week was our final session with both groups of girls. However, we ended on a positive, fun note with a big party that the girls surely deserved for all their insight and participation in the program throughout the summer. This session focused on how exercise does not have to be a boring, tiring task; instead, exercise can be fun and energetic as long as you pick an activity that is exciting and fun. In particular, we used dance as a prime example and taught how dance not only offers great health benefits, but how dance also serves as an outlet of self-expression.

In preparation for our Zumba dance party, we had the girls make their own maracas that would make the dancing more fun. We used paper plates and kidney beans as the noise makers and had them decorate them. Next, we broke out the electrifying, hip-swaying Latin music to dance to. This was the best part for me because it was my first time leading a group exercise and teaching one of my favorite activities: Zumba. I love it so much that I signed up to get Zumba certified so I can volunteer to teach officially in the future for my Por Su Salud project and for other groups of children. Zumba is so much fun because it is a fun activity that distracts you from the fact that you are exercising, and you also get a great cultural exploration. I got the girls up and moving and taught them how to do the following cultural dances: Salsa, Merengue, Cumbia, and Reggaeton. I stressed that even if they did not get all the moves perfectly, all that really mattered was the fact that they didn't give up and kept their feet moving ☺ Next, I opened up the exercise leading to different girls that could come up with their own dance moves for the group to follow. This was the best part because we got to see the creativity of the girls shine through! This was by far my favorite session!

After about forty five minutes of working up a good sweat, we ended our fiesta by teaching the girls how to make fresh salsa. The salsa was very delicious and we enjoyed it with some *baked* tortilla chips. While just enjoying each other's final company, Stephanie and I asked the girls to meditate on what they learned this summer and how they could incorporate these lessons into their daily lives. It was so encouraging to hear how we had impacted their lifestyles, and I am moved by the changes (no matter how little) each girl pledged to make in order to sustain a healthy lifestyle.





**Summary**

I will forever cherish this experience and will never forget those beautiful, talented faces I got to know this summer. I got so used to the nickname "Ms. M" and I will miss their loving hugs. Unfortunately, we cannot continue our project at Operation Sunshine, but I will continue the program at the Boys & Girls by leading a group Zumba exercise there once a month once I get my official certification which will happen on October 2, 2011. One of the organizations I am a part of, the Student National Medical Association is very excited about incorporating this exercise program with the Boys & Girls Club into their service activities.



## **2011 Por Su Salud Project**

In addition to designing the BEAM girls project, I am also continuing my work on a similar healthy lifestyle program for Hispanic women in the community in conjunction with an ESL program called ALMAS that I participate in. I began working on this project this summer but am still in the stages of enacting it this current semester. I had originally wanted to take a Spanish for the Health Professions class and shadow Spanish translators at PCMH and the Grimesland Clinic, but I soon realized that I was going to be taking on too much this summer with BEAM girls and being a TA for the SPFD program. As a result, instead, I purchased an online textbook of Spanish for the Health Professions that I could use to study on my own time throughout the summer. This book was great in showing videos of different parts of the History and Physical in Spanish. I learned so much and now feel more comfortable in my abilities to communicate with Spanish speaking patients.

In addition, since I love group exercise, with my official Zumba certification that I am getting on October 2, 2011, I will also offer a weekly group Zumba exercise for these Hispanic women. Like I described before, Zumba is one of my favorite activities, and I am so excited to share this interest of mine with the women—many I have talked to already are very excited about being able to participate in a group exercise weekly for free! In addition to the weekly group exercises, I will design monthly health sessions for the women. I have already handed out a health survey to a group of Hispanic women who participate in the ESL tutoring program ALMAS so that I can get a better idea of their health interests. I will use these surveys to design sessions that are catered to their interests. In conclusion, I regret that I do not have much to show for this effort as of now, but I will provide updates with the project as it begins to come into more substance!