

Part II

Early Intervention for Greater Gains

If leaders are made, and not always born, then why not begin nurturing women leaders as soon as possible?

Dr. Angela Reddix's Envision Lead Grow program intercepts girls at 10 years old. Over the course of eight years, the program nurtures their entrepreneurial skills as they become "girl bosses."

In Nigeria, the Girl Voices Initiative led by Carolyn Seaman encourages girls to "try on different roles" until they find their passion.

Women Forward: The 2020 Playbook

“I launched Envision Lead Grow to transform communities of poverty into communities of prosperity through the promise of middle school girls ... teaching them to be entrepreneurs and employers.”

Dr. Angela Reddix, Envision Lead Grow

Dr. Angela Reddix
Training the Next Generation
of Entrepreneurs

Dr. Angela Reddix was not content with building her own highly successful healthcare management consulting company. She decided that young girls needed to know that someone like her, born into poverty, could be an entrepreneur and have the privilege, as Reddix calls it, of being an employer.

ARDX is Reddix's company, with approximately 100 employees. While running the company, and studying for her PhD in organizational behavior, Reddix launched Envision Lead Grow (ELG), a nonprofit whose mission is to teach her recipe for success to middle school girls across the U.S.

The program trains girls as young as 10 from impoverished communities to unlock their passions and turn them into profitable businesses. The goal is to evolve the girls into employers as well as entrepreneurs, lifting them and their communities into prosperity.

The annual weeklong training takes place on-site at partner colleges and universities. Following that is group mentoring and online classroom

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study for the remainder of the year. The graduates then spend two and a half days with Fortune 500 female executives, honing their skills and developing their business plan.

To date, 1,280 girls across the U.S. have benefited from ELG. Not only are they building businesses, they are improving their outlook on life. ELG teaches girls self-efficacy, self-control, conscientiousness, delayed gratification and personal leadership. Organization stats show that when the girls were part of ELG: 89% reported that the program helped them feel more confident than before they joined; 95% reported experiencing personal growth; 85% said that ELG helped them feel more comfortable with public speaking; and 100% reported planning to complete both high school and college.

Reddix effected change by:

- Articulating her path to entrepreneurial success so that others could replicate it.
- Addressing preteen girls to show them life and career options they would otherwise never be afforded.
- Inspiring young girls with the vision of being future employers, to raise their communities out of poverty.

In Reddix's own words

“I am the founder and CEO of ARDX, a healthcare management consulting and IT firm, in the federal government space. I have approximately 100 employees responsible for implementing legislation or policies and systems to support legislation in the healthcare space,

specifically Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.

“While running the company, I went back to get my PhD in organizational behavior and recognized that my real love was entrepreneurship. I dug into the literature on expert performance and deliberate practice, and decided that my passion is replicating my story.

“I was born to a teenage mother living in poverty but now have the honor of being an entrepreneur and employer. I am providing my employees with life insurance, health insurance, a retirement plan and the ability to send their children to college. I decided to replicate my model for success as my dissertation for my PhD, and that became Envision Lead Grow.

“I launched ELG to transform communities of poverty into communities of prosperity through the promise of middle school girls. That means we have to be able to employ others so that we infuse capital into these communities. I specifically targeted middle school girls in 48 states across the U.S., where 80% of the students qualify for free lunch. We start working with them in fifth grade right through high school graduation, teaching them to be entrepreneurs and employers.

“ELG is now also a three-year longitudinal study. We are tracking variables like high school graduation rates, teenage pregnancies and crime and how these are impacted by poverty. We can see that the cities with the highest level of prospering small businesses have the lowest level of teenage pregnancies, higher levels of high school graduations and lower crime rates. So all of these are connected.

“We begin with girls as fifth graders because we recognize, and studies show, that as girls are approaching the middle school age, that is when their decisions could change the trajectory of the rest of their lives. So we

try to capture them at that moment and keep them through high school graduation.

