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75th year

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS  
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philanthropy in hollywood

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# GIRLS on FILM

NEW YORK'S LOWER EASTSIDE GIRLS CLUB NURTURES  
THE NEXT GENERATION OF YOUNG FEMALE FILMMAKERS

Filmmakers flew in from all corners of the globe in April to walk the red carpet at the Tribeca Film Festival. But for a few, the trip required just a quick ride on the F train — and parental permission. This year, the 10-minute documentary "Respect," conceived and created by members of the Lower Eastside Girls Club of New York, held its own against those with far greater name recognition; it's just one of many media projects emerging from the private grass-roots organization.

Founded in 1996, the Girls Club (which isn't affiliated with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America) was set up to provide a specific community support for neighborhood girls, many of whom live at or below the poverty line. While other areas of the organization address literacy and leadership issues, one of the club's star programs involves engaging the girls with all aspects of media.

"When we formed the Girls Club, it was all volunteer moms, and we went with our strengths and skills," explains executive director Lyn Pentecost, a former independent video producer who oversees the club's 12-person staff and a yearly budget of nearly \$1 million. "The girls we deal with come with some literacy problems that makes visual literacy such an opportunity for them to have success."

Individuals, local elected officials and private foundations provide much of the funding for the Girls Club — and those funds often guide its programs. Currently, the club runs a monthly half-hour cable TV show, several radio-based programs and offers classes in film and TV production, photography, digital editing and sound design. It even has

a celebrity spokeswoman in Rosario Dawson, a former resident of the Lower East Side.

"I grew up when it was much worse of a neighborhood than it is today," says Dawson, who has hosted programs with the club and hopes to teach a class with the older girls. "You want to give these latchkey kids not just a place to hang out but get them engaged and involved and help them start thinking about college."

Then there is the film program. Funds are limited, but the Girls Club works to connect Hollywood's next generation of filmmakers with mentees. One successful pairing includes Jennifer Poe, a director who wrote her first screenplay at 16, and Ruth Sergel, an independent filmmaker. Under Sergel's eye, Poe cast her film at 17 and shot it at 18. Her final budget? A mostly donated \$1,000.

"Without (the Girls Club,) I don't know where I'd be," Poe says. "Whenever you have doubts or you need help with something, I just go to them, and they give me support and love. It's just like a family. They give you the opportunity to get whatever you need done."

— Randee Dawn



Spokeswoman Rosario Dawson visits Lower Eastside Girls Club members.

For more information, visit [www.girlsclub.org](http://www.girlsclub.org)