



# REAL GIRLS REAL STORIES

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Empower girls everywhere to speak out for change by supporting Girl Be Heard, a non-profit theater group that brings global issues affecting girls center stage. Learn more at [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org)



# G!RL BE HEARD

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## MISSION:

Girl Be Heard is a non-profit **theatre company** that brings **global issues** affecting girls center stage **empowering** young women to tell their stories.



## OUR PHILOSOPHY

If a girl can change her own life, she can change the lives of girls everywhere.



## WHY DO WE DO THIS WORK?

- Out of 195 countries, only 17 are led by women.
- Of Fortune 500 CEOs, 23 are women – that's 4.6%.
- Women hold 18% of our elected Congressional office. Women of color hold only 5%.
- In the United States, women still earn 77¢ for every \$1 a man earns. In certain cases, African American women earn 64¢ and Latinas 55¢.

## RAVE REVIEWS

*"Fearless, political theatre."*

– **Huffington Post**

*"Can't miss production."*

– **Ebony Magazine**

*"Inspiring to see bright, confident young women holding forth on stage."*

– **The New Yorker**

*"Join in the truth-telling as told by clear voices of girls before pretense or pressure have quieted them."*

– **Gloria Steinem**

## EDUCATION SERVICES

- After-School Program
- School Assembly Performances
- International Cross-Cultural Exchange Program
- Teacher Training

 Girl Be Heard

 @GirlBeHeard



# G!RL BE HEARD

## GIRL BE HEARD ORIGINAL SHOWS

**9MM AMERICA:** *9mm America* explores America's culture of violence. Young women share Their experiences living with the threat of gun Violence in their neighborhoods, from East New York to the South Bronx.

**DISPLACED:** Inspired by stories of girls living in refugee camps, *displaced* is based on personal stories of women and girls who've experienced displacement and homelessness in NYC and abroad.

**GIRL BE HEARD: CONGO:** Theatre-inspired activism devised with youth leaders working in the Democratic Republic of Congo to raise awareness about the rape epidemic in Congo.

**GIRLPOWER: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST:** A ground-breaking call to action, raising awareness around issues such as bullying, body image, self-esteem, race, and LGBTQ identity. Audiences experience a perspective of what it means to be a girl in today's society.

**TRAFFICKED:** The story of 15 sex trafficked girls across the globe. The show puts a name and face to the countless girls enslaved into the 38 billion dollar a year sex industry.

**AMERICA'S DIRTY SECRET: HUNGER, HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, AND THE STREETS:** Rumbling stomachs are not just happening in foreign lands; children across the United States are going hungry. There has been a 40% increase in homeless children in the US, the largest increase since the Great Depression. The recession has made vulnerable our most vulnerable population: our children.





# G!RL BE HEARD

Bring  
***G!RL POWER***  
to your school!



*To book a show, workshop, teacher training or bring our after school program to your school, check out our "Menu of Services" at [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org).*

## **Performances**

Girl Be Heard shows educate, empower and engage audiences in schools, universities, community settings and corporate events. These award-winning performances – seen at the White House, TED conferences and the United Nations – are written and performed by girls (ages 12-21) about issues they care about most, from bullying to body image.

## **Workshops**

Interactive sessions may include arts-based advocacy, leadership, gender-related issues, bullying, and global issues affecting girls. Topic specific workshops often cover current issues facing a local community and are devised in partnership with school principals, guidance counselor and parents. Workshops may incorporate show excerpts. Girl Be Heard residencies can also be set up in schools, in addition to Teacher Trainings.

## **Cross-Cultural Exchange**

Girl Be Heard hosts groups from around the country and the world. Customized, girl-powered visits include sight seeing, learning about social issues that impact our city, and special performances that shed light on NYC's social fabric as told by our girls. Previous exchanges have included visits to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, culinary tours of immigrant NY, picnicking in Central Park and boating around the City.



## EDUCATION GUIDES



**Girl Be Heard** along with Women Making Movies, Gathr Films, and Duggal Visual Solutions have partnered with ***I AM A GIRL*** to raise awareness about human rights issues affecting girls around the world.

**Girl Be Heard Education Guides for *I AM A GIRL*** are three units of 25 total lesson plans aligned with US Common Core Curriculum (grades 9-12), to provide a practical and ready-to-use resource for teachers to address human rights and social justice issues affecting girls around the world.