“We have a one-week College Immersion Entrepreneurship program where girls come to a partner college or university. They eat on campus and sleep in the dorms. We have all-day sessions from Sunday night until Friday, where they learn the components that I have documented as the significant elements of being a successful entrepreneur and employer.

“The girls love it! They are meeting other girls from different states, so their network increases tremendously. They learn about diversity because you have girls from Maine to Miami to Memphis, all in the same camp. They are learning that the world is a lot bigger than the street they live on, because many of these girls have never moved beyond their community. So that is the first part of the program.

“After they return to their communities, they are assigned a mentor. We do team mentoring because we do not want them to feel they are in a classroom all the time. We assign three girls to each adult mentor. We have roughly 350 women across the United States that have agreed to mentor our girls once a month for a full year. And we continue the classroom training we started during the College Immersion week in a virtual format.

“This is all completely free to the families. We don't charge anyone. But the way they pay is through engagement. The girls earn points for their level of engagement starting at the college camp through the work with mentors and the virtual classroom. Those with the highest scores get invited to what is the final part of the program, the Entrepreneur Institute; this is really about no risk, no reward.

“We send the top 100 girls to the Entrepreneur Institute every year, where they spend two and a half days with Fortune 500 female executives and entrepreneurs working with them to hone their skills. Since this is a longitudinal study as well as a nonprofit, we are collecting data along the way, and it is amazing to see their self-efficacy improve. They complete surveys before and after so we can see if their confidence has increased, if their belief in their ability to succeed has improved, and if they can delay gratification, demonstrating more self-control. And in every case, those metrics have moved up.

“The reality is: Whether they become an entrepreneur and an employer or an employee, we’re shaping girls who are going to change the face of the boardrooms. They’re going to be excellent employees. As an entrepreneur employer, I can tell you that those who are confident enough to trust their voice are the best partners for an entrepreneur.

“Our girls don’t just talk about starting a business; within nine months of participating in the program, some actually have businesses with EIN numbers. We call these girls our ‘thousandaires.’ The goal is to make their first thousand, because before you can become a millionaire, you have to be a thousandaire. We teach how to have a healthy relationship with money, which is not something most of these girls get at home.

“I love it when our Fortune 500 executives come to our Institute, and they hear questions like: ‘When can I expect ROI? When will I have a break-even? How should I expand my target market?’ It is just thrilling.

“We work with the girls from Day 1 to figure out what they are passionate about, because my recipe for success started from a place of passion for the healthcare industry. It’s my passion that motivates me, not the money. We had one young lady who loves K-pop. So we worked with her to understand the why and uncovered that what she loved was the

Korean language. By the end of the week, she had created her business plan to build an app to learn the Korean language. She pitched to two investors and has already won seed money.

“Another young lady who has been with us now for three years had been bullied at school because she loved science. By the end of the first week, she’d created a business plan to start a nonprofit to teach other young girls to love science. She built the model very much like the college camp experience. By Year 2, she figured out that nonprofits have to raise money. So she formed her second business selling positive affirmation products, and she uses that money to fund her nonprofit. She has now pitched publicly at nine different pitch competitions with adults as her competitors. She has received \$10,000 at a time and was selected this year as a Disney dreamer.

“For me, as the owner of my own business, that meant the lights had to be on all the time. Is that a good look for the young mothers in the company or our ELG girls? Does a woman or girl feel she has to give it all up to be successful? I learned I had to create some boundaries for myself so that I could make moving up the corporate ladder and owning your own business attractive to someone else. That meant I had to leave the office. I had to go on vacation and truly be on vacation. I had to demonstrate the controls.

“I held myself accountable, because I know as a CEO the paparazzi are watching, and the paparazzi are your employees and my ELG girls who are watching the success of the company and trying to figure out what it takes to be successful. I need to model what that looks like.”

Taking action on Reddix's experience

- Consider a multipronged approach to effect change, that includes a group class experience, one-on-one mentoring and a follow-on peer mentoring group.
- Explore how your program will unlock each person's passion.
- When holding out a big vision, set intermediate visions—e.g., thousandaires before millionaires.