



Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana  
222 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 2120, Chicago, IL 60606

**PRESS RELEASE CONTACT:**

Julie Somogyi, Director of Integrated Marketing and Communications  
312.416-2500, ext. 219; [jsomogyi@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:jsomogyi@girlscoutsgcnwi.org)

**For Immediate Release: Dec. 2, 2009**

## **Girl Scout Study Finds That More Youth Today Say They Would Make Responsible Choices than Predecessors 20 Years Ago**

A nationwide survey released on Dec. 2, 2009, by Girl Scouts of the USA finds that more American teenagers say they would make responsible decisions on a range of issues from lying and cheating to smoking and drinking than young people just a generation ago.

The study, conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI), is nearly identical to one Girl Scouts commissioned in 1989, and a comparison of the two studies shows a marked shift toward more ethical and responsible beliefs and values and civic involvement among teens and tweens.

Nearly two out of three young people (62 percent) surveyed in 2009, for example, say they would not cheat on a test compared to about half in 1989. Fifty-eight percent say they would refuse an alcoholic drink if offered one at a party. That's compared to fewer than half (46 percent) in 1989. And only 18 percent say they believe smoking is acceptable if a person finds it enjoyable. In 1989, more than a quarter of those surveyed thought smoking was acceptable.

"It's vitally important for youth-serving organizations such as the Girl Scouts to understand the relevant perspectives and behaviors of today's young people," said Maria Wynne, CEO of Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana.

"Our values-based program for girls impacts them during some of their most formative years. By understanding what they are thinking and how they need to be supported, we can provide them with

an enriched and contemporary experience that will shape their character and will, in turn, have a positive generational impact,” Wynne added.

The survey, *Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today*, involved a nationwide survey of 3,263 girls and boys from the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades that queried them on issues ranging from ethics and diversity to civic involvement and peer pressure. The study was conducted with Harris Interactive (formerly Louis Harris Inc., the same firm that worked on the 1989 study.)

The study also finds that that one-third of teenagers say they intend to wait until they are married to have sex compared to less than a quarter (24 percent) in 1989. And two decades later, youth are more accepting of gay relationships. Fifty-nine percent of teenagers agree with the statement, “Gay and lesbian relationships are OK, if that is a person’s choice.” Only 31 percent agreed in 1989.

“There’s clearly a generational change taking place,” said Kimberlee Salmond, senior researcher at GSRI and lead author of the study. “These young people strongly value diversity, acceptance and civic involvement, and almost across the board they’re more committed to these values than were their predecessors 20 years ago.”

The study also surveyed young people about issues that have become prominent with the advent of new media and technology. Only six percent say they would engage in cyberbullying by forwarding an embarrassing picture of a classmate to their friends. Some 40 percent would take the extra step of telling the originator of the e-mail what he or she did was wrong.

In addition, the data show that youth today value diversity. Among students in 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, nearly six in 10 (59 percent) say that being around people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds is important to them. This appears to be particularly important to girls (63 percent versus 55 percent of boys) and youth from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds. (Note: this question was not asked in 1989.)

And young people today appear to have a stronger sense of civic engagement. Compared to 20 years ago, youth today are more likely to say they intend to vote in the future (84 percent vs. 77 percent), as well as give to charity (76 percent vs. 63 percent). Some 79 percent say they will volunteer in their communities.

Local Girl Scouts of all ages from the Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana area have long supported significant volunteer-based community service projects in their neighborhoods and schools.

For example, a large group of elementary school-age Girl Scouts spent a month collecting gently worn shoes as part of their Girl Scout World Thinking Day service project. The girls sorted and packed the shoes to send them to children in other countries.

In addition to interacting with people in their local community when they collected the shoes, the girls learned about other cultures and made personal connections with girls around the world when they sorted, packed, and shared the shoes. The experience allowed the girls to walk in another's footsteps and lead others toward making the world a better place.

In addition to their commitment to volunteer service, 71 percent of those included in the study say their religious beliefs are important to them, and this group is not as likely as young people who are less religious or nonreligious to say they would lie, cheat, drink and have sex.

The study also uncovered differences among boys and girls. Among teenagers, girls are less likely than boys to say they would have sex (18 percent vs. 38 percent) or advise an abortion (6 percent vs. 12 percent), and are more likely to give to charity (80 percent vs. 72 percent) and volunteer in their community (81 percent vs. 77 percent.)

Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana impacts the lives of nearly 95,000 girls and 24,000 adult members in 245 communities in six Illinois counties (Cook, DuPage, Grundy, Kankakee, Lake, and Will) and four Indiana counties (Jasper, Lake, Newton, and Porter). Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place.

For more information about Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana, visit [www.girlscoutsgcnwi.org](http://www.girlscoutsgcnwi.org).

###