

Agency for Change Podcast: Candias Jones, Executive Director, Girls Inc. of Omaha

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Candias Jones: 0:00

I give all the grace I need, all the time.

Announcer: 0:06

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:34

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman. Welcome back to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. I want you today to get ready to be inspired, because we are chatting with Candi Jones, one of the driving forces behind Girls Inc. of Omaha. She has a true passion for empowering young women and she's creating a brighter future for girls in her community so that they have the support and resources they need to become strong, smart and bold. Candi, I can't wait to talk with you today. Welcome to the podcast.

Candias Jones: 1:08

Thank you so much, Lyn. I'm happy to be here. Thanks for the invite.

Lyn Wineman: 1:12

I am eager to talk to you. I always like topics that deal with the empowerment of girls, and could you just start by telling us more about Girls Inc. of Omaha?

Candias Jones: 1:23

Yes, Girls Inc. has been around for quite a while. I am literally standing on the heels of some pretty incredible giants. We've been around since the early 70s, and we have done work. We've been around focusing on the empowerment and development of young girls in our community. So we primarily navigate black and brown girls ages 5 to 18. And then we also operate a transitional living home. So we also work with our young women that are aging out of foster care, so we're literally the full gamut.

We work with our girls when they're babies and we work with them into adulthood. So it's amazing.

Lyn Wineman: 1:58

That is fantastic. I did not know that you had the transitional housing and that is such an important time when girls, kids, all kids age out of foster care and having that resource for them is cool. So you know, one thing I love about Omaha, Nebraska is that there are a lot of really great nonprofits that support all kinds of causes, and one thing I'd like to know from you is what sets Girls Inc. apart from some of those other great nonprofits.

Candias Jones: 2:32

Yeah, there are so many amazing youth-serving organizations, but I think what Girls Inc. has is number one, the legacy. We've been around, like I said, for a long time. We're kind of a staple in the community. We operate in both North Omaha and South Omaha, which gives us kind of a unique lens of all of the different identities and cultures in our community. And because we're girl focused, I think that is what also gives us our you know, our credibility. But also what makes us just really unique and thoughtful is we're very intentional about offering our girls what they need and I think that is what, you know, really sets us apart.

Lyn Wineman: 3:06

That's awesome. So, Candi, I think you and I first met at an event that was hosted by Nebraska Furniture Mart. It was their Women's Empowerment Brunch in Omaha. I was on the panel. Girls Inc. of Omaha was the featured nonprofit and there were three words that people, you had a lot of supporters and girls in the audience, there were three words that that people kept chanting about Girls Inc.. Could you share those three words and tell us a little bit about their importance?

Candias Jones: 3:37

Yeah, Strong, smart bold.

Lyn Wineman: 3:39

I love it. That's just how people did it Strong, smart, bold. I was like those are great things. I need to know more.

Candias Jones: 3:51

So the strong, smart, bold is and a lot of people know this, but Girls Inc. is the local affiliate of a national model. So we have about 70 different affiliates and Girls Inc. of Omaha is one of the one of the ones that you know does this incredible work around that strong, smart, bold mission. So, ideally, what we talk about strong, smart, bold we're talking about how our girls show up in the world. So strong we want our girls to feel good about themselves, have confidence. We do a lot with sports and athletics and eating healthy and just doing all the things to keep their bodies healthy so they can, you know, make it in the world.

Smart is the model around the education aspect that we provide. All the program that we have that's centered around, like STEM and math and education and ensuring that our girls are educated in this world and are able to use their knowledge to transform their own lives and the lives of those around them. And then the strong, smart, bold piece of it. The bold part is just kind of around the advocacy and

our girls being able to stand up for themselves and talk about themselves and do the work that they need to make sure that they're, you know, again bold in a world where it's kind of difficult for young women.

Lyn Wineman: 5:02

Strong, smart bold. I think it's a great chant for anyone right on those days when you're feeling like a little down, a little anxious, a little unsure of yourself. I think that's a great one. So let's talk about some of the key programs of Girls Inc.. We talked about transitional housing, but give me an idea of all the different things that you do.

