



## A Woman's Place

Girls Inc. alum Nikki Sutton gives the nonprofit's new office a fresh look.

As a 7-year-old, Nikki Sutton learned the value of individuality via a Girls Club (now Girls Incorporated) style show, for which she fashioned a homemade skirt fringed in newspaper. When most of her peers showed up in stylish street clothes, Sutton locked herself in a bathroom stall and cried until an instructor crawled under the door to console her. "She said, 'Those girls are wearing what someone else told them was cool. You made your own cool, and you should be proud of it,'" recalls the 31-year-old Sutton, who continues to make her own cool as founder of the interior-design firm Level.

Fittingly, when Girls Incorporated of Greater Indianapolis moved into its new Meridian Street digs earlier this year, it enlisted Sutton to design the low-slung 1961 building. Working with architect Sam Miller of Solstice, she updated the space with bold elements like red accent walls and a curved trellis at ceiling level and opened up walls to let in more natural light. She was able to stay under Girls Inc.'s tiny budget by repurposing items salvaged from other parts of the building—like original pocket doors used as a moveable room divider and walnut wood for framing out doors. "I don't come from a lot of money, and my mom had her hands full raising my sister and me," says Sutton, who kept her connection with Girls Inc. as a volunteer and donor. "One of the things Girls Inc. taught me was that barriers don't exist if I don't choose to recognize them." —*Meghan McCormick*