**Girl Be Heard Education Guides for *I AM A GIRL*** help teachers bring important human rights topics and a future of gender equality to the classroom.

- 3 units (History and Social Studies, ELA, and Health and Advisory)
- 25 lesson plans, 45-50 minute long each
- More than 50 activities and prompts
- Ad hoc inquiry-based reflection processes
- 6 video vignettes corresponding to the six girls (12 min. each)
- 1 full documentary (88 min. total)

## LET A GIRL BE HEARD!

If you want to **bring the Girl Be Heard empowerment approach to your school or community** along with the film, contact us at **[girlbeheard@girlbeheard.org](mailto:girlbeheard@girlbeheard.org)**

Sign up for updates on our website, or follow us at:



Girl Be Heard



@GirlBeHeard

## GIRL BE HEARD EDUCATION GUIDES FOR *I AM A GIRL*

### **HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES** (12 lesson plans)

U.S. History: migration movements, black history

World History: feminism, colonialism, indigenous populations, dictatorships, geography of lesser known countries

Civics, Citizenship, Government: mental health care/social services, reproductive rights

Economics: macro economic systems, micro finance, war politics, black markets

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS** (6 lesson plans)

Using the following forms of expression, this unit covers topics of girls' access to education, sexual abuse, sex trafficking, reproductive/mental health, and more.

Journalism

Humanitarian reports

Poetry and music

Storytelling and folklore

Blogging

### **HEALTH AND ADVISORY** (7 lesson plans)

Role models

Social media

Social expectations

Mental health

Sexual abuse/consent

Reproductive health

Gender inequality

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If a girl can change her own life, she can change the lives of girls everywhere.

***I AM A GIRL*** (Director Rebecca Barry, 2013) is a feature-length documentary about what it means to be a girl in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Taking the audience through diverse cultures and societies, it shows the remarkable stories of Manu, Kimsey, Aziza, Habiba, Katie, and Breani, a Girl Be Heard company member.

# G!RL BE HEARD



Our theatre company provides a stage for youth to share their struggles – from body image to bullying – rise above adversity, and become brave, socially-conscious leaders who inspire audiences from schools to the White House.

We are grateful to you for your leadership in promoting girls access to education worldwide and all of the work you do for women and girls.

Thank you for letting a Girl Be Heard!

Attached, find our gift to you – our girls' stories of rising above adversity.



## Family Owned and Operated

By Betsy Perez, Age 23



At age nine, I was too much body for my age. I don't know if it was the platanos or the queso frito, but this girl was busting out of everything. And then I got my period. I swear I thought my mother was going to rush me to the emergency room but all she said was, "Mira muchacha, relax girl. You're a woman now." My mother and I hadn't had "the talk." The one about becoming a woman. About how to safeguard "my popolita." Not let anyone touch that part of me. It was so confusing. Especially since everyone was touching my popolita but me.

At five, I opened up shop without even realizing. It was a family owned business, I guess. Cousins and a very involved Uncle Freddy took pride in my shop. Polished me up every week...it happened so often and for so many years that it

became normal. I thought this was how I was supposed to act, how I was supposed to show love. I thought that everyone's first sexual experiences are supposed to be like this. Los primos se priman is what we call it in Latino culture. It's a saying we have for incest. I don't know how true that is for you, but it was for me.

Every weekend, my family would get together religiously for dominoes, bingo and cards. Uncle Freddy would catch me in the cuts. Those dark spaces in the house where no one sees a thing. He would ever so subtly trace the straps of my tank top, rub me down quickly. Our "quickies" he called it.

Then he started to ask my mother every weekend to let me come over to play...allegedly with cousin Lucy, but she was rarely there. He was my mentor. I learned the art of luring and manipulation. I learned to say "It's ok, no one is looking." To reassure Lorena and Cynthia when they got hooked. Uncle Freddy taught us well. We promised we would never tell. We would never tell anyone.

**@BetsyPerez2014**



## Look At Me

by Breani Michele, Age 18

Look at me.  
What do you see?  
Am I a 10, a 7, or a 3?  
Or maybe I'm a 9.5 because there's not enough  
meat in my thighs.  
Naaa I'm a 10!  
No, I can't be a 10; I'm less because there's not  
enough in my chest.  
It's all about your breast butt and thighs.  
It's my body that counts, boys don't really look  
at your lips nose and eyes.  
How about I let Facebook decide I have too  
much clothes on.  
This shirt makes the picture look all wrong  
Click, click...

