

Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County:
A Career Readiness Center on the Near Westside

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Abstract

In Syracuse, New York, there is a need to help young women develop skills that will prepare them for the workforce and help create an emotional, physical and financial independent lifestyle. Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County is an affiliate non-profit organization in Syracuse, NY, which currently assists with this need, however, their outreach is limited due to inadequate staffing, small programming budgets and most of all a lack of space to facilitate programs. The Blodgett School in Syracuse, New York is my proposed location for the new Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County. The Blodgett School was built in 1918 in a Beaux-Arts style at 312 Oswego St, Syracuse, NY 13204. The building stands as a visual reminder of a once flourishing past, but has fallen into poor condition over time due to insufficient funding and poor maintenance. I feel it is important for the young women to see a building being adapted to fit a new purpose much like they are adapting their own lives to fulfill a new purpose.

I developed a three-part strategy for proposing the reuse of the Blodgett School for the new home of the Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County using my knowledge from my environmental and interior design program. My process is comprised of three parts: empower the girls, preserve the Blodgett, and promote the importance of women's history in Upstate New York. I will attempt to empower the girls through the use of inclusive design that allows them to customize the spaces they use and adapt them for their needs and preferences. Following the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board: Standards for Rehabilitation, the building would be preserved and restored to its original physical integrity. Since the physical structure of the building will remain nearly identical to the original floor plan, I will be rebranding the interior to fit the needs of the girls and promoting women's empowerment. This will be a continuous visual element in the gathering spaces, which promote the Girls Inc. motto "to empower girls to be strong, smart and bold." My final submission is a collection of construction proposals, furniture/material plans and 3-D renderings to show how the Blodgett School could be transformed into the new home to the Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County.

Executive Summary

The Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County is presently a small operation in the local Syracuse New York YMCA. Girls Inc. has been recognized as a national organization since 1945 and has locations in all fifty states, but facilitates differently in each location based on the needs of the demographic they are serving. The need for girls in the Near Westside of Syracuse (NWS) to have a meaningful afterschool curriculum and outlet is beyond the current physical and financial capability of the Syracuse City School District. The Near Westside area has an average graduation rate of twenty percent and is located in a high-crime neighborhood in the middle of a food desert (“Near Westside Neighborhood in Syracuse, New York (NY), 13202, 13204 Detailed Profile”). Allowing a national non-profit organization to expand in this community should help with the current high school drop out rate, the crime rate and the career readiness aptitude that these girls will have after participating in the daily afterschool program. By filling this need in the area, girls will be able to grow academically and give back to their community.

This historic renovation project will take place at the Blodgett School at 312 Oswego St, Syracuse, NY 13204. The building was completed in 1918 as a trade school with the building floors separated by male and female curriculum. The structure has had minimal repairs and improvements in the last hundred years and if preserved could be a landmark for the community (“Blodgett Structure Interview”). My proposed renovation plans followed the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board: Standards for Rehabilitation and kept in mind the LEED Green Building certification process. Using the Blodgett School for a new Girls Inc. location will help give the young women in the NWS a place to learn, grow and explore while also teaching them about the history of women’s rights in Upstate New York. The architecture and location of the

building are rich in history and can be emphasized through the new building usage. The building will also serve as a gathering space for the local community events through the rentable theater spaces, open women's rights gallery and available third floor.

To demonstrate my ideas for the reuse of the Blodgett, I utilized multiple strategies for space analysis and to determine the needs of the building for Girls Inc. By creating an adjacency matrix and specifically documenting the building needs and spacial allocation, I was able to determine that the best way to use the building was to create a clear division between public and private spaces. The public spaces will generate extra income for Girls Inc. and create additional gathering spaces for community use in a neighborhood, which lacks safe meeting spaces. The private spaces will be solely used by Girls Inc. are completely secured for the safety of the girls against any harms of the outside environment. The Girls Inc. facility is designed to promote their mission to inspire girls to be strong, smart, and bold in an inclusive and educational environment.

