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Group encouraging teen girls to learn the power of giving

Austin Business Journal - August 19, 2005 by [Jenny Robertson](#) Austin Business Journal Staff

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They're students in middle school and high school.

They're the daughters of women involved in **Impact Austin**, a 2-year-old nonprofit that pools \$1,000 memberships to pay for grants to other local charities.

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And now they're Girls Giving Grants.

Seventeen girls recently formed the nonprofit as a division of Impact Austin. The eighth- to 12th-grade girls will pool together their \$100 memberships and grant the money to a local charity that they select.

In the future, the girls foresee the organization possibly becoming a standalone operation. But during the program's first year, membership will be restricted to daughters of Impact Austin members.

"We knew this would be such a simple idea to execute that we would probably have a lot of young women interested in joining," says Lisa

Maddy Lyons, an Impact Austin director and an adviser to Girls Giving Grants. "We're interested in growing, but we wanted to get stable first."

The girls have written a three-committee business plan. An education team will help gather new members, and a grants committee will be a point of contact between the organization and charities who apply for funding. A third team will focus on marketing, including Web design and communications.

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Choosing a logo was one of the first decisions the girls made after naming the group. Trying to exhibit their "girliness" while still being taken seriously, the girls settled on a logo with pink butterflies.

"A butterfly metamorphizes," 15-year-old Amanda Kushner says. "It can change, and since we're teenage girls, we're going through changes personally."

Plus, 13-year-old Mara Weidmann says, there's "the butterfly effect" -- the theory that small changes over the long term have big effects later.

"Basically, it flaps its wings in New York, and there's a tsunami in Japan. It triggers something else," Weidmann says. "In this case, we're triggering something good."

"Once we donate money to a nonprofit organization, it helps someone else."

While the group hasn't decided what kind of charity it will contribute to, the members have considered donating to a teen-focused nonprofit.

"We just feel that we're teens, and we understand. We can relate to them," 15-year-old Claire Powers says. "We feel it's something near and dear to our hearts."

The girls will examine tax forms and other financial information from the nonprofits that apply for grants to learn what makes a nonprofit viable. A Girls Giving Grants team will conduct site visits for the finalists.

It will be a business lesson that not many teens learn, Lyons says. Part of Impact Austin's mission is to pass on a culture of philanthropy to the next generation of women.

"As young women, we're all taught to volunteer our time," she says. "But we're never taught, 'Hey, you've got money,' and how to donate your resources."

Rachel Muir, founder and executive director of Austin-based Girlstart, is in a unique position to see girls embark on their own businesses. Her group, which seeks to empower girls in math and science, has helped girls create projects ranging from Web sites to films.

"Girls can do anything," Muir says. "All you need is to dream big, work hard and never give up."

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