Yeah, now this picture looks nice: a bra and jeans real tight.  
And nobody should have nothing to say 'cause Kim Kardashian had a picture like this,  
and she was dressed the same way.  
If she could do it, I could do it too! Right?  
In one picture my back was turned to the camera, and all I had on was tights.  
That picture got almost 500 likes.

Boys think I'm so sexy and my body is great.  
Girls are always jealous. I think all they do is hate.  
I have one best friend, she and I can relate.  
We kissed a few times, so I guess we're not straight

Boys love us.  
They really love us, always asking us on dates.  
I don't get along with girls,  
so I think we were brought together by fate.  
For me, growing up wasn't easy. I always got teased.  
Facebook just has a way of boosting my self-esteem.  
Go ahead, judge me. Do what you please.  
You just don't understand how much those likes mean to me.

**@BreaniMichele2014**

## Chatty Belly

Allysia Onder, age 20

I sometimes trace the stretch marks on my hips with  
dark black ink,  
and pretend that they are quotation marks,  
and fill in what my belly thinks.  
“Man, I'm starving, can you throw something my way?  
Feed me, Jesus Christ! I've had nothing all day.  
I know you can hear me, and you feel me quite frank.  
You'll get yourself nowhere on a big empty tank”.  
Hah, oh yeah, my belly cannot lie.  
Believe me, I know her. She's never far from my thighs.  
You see, I know what my belly thinks, and I can handle  
her okay.  
The real horror, however,  
is what other people say.  
“Fat ass, cow, waste of space,  
blimp, beached whale, beep-beep, pick up the pace.  
Miss piggy, lard ass, thunder thighs, and fat.  
I've even had people ask me, “would you like fries with that?”  
Men my age are too small, plastic furniture scares me,  
I know all the weight limits, and bunk beds are the enemy.  
I'm a size 16, and I eat less than you.  
I exercise daily, and there's nothing I can't do.  
But at the end of the day, no matter what I cook,  
most people can't get over  
that this is just the way I look.

**@AllysiaOnder2014**







## Halle's Story

Halle Paredes, age 14

If you had told me last year that my life would have turned out the way it has, I would never have believed you. When I was 12 years old, I suffered a concussion while playing hockey for my school.

After going to the doctor, I was confined in my room: no stimulation, no light, and no loud noises for 4 weeks. It was a nightmare with only my thoughts to keep me company.

When I was finally able to go to school, I was different. I was extremely sensitive. I was always feeling tired or sick, and I just didn't feel like

myself. One night in April, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop my insecurities from swirling around like a tornado in my head. **I felt so overwhelmed with self-hate and sadness. I took it out on myself.**

It was like I was under a spell of my own conjuring. I wasn't sure what came over me. I looked around to find the sharpest object I could and proceeded to cut my forearms. Once released from that spell, I realized what a big mistake I had made. I promised myself that this was a one-time thing. The next day, I didn't tell anyone. I told myself it wasn't a big deal.

Over the course of a week, I broke my promise and cut myself several more times. Far off in my mind I knew it was a problem, but I didn't want to face it. I decided I should tell a friend. I hoped she might tell an adult because I wasn't strong enough to. The only thing she told me to do was to stop. My habit worsened. I graduated from using household objects to using razors, which scared me. I couldn't stop. I was cutting more and more: six to seven times a day. No matter where I was, I couldn't stop thinking about the next time I could cut myself. As I continued cutting, suicidal thoughts began to appear. As much as I had wanted to keep my cutting a secret, I needed to tell someone before it got worse. **I needed to be my own hero.**

I had to tell my guidance counselor. I had attempted to tell her several times before but was too scared. This time I would do it. It took all of my courage and strength. If I didn't tell her now, I never would.

This was the beginning of my recovery. I was sent to the hospital and learned – for the first time — that I am not alone. I learned that one out of twelve teenagers are just like me, struggling with self-harm. **I wish I could say relapse is not in my story.** I was in and out of hospitals before I joined Girl Be Heard. Girl Be Heard has changed my life forever. Today, I can use my story at Girl Be Heard to help others to stop self-harm. I've made lifelong friends and learned my true potential as an artist, songwriter, singer and most importantly, as a person. I will be forever thankful for Girl Be Heard.

