

Girls Night In

By Teacher Isaac Cetto and Foundation Board Member Chuck Tyler

Grant Recipient: Isaac Cetto, Wayne Preparatory Academy

A Teacher's Perspective...

The idea of a program like GNI at Wayne Preparatory Academy (WPA) started a long time ago before I knew this program even existed. Since starting at WPA in 2007, I have witnessed many unfortunate situations that have led to the self-destruction of many female students. The one that hurt the most started in 2011 when a 7th grade girl "Muriel" came to our program. "Muriel" had been sexually abused by her father which upset me so much as a father to a young daughter.

"Muriel" just didn't care about anything. She hated coming to school. I unsuccessfully tried to find her sources of counseling. Her trauma started to take over and I watched her make one bad choice after another. After 7th grade, "Muriel" started to use drugs and was in a gang. She had many gang tattoos and was spiraling into a deep depression. In the 8th grade, it was obvious that "Muriel's" pain had turned into anger. The following summer she became a run-away. It was at that time, I felt so hurt and thought that I could have done more for her, that there could have been something, anything I, or someone could have done. That was the first time I thought about leaving education. She was gone.

During our district staff development I was introduced to Jimmielyn Rice and the program GNI. That was when I made it my mission to bring GNI to our building. Even though I had lost "Muriel," at least I could try to help other girls who were struggling with issues. We launched GNI in 2013 -2014 with great success. It was the first time I actually witnessed a room full of students and staff open up about their problems and share their struggles -- everything from Body Image, Addiction, Sex, Self-Worth, Toxic Relationships, Self-Harm and more. There were some sessions that were so powerful and emotional that there wouldn't be a dry eye in the room. The transformational teaching provided strategic life coaching to guide the girls away from self-destructive behaviors. Powerful, impactful mentoring events were designed to service our young teen girls. Jimmie and her staff did a fantastic job of just showing the girls that they are wanted, loved, and valued.

During year two, the Wayne Township Education Foundation was supportive of this grant and we were off to another year of GNI. Then, it happened! I saw "Muriel" in the main office! My heart dropped and I became over run with emotion. I went and gave her a big hug and told her I was so happy to see her. She didn't know it, but I was crying. "Muriel's" street life had caught up with her. She had become drug addicted and even ended up in the juvenile system. Per her probation she had to attend school and she came back to WPA. "Muriel" also had an inappropriate tattoo on her face that she would not cover. Again, she didn't want to be in school and didn't care about anything. She said she was dead on the inside and could hardly get herself dressed each day. Though "Muriel" wasn't interested in GNI, I did invite GNI director Jimmielyn to come meet her. After that "Muriel" started to attend GNI and little by little, we could see her become a happier person. All of the WPA staff came together and helped "Muriel" feel welcomed and wanted. Mrs. Sayles gave up her prep time to help "Muriel" catch up on some credits. And, though she is not caught up yet, we are getting there. We convinced "Muriel" to have the tattoo on her face removed and the WPA staff chipped in and she is on her 7th treatment; it's not gone yet but she is getting there. The ladies of GNI also helped "Muriel" purchase a new wardrobe.

Girls Night In helped transform "Muriel" in ways we couldn't imagine. Now she comes to school because she wants to. The GNI Program allowed "Muriel" to share her pain and realize that there are others who are also struggling with issues. The program allows these girls a safe place to share, have some life coaching, and learn options to help them with their struggles. The biggest transformation that

“Muriel” went through is that she now knows that there are good people like all of the ladies from GNI who showed her that she is wanted, loved, and valued. “Muriel” is now at a place where she can share with others what changed in her life to help her out of that dark place where she had been for so long. This transformation that happened in this one student and many others was all made possible because The Wayne Township Education Foundation believed that the GNI at WPA grant was worth funding. On a personal note, I would like to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart who made this possible, and for restoring my faith in education. Thank You... Isaac Cetto, Math Teacher WPA

Foundation Board Member NiCole Keith interviewed Mr. Cetto and “Muriel”

We visited privately with Mr. Cetto in his classroom at WPA. He beamed as he explained how he was hopeful for his own daughter’s future...and for ‘Muriel’s.’ With a huge, proud smile on his face he then asked us, “Wanna meet her?” He left the room and quickly returned with ‘Muriel.’

In walked a beautiful girl with big green-gray eyes that would melt anyone’s heart. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail that had a little tint of green to match her eyes. She was small for her age, but amazingly poised. Once she began to speak, she was mesmerizing. We asked ‘Muriel’ what made her decide to take Mr. Cetto’s advice and participate in GNI. She then told us what GNI has done for WPA. “I wanted help but I didn’t know how to get it. I don’t have insurance, my [younger] sisters have that blessing, but I don’t. The teachers take their free time to help the kids do well in school. They help me with everything. The ladies are into you. They want to help you. Girls were in cliques before GNI but after, they don’t bully the other girls anymore. The topics are things we’re going through and show us that we’re not alone. The girls need this program (the boys need some attention too).”

During GNI (which happens within the school day) Mr. Cetto takes the boys to the Boys and Girls club, but is seeking another more formal leadership development program for them. Lastly, we asked ‘Muriel’ about her hopes for the future. She told us, “I want to be a plastic surgeon and be an example for other girls.” GNI has clearly moved “Muriel” closer to her dreams.