GEM GIRLS EMPOWERING MOVEMENT

A transformative game-changer created by girls, for girls.

For too long, girls have been sidelined in traditional sports and physical activity programs—told they don't belong, or that movement is only for the strongest or the fastest.

But what if movement wasn't about competing? What if it was about joy, empowerment, and belonging?

Girls Empowering Movement (GEM) turns the structure of typical mainstream physical activity (PA) programs on its head. Most PA programs are created by adults and geared toward boys. They focus on competitive sports instead of leadership, confidence, and collaboration.

The Challenge

Only 51% of 5th grade girls in Georgia have a healthy aerobic capacity. By 12th grade, that number plummets to just 31%. Only 15% of all high school girls get the daily recommended amount of physical activity.

By Girls For Girls

The 14 founding middle school girls developed the program, identified needed resources, created its name, logo, and identity, and built a working framework, providing a safe space, where girls are always in charge and everyone is welcome.

Guided by adult facilitators, asking for and providing feedback is a central component to continue to grow and strengthen the program.

"GEM helped me realize that movement is about more than just fitness—it's about feeling strong, being with friends, and believing in myself. I love leading others and seeing them get excited about movement too." – Olivia, 8th Grade

Over an 18-month period, 14 female middle schoolers from across Georgia built GEM. HealthMPowers asked them to tell us what girls their age need. We had no idea how just asking this question would empower them to build a program that does so much more than increase physical activity. It emboldens and equips them with the tools, skills, and capacity to be champions for change.

> **"When we were virtual, my GEM Ambassador Leader acted as a teacher to the other students. I realized then that it's not just a title, it's a new identity – like a superhero."**
>
> —Sherri Griffith, Bethune Middle School

The Solution

Creating a program that girls want to participate in is key to improving PA outcomes as girls move from middle school to high school.

Girls embrace GEM's flexibility to create a program targeting their specific physical and emotional needs, considering their likes, dislikes, personal motivations, and group dynamics. They plan, implement, and evaluate a "Create a MOVEment" project to encourage other girls to engage in physical activity. They get to be leaders – running the program in tandem with an adult facilitator, setting individual and group goals, selecting activities, creating a budget, and purchasing equipment. Additionally, two girls are selected from each group to be GEM Ambassadors who receive training and connect with other ambassadors across the state.

At the same time, GEM provides girls with a safe-space and "girls-only zone" where they can make unique social connections, experience a supportive atmosphere, and grow to be confident young women. Throughout their GEM journey, girls take part in emotional wellness activities, mood tracking, mindfulness journaling, and learn coping methods and self-care skills.

The Impact

GEM girls emerge from the program with stronger leadership, communication, and project management skills, while creating positive, lasting impact on the physical and mental health of girls in their community.

Girls Empowering Movement is transformative for middle school girls, empowering them to improve their physical and mental health, while cultivating community care and leadership. GEM fosters intrinsic motivation, leadership skills, and a sense of belonging, creating a supportive environment where girls thrive.

Supporting and expanding GEM works toward giving all girls in Georgia the opportunity to lead healthy, active, and fulfilling lives. Join us in advocating for the girls and youth in your own community, ensuring their future is bright, healthy, and strong.

GEM isn't a moment. It's a movement.

6,526

GEM girls planned and led more than 150 community initiatives, providing new physical activity opportunities to 26,428 additional girls.

51%

Increase in physical activity in girls participating in GEM's first year.

73%

GEM girls reported improving or maintaining a high level of leadership ability.

For more information, please contact Jennifer.Owens@HealthMPowers.org

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GEM Program Guide

The Core Components of GEM Include:

1) Training for Adult Facilitators and youth leaders to implement the program (virtual or in person). The program requires a minimum of one Adult Facilitator at each site.

2) Annual Licensing Fee includes website with supplemental resources such as youth-led stretching and breathing videos and leadership training on topics like mental health and making physical activity accessible and adaptive for all abilities.

3**) The GEM Journal,** a self-paced curriculum co-created with girls and subject matter experts with 10 integrative modules designed by girls to be fun and engaging for youth.

4) Create a MOVEment, a peer engagement project where girls create and implement a plan to make a sustainable change to expand PA opportunities for their peers.

Site Checklist

Who can start a GEM program?
Any organization or program that serves middle school girls and can provide a safe physical space with a designated background-checked adult facilitator can have a GEM group (schools, afterschool clubs, Girl Scout troops, gyms, etc.).

Site Checklist

- Secure administrative and funding support.
- Designate an Adult Facilitator to serve as the site liaison and supervise the program.
- Provide a safe indoor and/or outdoor space for physical activity.
- Set a meeting schedule.
- Recruit program participants.
- Select two girl Ambassador Leaders to help.
- Schedule and attend training.
- Access and review online resources.
- Distribute program materials.
- Guide girls through the GEM journal curriculum at your own pace.
- Support peer engagement project outlined in the Create a MOVEment curriculum.
- Ensure safety and inclusivity of all participants.
- Have participants complete the pre and post survey.

I love that I can be my most true self and feel comfortable around people who want to see me be my best. GEM has given me a space where I can build true friendships and learn about things that build my confidence. I don't know where I'd be without GEM.

- Nicole, 6th Grade

GEM has impacted me because it has made me a healthier person, better athlete, better listener, and a better leader.

- Kennedi, 8th Grade

Annual Licensing - $500

An annual licensing fee is required for sites implementing GEM. Cost includes:

- Program licensing for one year of the GEM program and brand (following guidelines)
- Digital access to the GEM journal curriculum
- Digital access to facilitator resources to support training and ongoing implementation

Training - $300+

A one-time training and GEM certification. At least one trained Adult Facilitator is required. Inviting youth leaders to training is recommended. Cost includes:

- **Virtual Option ($300):** Two hours of virtual training for Adult Facilitator(s) and youth leaders covers the GEM approach to girl-centered leadership, GEM journal curriculum, and planning for "Create a MOVEment" peer engagement project.

- **In-Person Option:** A half-day (4-hour) training, option combines the content of both facilitation trainings and allows for discussion and group collaboration. Georgia-based training is $1,000, while out-of-state training is $3,000 and includes facilitator travel and accommodations.

GEM isn't a moment. It's a movement.

"Create a MOVEment"

A peer engagement project where girls create and implement a plan to make a sustainable change to expand physical activity opportunities in their communities.

- Curriculum and project planning included in the GEM Journal
- Additional facilitator supports and project ideas included in digital resources
- Successful projects range from $0 - $1,000 per site, provided and determined by site

For more information, please contact Jennifer.Owens@HealthMPowers.org

HealthMPowers is a nonprofit organization based in Georgia that champions healthy habits and transforms the environments where children live, learn, and play. Ultimately, we aspire to build a future where all children are nourished and active.

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