The Girls Inc. facility will provide spaces for studying, learning, playing, exercising and collaborating. The first floor has general use spaces like teaching kitchen, study room, multi-purpose classrooms, a 2-D art room and employee facilities. The second floor has rooms with more specific uses such as a 3-D art classroom, music classroom, age designated lounges, volunteer center, and fitness/dance studio. The curriculum provided in the different classes will teach the girls about new careers, lifestyles and interpersonal skills. Girls Inc. already has developed curriculum for these needs, so this facility will provide the proper space and resources to allow that program to flourish.

After determining what space would be used and how it will be used, I had to choose what would stay of the original design and what would change. Exposed brick, restored hardwood flooring and terrazzo and bluestone marble all remain as staples of the original

Blodgett design from 1918. New additions of drywall, wall features, more adaptive lighting and recreating the original windows will give new life to the space and allow the girls to have a new bright, playful space to explore. As for the furniture, the need for flexible furniture and inclusive learning spaces is the thematic tie between the furniture choices and specification. Nesting chairs and tables allow for easy movement of the furniture by the girls in order to customize the space as they see fit. The girls will have access to convertible lounge furniture to allow them to have freedom of expression and collaboration.

While adapting my design to this specific building, I also created a branding strategy that could be used in Girls Inc. locations throughout the world. I utilized their current brand guide with the signature red and grey colors and Univers fonts, but I also added accent colors and guidelines for placement of graphics and colors to be used in any new Girls Inc. facility. This overarching branding scheme could help current centers in the U.S. and new centers to promote a cohesive visual message throughout their facilities. The branding would also include inspiring messages from women in history and visual displays to teach girls about the importance of women's rights in the U.S. and around the world.

This project brings together the importance of preserving history and creating a better future: By preserving the Blodgett, which is a landmark in the Nearwest Side, and giving it a renewed purpose as a center to help and educate the community. Showing the girls the history of women in Upstate, New York, specifically the women's rights movement, and inspiring them to continue the mission to fight for equal rights. Helping the Girls Inc. brand to speak to the needs of girls around the U.S. to help them develop skills they can use as an adult in the workforce. These three goals work synonomously in the new Girls Inc. of Syracuse and Onondaga County in the Blodgett.

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Preface

Historical preservation of buildings is not a universally common practice in the United States. As a relatively young country, attachment to buildings and history is not as strong as in Europe. Often buildings with enriching history and culture are torn down to make room for a cheaper construction of a new facility instead of repurposing what is already present. In Upstate New York, there are multiple organizations dedicated to preserving the buildings in the region, but the general community awareness is still lacking. I chose to base my capstone in an area where my building was “the last man standing.” The Near Westside had been home to the wealthy and elite of Syracuse historically, but now the Blodgett School remains one of the last pillars from the past of beaux-arts architecture in this neighborhood. By following the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board: Standards for Rehabilitation, I have not made many physical changes to the structure of the building, but have instead changed the purpose, intent, and overall functionality of the building. These standards promote maintaining the original building and materials as much as possible while still allowing for necessary updates to be done to fit new building codes and accessibility determined by ADA.

Advice to Future Honors Students

Being a design student, which requires a thesis project, and having a capstone project through honors did not sound daunting to me as a freshman or sophomore. Now as I turn in my thesis and capstone projects, I realize that I should have been more aware of my own limitations and explored my final thesis deliverable options earlier. While I am happy with my work, I can say I was hindered by not mastering all of the computer technology that I wanted to use in my thesis before my senior year. I would tell future honors students to try to plan ahead as much as possible. My other advice is to utilize the best of your abilities that you have learned in the last four years. Your capstone should be a reflection on your growth and what you have learned during your college experience. Find joy in the experience and push yourself to meet your personal goals. Be proud of your own work and accomplishments as you turn in your capstone and finish your undergraduate career.

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