



How to Raise a Tradesperson

Reprinted from Vermont Woman

By Kim Brittenheim

Want to help change the world? Ensure that our future women get equal pay for equal work? Imagine our girls growing into skilled tradespeople – building and wiring houses, welding bridges, designing highways, fixing plumbing – and earning the higher wages that those jobs bring in.

Several communities around the U.S. are steering adolescent girls toward strong futures by offering summer trades camps for girls. “Rosie’s Girls” was designed by Vermont Works for Women in 2000 (when it was still known as Northern New England Tradeswomen) and currently runs in California, Ohio, South Carolina, and three Vermont towns. Combining hands-on instruction in trades (like carpentry, wiring, welding, auto mechanics, and firefighting) with a rich array of expressive arts activities, the camp allows girls to develop their own strength and confidence in an atmosphere that is fun, encouraging, and positive.

Rosie’s Girls Summer Program Coordinator Jennie Date says using power tools and learning building techniques is the easiest part of becoming a tradesperson. “It’s the other things associated with being a women in a man’s world that are the hard part”.

“Girls need a strong sense of self and they get that from many places. Rosie’s Girls is just one of those places,” says Date. She lists positive role modeling, good physical fitness, supportive communities, and unbiased language as keys to girls becoming successful tradeswomen.

“Women need to be involved in girls’ educations,” she continues, hoping more tradeswomen will share their skills via teaching in addition to being good role models on the job. Date encourages parents to be open to opportunities for their girls to use tools-around the house or as part of local building projects like community gardens, bench building for parks, or dog houses for humane societies. “Just encourage them to try different stuff”.

The girls’ enthusiasm is clear. Ally, a Rosie’s Girl in the Barre program, wrote in the camp journal the first week, “today I learned how to weld and I really liked it; and I was scared and then I forced myself to do it, so then I just wanted to do it again and again”.

Sandy, 11, of East Montpelier says the hammer is her favorite tool. “I like pounding nails!”

Grace, also 11 from Montpelier, yells, “Chop saw!” when asked when asked about her fave powertool. “It is so cool!”

Vermont Works for Women

is a 501c3 nonprofit organization founded in 1987 to help women and girls recognize their potential and explore, pursue and excel in work that leads to economic independence.

32A Malletts Bay Avenue ♦ Winooski ♦ Vermont ♦ 05404

www.vtworksforwomen.org ♦ 802.655.8900 or 800.639.8922 ♦ www.rosiesgirls.org



Brittney, age 13 from West Brookfield, has a father who builds and shares his tools and skills with her, "he showed me a bunch of stuff, he built our house."

While she favors the jigsaw "because I can cut a bunch of stuff with it-straight cuts or curves." And thinks working in the trades wouldn't be that hard, she says it isn't the career for her. "I really like to draw." Rhye, age 12 of Montpelier, echoes Britt's fondness for the handy little jigsaw. "I like them all, but kinda' like the jigsaw the best." She thinks she wants to be a carpenter one day, "because I take after my mom a lot, and she does carpentry."

The actions and words of family and friends play large girls' openness to the trades. Study upon study has proven it. Parental support and participation are substantial factors intrinsically linked to adolescent self-esteem (per studies by Demo, Small, & Savin, 1987; Openshaw, Thomas, & Rollins, 1984, Richards, Gitelson, Peterson, Hurtig, 1991). Language also plays a key role. How are our girls going to grow up and become tradesmen, handymen, journeymen, electricians, businessmen, congressmen-if they are not going to grow to grow naturally grow up to be men?

Rosie's girls make posters examining gender-biased words. They consider the work required of each position and choose a new name that is not dependent upon the sex of the person doing the job. We used to say "fireman," "policeman," "postman"; now they are firefighters, police officers, and postal carriers. A "journeyman" is now a licensed electrician; the old "servicemen" are today's

military personnel. People in the trades-tradespersons- are no longer just tradesmen. Take a look at the words you use. If they include anchorman, fisherman, lobsterman, lineman, crewman, man's best friend, or showmanship, you, too, may want to consider some alternatives.

The building trades hold viable career options for women. When high school girls are considering careers, make sure they know the pay scale for the jobs they would become skilled to. In Vermont, service industry jobs in restaurants and retail stores frequently pay minimum wage, currently \$7.25/hour. A skilled tradesperson in Vermont can make anywhere from \$16 to \$35 an hour.

Experienced heavy equipment operators can make \$55/hour. Job growth is guaranteed in this sector as the baby boomers retire and many service and technical jobs move overseas. You just can't outsource your plumber, electrician, or carpenter! High school girls can explore trades, career options at the annual "Women Can Do Conference," a full day of over 30 hands-on workshops in trades and technology. Held at Randolph Technical Center in October, it serves over 300 girls from 60 schools each year. Girls can sign up through their school by contacting their guidance counselor.

What brighter world can you imagine than our daughters, nieces, sisters, and girls next door growing up and earning good wages while building our futures infrastructure? Now that is the world I want to live in!

Vermont Works for Women

is a 501c3 nonprofit organization founded in 1987 to help women and girls recognize their potential and explore, pursue and excel in work that leads to economic independence.

32A Malletts Bay Avenue ♦ Winooski ♦ Vermont ♦ 05404

www.vtworksforwomen.org ♦ 802.655.8900 or 800.639.8922 ♦ www.rosiesgirls.org