

Powerful Alternatives

A Newsletter for Supporters of Alternatives For Girls

Special Feature: Asset Building Program

Alternatives For Girls (AFG) Asset Building Program (ABP) helps middle school-aged students plan for high school, college, trade school, and beyond by filling college access and preparation gaps. For many students in low-income areas, institutional barriers in education make college and career planning difficult despite evidence that higher education improves life outcomes. After starting with 35 middle school-aged girls in 2015, the program has grown to 57 participants. Although the pandemic made access to education and other supports even more complicated, AFG has supported our participants with 153 virtual workshops (approximately three per week) since June 2020. The ABP identifies four core areas for support:

- i. Academic Enrichment offers academic and career workshops that prepare students for higher learning. Workshops include homework help/tutoring, hands-on STEAM classes, SAT/ACT preparation, college tours, and career exploration.
- ii. Mentoring engages students in 1-on-1 sessions with an adult guide who encourages them to develop their potential, set clear life goals, and foster confidence. AFG has a National Quality Mentoring System Badge recognizing our quality and practical mentoring component.
- iii. Family Engagement offers monthly workshops for parents/families to support their child's ABP experience. Through topics like How to Apply for FAFSA and Understanding Adolescent Development, workshops ensure that parents understand and support their children's efforts.
- iv. A College Savings program helps participants set up a Michigan Education Savings Plan (MESP) to incentivize college savings early on, with a coordinated donation of up to \$500/girl from AFG. To date, in FY2021, AFG has matched \$9,913 of girls' savings, and all senior participants attending university have exceeded their \$500 match.



Our students are generating successes in the ABP:

- ✓ 100% of our seniors graduated from high school for the twentieth year in a row.
- ✓ 80% of our seniors will attend university or trade school with post-high school support.
- ✓ 73% of all participants increased their GPA and/or maintained a 3.0 or higher in 2020. The average GPA was 3.39.

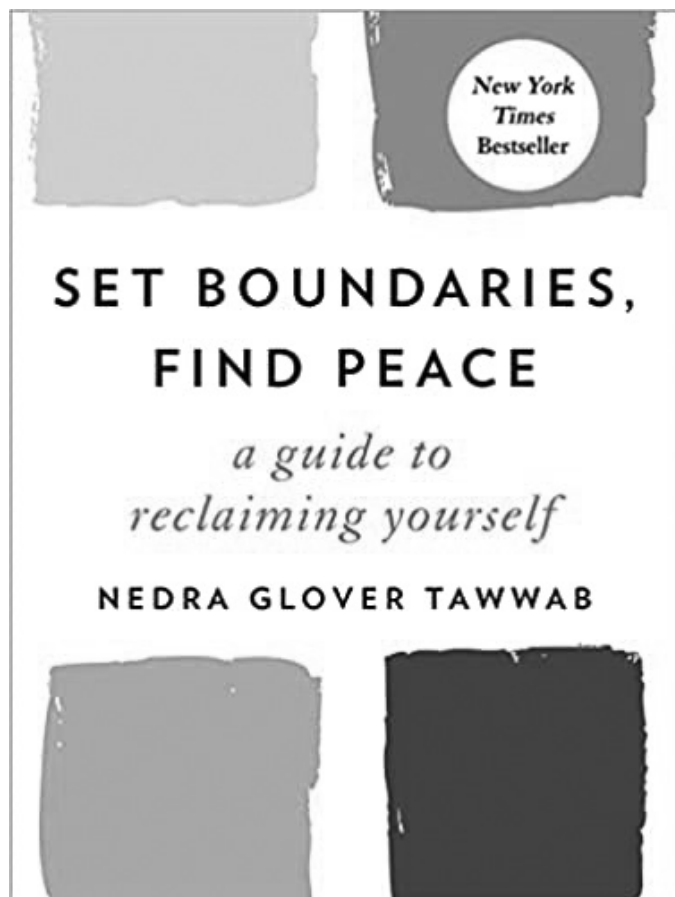
Over the next two to five years, the Asset Building Program will be:

- Enhancing evaluation of the core components for effectiveness in participants' success;
- Enrolling more participants (at least 50 in the 2021-2022 academic year);
- Scaling by sharing our work across Detroit to drive college attendance, career development, and healthy, sustainable lifestyles.

To find out how you can support our Asset Building Program, please email Dawn Barrack, Director of Fund Development, at dbarrack@alternativesforgirls.org

BURGERS & BOOKS: CONNECTING PARTICIPANTS TO THE PAGE

By Sara Kernan, Curriculum Coordinator for Shelter & Housing Service AFG



The moment a donation crosses the threshold of Alternatives For Girls, it travels from the hearts of donors to the hands of participants. From monetary to material, contributions are carefully documented and sorted by destination: Prevention, Shelter, and Outreach and Education Services.

One donor gave AFG's Shelter program multiple copies of *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself* by Nedra Glover Tawwab. It sparked the start of a new series that challenges participants to join a book club and learn about setting boundaries.

Books might not be everyone's favorite pastime, but burgers are the perfect way to connect participants to the page. Thus, the first Burgers & Books series was created to pair learning with a shared meal. Wanting to create an event that is challenging but not overwhelming, Aftercare Case Planner, Cheree Dowdell, sparked the vision: "I thought 'what a great read this book would be for the girls and myself.' I'm always up for sharing my knowledge with someone

AND learning NEW things. I believe a lot of our stresses come from having a lack of boundaries or not knowing how and when to set them."

