



Girls Camp in Proctor Teaches Empowerment and Power Tools

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By Cristina Kumka, Staff Writer

A group of 24 young local girls are breathing new life into a phrase made popular more than 60 years ago.

Rosie the Riveter's "We Can Do It," coined by women workers in World War 11, was echoed by carpentry business owner and instructor Heidi Eccleston, who taught the girls of Rosie's Girls summer camp how to use power tools and how to empower themselves.

Eccleston started her own carpentry business in North Clarendon called Hometown Construction after 10 years working under a male contractor to learn skills of the trade.

She said doing it as a woman wasn't easy, but she was given a chance and through her work at the girls' camp at Proctor High School, is now paying it forward.

"It was scary, but I had the experience and knowledge," Eccleston said in a room at the high school recently, the sound of drills and saws buzzing in the background.

"It's empowering," she said. "It's not a little box (girls) have to look into. They can do whatever they want."

"Yes, you can ... there is no such thing as can't," Eccleston said.

Two dozen girls signed up for the camp, the second season it's been made available to girls in grades 6-8 throughout Rutland County.



The two-week long program focuses on teaching girls a trade typically reserved for men and through that, building self-esteem, perseverance and independence.

Physical activity and team building are also incorporated into the camp for fun.

The national program was piloted in Vermont in 2000 by the nonprofit group Vermont Works for Women.

VWW aims to address the needs of women in Vermont to earn a livable wage and to succeed despite numerous personal, educational and economic barriers to employment, according to Rosie's Girls.

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.

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Sue May, the director of the camp, said the point is to have young girls leave the camp knowing they can do things they didn't know they could do before.

On Thursday, girls constructed their own wooden tool boxes and recycled bits of scrap paper and made new paper sheets.

Earlier in the week, girls climbed the rope course at the Vermont Police Academy and learned self-defense from a woman with a black belt in martial arts.

Next week, the girls will take on fire fighting and wire their own lamps.

Competition and pressure from the opposite sex to do better or faster isn't a factor at the girls retreat.

But feminism doesn't describe it either.

"It's empowerment," said Linda MacFarlane, head counselor and program coordinator. "They can explore amongst themselves."

Proctor's Morgan Anderson, 12, said she was proud of her friend who climbed the rope course. "She pushed herself and I'm happy she did it."

Reilly Duggan, 11, of Proctor said she thought her toolbox was better than one crafted by her dad and brother.

When asked if they thought they could do as many things as boys, the crowd of girls said in unison, "Yup."

Rosie's Girls camp runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. today through Friday.

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