



CINNAMONGIRL INC.

When Renée Richard-Smith created Cinnamongirl Inc. in 2003, she understood firsthand the important role mentors and extended family played in her personal and professional life. Renée benefited from mentors while working for Procter & Gamble. When she became a full-time mother, she called upon family and friends for assistance. “I thought, ‘Wow, what are single parents doing to get the support they need, particularly underserved families of color?’”

Cinnamongirl Inc. was established to meet the specific needs of young African-American and Latina-American girls by offering leadership and esteem-building activities, cultural enrichment opportunities and career development programs. A cohort of 35 young girls ages 12 to 18 years old are matched with professional career women from diverse backgrounds.

“Usually there are two to three Cinnamongirls per mentor providing a high level of interaction,” explains Renée. “The mentors are

attuned to where the girls are in their lives and can take them to the next level.”

Cinnamongirl’s Health From Within project, supported by The Clorox Company Foundation, emphasizes mental, physical and financial health and wellness. With their mentors by their side, the Cinnamongirls participate in mental health retreats to discuss how to have healthy, loving relationships and develop anger-management skills. They also engage in nutrition workshops where they learn to shop for and prepare organic foods and become more active by participating in walk-a-thons.

Sarah Kidder, donor relations manager for Cinnamongirl, notices the transformation in Cinnamongirls after they participate in financial literacy activities. “At first, the girls may say, ‘I’m too young—I don’t know how to manage a checking account.’ Eventually, they become totally empowered to take control of their



money and are able to incorporate it into their daily life.”

Cinnamongirls also participate in workshops on college campuses such as Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley. “The girls think they can’t identify with college students. However, their perspective changes when they discover what college life really is,” explains Renée.

Initially at risk of falling through the cracks, young girls who have participated in Cinnamongirl’s programs continue their education. One Cinnamongirl alumna now attends Clark-Atlanta University as a premed student. Another attends California State University, Northridge.

“Alumnae of our program come back to participate as leaders in our fabulous summer internship program. I’m very proud of the older girls educating our younger girls,” says Renée. “The girls entering Cinnamongirl are young but are growing up fast in a very urban environment. Cinnamongirl helps them advance their dreams and teaches them to always believe in themselves.”