Weekly groups are a vital part of the Transition to Independent Living program for shelter residents ages 15-21. The topics cover essential life skills: employment readiness, household skills, personal health, interpersonal relationships, and budgeting. Burgers & Books set itself apart by being a life skills group and series focused on building a sisterhood. While nutrition and budgeting are traditional necessities for independent living, setting and expressing clear boundaries is essential for AFG participants once they complete the programming and live independently.

Bringing the message of *Set Boundaries, Find Peace* from pages to life, Racheal Allen, COO of Marygrove Conservancy and a 2021 AFG Role Model, facilitated the three sessions over the course of six weeks. Allen was personally instrumental in the book's editing process and graciously joined our efforts to offer this workshop on boundaries.

The grand finale will be a virtual meet and greet with Nedra Glover Tawwab, the 'book's New York Times bestselling author. We look forward to this meet and greet and starting a new format for learning at AFG.

Because of you.

A LETTER FROM OUR CEO: AMANDA (AMY) L. GOOD:



Thanks to the powerful support of many friends, and the commitment and courage of our staff and volunteers, AFG is successfully navigating continuing pandemic obstacles, regaining our stride. The spring and summer have become seasons of growth for us, even as we continue to shelter those who have been exceptionally vulnerable to Covid-19, some of whom are testing positive but who are being well-cared-for and, fortunately, doing well. We are, in fact, poised for growth on several fronts as we initiate and expand services in response to serious and unmet needs.

Our BIG NEWS is that AFG—together with our partners, Southwest Solutions and Full Circle Communities—has been awarded funding through the Michigan “Low-Income Housing Tax Credit” program, a great boost to our plans to build a 45-unit apartment building on Detroit’s northwest side, providing longer-term stable housing to formerly homeless youth and adults. This project, targeted for completion by the spring of 2023, has been a long time in planning and will address a severe shortage of longer-term supportive housing and child care for those we serve. In other news, we are immensely proud of the 22 recent high school graduates from our shelter, outreach, and prevention programs, almost all of whom are heading for college, including U of M-Ann Arbor, U of M Dearborn, Oakland University, OCC, WSU, and other schools. Generous donors have ensured that these students, who accomplished so much despite multiple challenges of Covid-19, homelessness, and/or other life traumas, are well-prepared to hit the ground running in college with new laptops and other supplies; we look forward to watching their academic adventures and their future contributions!

MISSION:

Alternatives For Girls’ mission is to help homeless and high-risk girls and young women avoid violence, teen pregnancy and exploitation, and help them to explore and access the support, resources and opportunities necessary to be safe, to grow strong and to make positive choices in their lives.

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Amanda (Amy) L. Good

DEPARTMENTS:

Shelter and Transition to Independent Living: AFG’s Shelter Program provides a stable home, counseling, and life skills training to homeless girls and young women ages 15-21 and their children. The goal is to empower them to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Outreach and Education Services: AFG’s Outreach Program helps teens and women engaged in high-risk activities, such as sex work, drug use, and gang involvement, to understand the risks of such activities and transition to safe choices and healthy lives.

Community Based Prevention: AFG’s Prevention Program serves girls and young women ages 7-19 who are at risk of pregnancy, gang involvement, abusing drugs or alcohol and school truancy. We engage them through after-school programs, a teen leadership program, and a summer camp.



For all you do, thank you.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: MS. ALETHA

Story by Christie Jackson

Ms. Aletha Perry's passion is evident to anyone that meets her—she loves working with people. Ms. Aletha staffs the front desk, where she is the first person people encounter when they enter Alternatives For Girls. Whether they need a question answered or help finding the correct department, she can get them to the right place, all with a warm and welcoming personality. She is a people person and a skilled multi-tasker that keeps the office running smoothly. She organizes packages and deliveries, orders the supplies, answers phone calls, maintains the check log, trains volunteers to staff the front desk, and completes other tasks that pop up around the office.

Ms. Aletha Perry has worked at Alternatives for Girls for twenty-two years. A friend who previously held the position referred her to the role, and she has been working at AFG ever since. What she loves most about her job? Helping the young girls and women that AFG serves. She is proudest when they make a plan, pursue their goals, and succeed, and she takes the time to encourage them to keep going. The other day, someone told Ms. Aletha that her words of encouragement made them feel good about themselves after they had a hard day at their new job.

That is symbolic of Ms. Aletha as a person. She has a way of making people feel good about themselves, whether they are staff, participants, volunteers, or visitors. Her presence in the office helps make AFG feel like family.



SAVE THE DATE!
Celebrate with us virtually on October 13, 2021

**POSITIVE CHOICES,
POWERFUL LIVES**

Positive Choices, Powerful Lives
Live streamed at 6:00pm
Wednesday, October 13th, 2021



903 West Grand Boulevard
Detroit, MI 48208

Phone: 313-361-4000
Fax: 313-361-8938
Crisis Line: 888-AFG-3919

www.AlternativesForGirls.org

At AFG, we respect everyone who comes to us for help – as they work towards a brighter future. So, while their stories are true, names and images may have been changed to protect their privacy. Thank you for understanding.