Candias Jones: 5:26

Yeah, we're so fortunate to have community support. Girls Inc. wouldn't exist without community, so a lot of the partners that we have that come in and do the work for us is centered around individual programs, right. So we have people that come in and teach dance, tennis, volleyball track, we have people that come in and teach gymnastics, and part of that is again the exposure and awareness that we think our girls need in order to be successful. I just personally believe that with our programming, our girls see the world in a different way and maybe are exposed to things they wouldn't normally be exposed to, and I think that changes lives.

So a lot of our programming is just centered around giving the girls what they need to be successful, listening to them, you know. So if they say, we want to go horseback riding, right, we find a way to make sure the girls go horseback riding. So our programming is really centered around again that strong, smart and bold model, but just exposure and awareness and allowing our girls to see what they can be right. They can be anything, but they won't know that until we expose them to it and they see it.

Lyn Wineman: 6:24

That's amazing. So talk to me more about how you got motivated to fill this role, because I know you've got a corporate background, you've got an entrepreneurial background, like, and now you've come to the nonprofit world. How did that work out?

Candias Jones: 6:38

So I tell this story and others have told it for me that I actually said no a couple of times because I knew how hard this work was. As you mentioned, I've done a lot of like executive leadership coaching and I've done a lot of coaching in the community. So with that, I heard all the good, the bad and the ugly about this world.

Right and I was very, very hesitant to get into nonprofit for several reasons, and the last time that I had a conversation with some dear friends and the board around this opportunity, I tell people my personal story is my grandmother had passed. I really believe that there was a point, maybe in a dream, where she said to me if not you, then who?

And it woke me up. Yeah, it woke me up my sleep. I remember I was crying because I had decisions to make and I had a couple of opportunities on the table and I'll never regret it. I mean, this was by far the

best decision I've ever made in my life and yeah, it's hard. It's hard, but it's the most fulfilling job and I think, because of my background and the relationships I have, that's what's made this so worthy for me because it feels like everything I've experienced, kind of came full circle.

Lyn Wineman: 7:46

Absolutely. I mean, it sounds like you truly were called to do this work, Candi. Absolutely, like not just called, but like dragged into it perhaps. But how do those perspectives of having that coaching background and the corporate background, how do they come to play now as you're leading a nonprofit and working with girls?

Candias Jones: 8:08

Yeah, you know, I honestly think I just remember to give all the grace I need. I understand this is difficult and I've said that many times. People don't get into nonprofit unless they have a story to tell.

And so in knowing that it allows me to be a leader that has her own story, her own traumas and her own things that have built me into the person I am, and so I try, I think, in this world to give what I know I needed in order to become who I am and I still I'm still a major work in progress. However, some of the things that I've handled and navigated and healed through, I think, have prepared me for this, and I just love people and I love our community deeply and I just bring that with me.

Lyn Wineman: 8:49

Yeah, you know, since this is a podcast, people won't be able to see you, but I can see you and I can just feel your passion through the screen as we're, as we're talking and having this conversation. So, obviously, Girls Inc. has a long legacy. You mentioned it was started in the 70s, so you've got a legacy, but I know you also have a vision for the future. Candi, Like, how do you connect the two, the legacy and the vision, and what does that vision look like?

Candias Jones: 9:22

I want to honor the work that has happened to get us here and I think in order to honor it, we have to do it. So part of it is like we know that women fought for women's rights to get us to this point. We know that there are amazing women who fought for our women today to be able to run countries and do the things that they do. So I feel like I have a really strong sense of responsibility to ensure these girls in our care and our programs know that they can do those things. So I think my way of envisioning us to the future is, I think, future state. You know, what do I want these girls? At some point we're going to all sit down, right? Yeah, all of us are going to retire, all of us are going to be tired and we're going to sit down and, and we need to know that our legacies and the young women coming behind us are going to carry this torch even further than we could.

Candias Jones: 10:12

So, that's how I kind of keep my brain focused on forward thinking and future focused and legacy. Just thinking about Candias when you sit down. How do you want this work to be carried on and how can you make that happen if the girls don't know that they're capable? So for me it's like joining the legacy

with future and just thinking about what I'm doing right, the example I'm setting, modeling it so that these girls are better than me. That's what I want them to be better than me.

Lyn Wineman: 10:39

I love it so much. So, Candi, I love your vision, I love your energy. What advice would you give to somebody who's interested in making a difference in the lives of young women?