**I'm becoming stronger every day.** Many people ask me what I think about my scars. The faded white lines are a reminder of where I've been, but also how I've progressed to the person I am today. They are battle scars: beautiful, in a way.

**@HalleParedes2014**



## Increase the Peace: Girl Be Heard's Melanie David Wages A Personal Fight Against Gun Violence by claire biggs

August 1, 2013



Gun violence is a growing problem in our country, but for some people, the problem isn't just national, it's personal. Melanie David's brother was shot and killed in 2010. When she found out about Girl Be Heard, a theatre company that brings social justice issues to the forefront, she knew she had to get on stage and share her story.

David, 25, was a company member for Girl Be Heard's highly-acclaimed "9mm America" show. At the performances, young women stepped into the spotlight to share their stories of how gun violence has personally affected their lives. Although she had to relieve the pain of losing her brother, David was supported throughout the entire experience by her mentor, Jessica Greer Morris, the executive director of Girl Be Heard, and legendary activist Eve Ensler.

To find out more about the performances and what David is doing now to Increase the Peace, check out our interview below.

### **ACT: How did you get involved with Girl Be Heard?**

**MELANIE:** I got a casting notice back in September last year and saw that they were seeking young woman with personal stories about numerous issues and one of them happened to be gun violence. I was too afraid at the time to share my story, so I didn't attend the audition. When I got the same casting in January I said, "OK, I am going to go and see what happens." So with all my reservations and fears intact I attended the audition, I sang and shared my story and had no idea that Girl Be Heard was going to change my life for the better. I encourage every girl who wants to be heard to audition.

### **ACT: Why is it important to you to speak out against gun violence?**

**MELANIE:** It is important for me to speak out against gun violence because my brother was murdered in 2010. Losing a loved one that way is an unimaginable pain that no human being should have to endure. People die every day, but no one should be allowed to decide another's fate, and unfortunately guns give others the power to play God.



**ACT: What was it like performing as part of “9mm America?”**

**MELANIE:** “9mm America” was the greatest and most difficult experience of my life. Having to relive the pain of losing my brother night after night was beyond difficult. I really exposed some deep issues that followed his murder like how I suffered from panic attacks to having to see his cold lifeless body in a casket. However, I got so much support from my mentor, Jessica Greer Morris (who is the executive director of Girl Be Heard), who taught me how to bring myself back as a performer and how to focus my energy. Eve Ensler (from “The Vagina Monologues”) came to our show and has been an angel to me personally and to Girl Be Heard. She provided great advice on self-care after having to go to such a dark place when performing. So ultimately as hard as it was, it truly made me a better performer and helped me heal my pain by sharing my story.



*From left to right Melanie with fellow Girl Be Heard members Bre and Betsy. (Girl Be Heard)*



*The brave and beautiful cast of “9mm America.” (Girl Be Heard)*

**ACT: Now that the shows are over, how will you continue to protest against gun violence in our country?**

**MELANIE:** I continue to perform my song “One,” every opportunity I get, which is a plea to end gun violence. I also have a non-profit in the works in honor of my brother to mentor and help educate the youth on gun violence. Girl Be Heard is also constantly asked to perform our show “9mm America,” and we are always hard at work to create new platforms to voice our message. Today, we are working to bring the show to The White House and Capitol Hill so we can inspire legislators to change gun laws.

**ACT: For our readers, how can they get involved in speaking out against gun violence?**

**MELANIE:** There are so many ways to help! Readers can look up organizations in their area and volunteer time. If there are none they can always support by giving to organizations like Girl Be Heard, that give back to the community by educating the youth and providing an outlet for them. Today we are working to raise funds to bring the show into public schools, specifically those in neighborhoods where gun violence is a daily threat. And we would love for every reader to join our movement to stop gun violence by “liking” Girl Be Heard’s FB page or following us on twitter.

**ACT: What is your hope for Girl Be Heard?**

**MELANIE:** My hope is that we can take Girl Be Heard around the world! I think it’s so important for people to express themselves through powerful mediums like music, acting, dance and spoken word. Gun violence is just one issue but globally we face so many challenges and with organizations like Girl Be Heard we can unite the world and shed light on important issues while making the world a bit more colorful and a better place to live.

*Increase The Peace is an ongoing series dedicated to celebrating young people who are coming up with creative ways to fight gun violence. For more on the series, visit [Increase The Peace](#).*