Where Is She Now? A Girls RAP Update with Janessa Harms


When the Girls RAP team caught up with Janessa, she had recently returned from her travels to obtain a temporary long-stay Visa. The team was excited to learn that Janessa just finished her sophomore year at College of St. Benedict, where she is studying philosophy. She is currently working over the summer at a farmers market and then will travel to France where she will study abroad for fall semester 2019.

Janessa often reflects on her time at YWCA in the Girls RAP program. She says she continues to utilize the skills she obtained in the program and thanks the Girls RAP staff for being consistent in her life. Janessa said, “I learned so much from the Girls RAP program. It is crazy how far it has taken me. I am still connected and receiving support from mentors I gained at YWCA.” Janessa is looking forward to her studies in France and says she is in the state of preparing for what is next in her life.

Janessa Harms, current student at College of St. Benedict
This June, Girls Inc. Eureka! kicked off our 5th year of the program and welcomed a new group of Rookies (year one cohort)! Rookies and Vets (year two cohort) are spending four weeks at the University of Minnesota College of Science and Engineering campus.

Each day, they participate in icebreaker games, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) sessions led by U of M faculty and Girls Inc. personal development activities related to leadership, economic literacy, healthy decision-making and media literacy. Twice a week the youth take swimming lessons at YWCA, and on Fridays they go on fun field trips like canoeing down the Mississippi River!

In their third summer of Girls Inc. Eureka!, youth participated in four-week, part-time internships at partner organizations, a company utilizing Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) or a company within a non-traditional field for women. Interns are paired with another participant from their cohort and spend the four weeks learning about careers in STEM, connecting with positive adult role models and gaining valuable workplace experience to help them determine what they want in their future careers.

This year’s internship partners include: Amazon, Brains On! podcast from American Public Radio, Hennepin County Central Library, Mississippi Park Connection, Project for Pride in Living, Rainbow Research, Transcend IT, Toole Design, University of Minnesota Youth Work Learning Lab and YWCA Minneapolis. On Fridays, Interns take tennis lessons with the Fred Wells Tennis and Education Center and go on fun field trips.
Pilots Essay Boot Camp

This month, our Eureka! Pilots (year four cohort) participated in a one-week College Essay Writing Boot Camp in partnership with ThreeSixty Journalism at the University of St. Thomas, where they successfully crafted their very own college application essays. Through this experience, the youth were able to write, edit and share their stories with professional writing mentors, editors, ThreeSixty staff and other girls from the Twin Cities community. While on campus, Pilots spent time brainstorming about their “Strong Memories,” reflecting on their values and considering what stories they want to share with college admissions counselors in 500-word essays.

The stories included reflections on personal experiences, things they have overcome, how Eureka! has impacted them, the power of identity and self-love and many more. After the completion of this camp, some of the girls continued on to ThreeSixty Journalism’s Digital Storytelling Workshop where they were able to record, edit and share their essays while gaining key digital journalism skills. Beyond walking away with the experience of writing and crafting a college essay, some of the girls walked away with newfound passion for storytelling and with connections to others in the community who are excited to cheer them on as they approach the second half of their high school journey.

Eureka! Graduates Experience College Life

Eureka! Graduates (year five cohort) spent a week living at St. Catherine University (St. Kate’s) as part of the First Step Institute. The high schoolers attended workshops in financial aid, prepping for residential life, college money and debt management, and choosing a major. First Step mentors also supported the youth in team building and reflective activities focused on confidence and self-esteem, imposter syndrome, the masks we wear, trauma and resiliency, and exploring their strengths.

As our first cohort of Eureka! participants head into their senior year, the time at St. Kate’s provided a powerful and grounding experience. We’re excited to see our graduates move forward with post-high school plans over this next year with confidence!
Girls Make the Message

Girls Inc. partnered with Laura Jeffrey Academy in June for a 7th grade media literacy class. During this session, youth learned to analyze forms of mass media, explored beauty and healthy sexuality messages, and looked at diversity and representation in media. The class took a field trip to St. Paul Neighborhood Network, where they learned about the different stages of media production and got to sit in front of and behind the camera! They finished by making their own media messages, producing their own brands and working in groups to create PSAs on topics such as how to support a peer who is having a hard day and the importance of learning life skills in school.

High Schoolers Take Action!

This spring wrapped up the first year of our new high school groups! Health Care Ambassadors ended with presentations about a health topic of their choosing, and Girls Inc. Council for Advocacy and Change (GCAC) finished their community action projects. N’yah, a GCAC member, chose to write poetry about the black female body as part of her project, to share with other girls that being black is beautiful and powerful. N’yah hopes to continue to create a series of poems about experiences as a black woman and is excited to return to GCAC next year!

Questions? Contact our department at 612-215-4372 or at girlsinc@ywcampls.org

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Hips of an hourglass
Full lips and midnight eyes
The Black body is a GOD
(It) Perplexes and stuns
Melanin shining
Ranging from an albino pearl to an onyx gemstone
This black body tired
Hurt
Broken
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Wounded
This black body is Amina
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