Candias Jones: 11:04

Just do it. We do it every day. We do it when we're passing someone on the street. We do it when we give a compliment. We do it when we say nice things to one another, when we support each other publicly and privately.

It's not complicated, we just have to do it, and I think our girls pay way more attention than we give them credit for. So I think it's just in our everyday lives is how we really show up for our girls in a new way. I always say just be who you wish you had, be the person you wish you had, or be the change you know, like we've heard you want to see. Just do it, and I think our girls will see it and they will model it and we will really see a next generation of good, which I think is what we all.

Lyn Wineman: 11:33

That's awesome. You know, Candi, I kind of feel like sometimes, sometimes for an adult, it's slightly intimidating to try to connect with adolescent or teenage girls, because they maybe seem like they aren't listening or they maybe make us feel like we're so old. But I think you're right. I think there's more listening and more appreciation than any of us ever realized, would you say that's also the case?

Candias Jones: 11:59

That's the truth. Listen, our youth are tough, they're tough, and we got to keep up, you know, and we cannot do things the way we've always done them and expect to change. So we have to sometimes follow their lead which is different for us them and, yeah, just being present and knowing that, even if it looks and appears as if they're not hearing anything we're saying, so we just have to keep trying and have to keep going.

Lyn Wineman: 12:32

That reminds me of something my daughters always remind me of that if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got, and you have to we all regardless of our age, have to be willing to step out of that comfort zone and try some new things. So Candi for our listeners who would like to learn more about Girls Inc. of Omaha. Where can they go? Where can they find more information?

Candias Jones: 12:56

Yes, so we are in the process of revising our website. So you may have some glitches and outdated information, but we have a fabulous website coming soon. But www.girlsincomaha.org is our website today and you can still find out some really cool information and get in touch with us there. But

definitely be on the lookout for our website. Blogs we're going to do more social media. We're just going to have a lot of fun with our girls, so you can really get a look at everything we're doing every day. So there's exciting stuff coming.

Lyn Wineman: 13:32

I love that. Hey, we at KidGlov and Agency for Change, we love a new website launch, but I tell you what it's a little bit like building a house. It's a lot harder than you think. It's going to be right. There's so much work and so many details. So, yes, be patient, it'll be worth it.

Candias Jones: 13:47

That's right, that's right.

Lyn Wineman: 13:49

So, Candi, I can't wait to ask you this next question because you are such an inspirational person, but I'm inspired by motivational quotes. I've asked this question of every podcast guest. Could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners?

Candias Jones: 14:08

So I have two things I say all the time. I said the my colleagues here will probably laugh, but um, I always say I give the grace I need. So I give it because I know I need it, and that keeps me both humbled and present to what's going on, to not judge a situation, to be in the moment of it. So I give all the grace I need. Also, things are difficult for many people, both personally and professionally, right, and I don't I don't think any of us can deny that. So I think part of it too is I say something around. You know, when you walk on the ground, right, you may not always feel it, you don't know that you have that support and stability, but it's there, and for me that's faith, right, I keep one foot in front of the other. I don't always know what's happening underneath me, I may not even feel the ground, so I'm down. However, I keep walking because I know it's there.

And for me, that's faith. So faith and grace are the two things that I live by and those are the two things I bring into everything I do.

Lyn Wineman: 15:06

Amazing. You're an overachiever. I asked for one and you give me two. I love that. I love that. So, Candi, as we wrap up this great conversation today, what is the most important thing you'd like to leave people with about the work that you're doing?

Candias Jones: 15:22

I would ask that our community understands that we as an organization are so committed to the work that we do and change takes time, transformation takes time, trust but just to know that we are so committed to do the work that we promised we do for our girls and that we care deeply and I think I just want people to understand Girls Inc. is so much more than a daycare. We are truly a leadership program

and we will honor that. And so there are some amazing things happening that I want our community to know and be proud of, and we have a long road ahead of us, but it's going to be exciting. So I'm excited for it and I want everyone else to be too.

Lyn Wineman: 16:11

That's fantastic. Candi, this has been so much fun. I fully believe the world needs more strong, smart and bold people like you and more organization like Girls Inc.. I think we should do the chant together to end it off right, let's do it. Let's do it. Ready, strong, smart, bold.

Announcer: 16:46

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