



Rosie's Girls Build Confidence

*Article by Erin Cummings
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While painting a wooden step stool that she constructed herself at the Rosie's Girls summer camp this Monday, 13-year-old Amanda Moricette explained why she is attending the three week camp at the Patricia A. Hannaford Career Center in Middlebury.

"I joined Rosie's Girls to make new friends and learn how to build stuff," she said. Her favorite part? Learning how to use the power tools.

So far at the Middlebury camp, camp leader June Hallock and the girls have been using the mornings to build toolboxes, step stools, lamps and a picnic table. In the afternoons they have constructed masks, built rockets, and completed tiling projects. They have also gone swimming, and talked about women's roles and how they have changed over the years. Hallock said that over the next week they plan to discuss body image.

Moricette said that being at Rosie's Girls this summer has made her feel more confident about herself and about what she's capable of.

That's just the message that Rosie's Girls administrators like Hallock and Tiffany Bluemle hope participants take away from the camps, which are taking place around Vermont this summer. As a middle school and high school teacher, Bluemle noticed a distinct change in female students as they grew up and made the transition into high school.



"Their voices got quieter and quieter from lack of confidence and they started doubting themselves for reasons that were surprising to me," Bluemle said.

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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Now the executive director of Vermont Works for Women (VWW), a Winooski-based nonprofit organization founded in 1987, Bluemle works toward the organizations goal of providing education and training to women and girls with the objective of economic independence.

VWW was founded by carpenter Ronnie Sandler, who wanted to encourage women to pursue a career in carpentry not only because she loved it but also because she thought it was a great vehicle for helping women support themselves. Now, 24 years later, the organization has expanded its programs to include approximately 900 women and girls per year, all learning skills that have traditionally been designated to men.

One program in particular, Rosie's Girls summer camp, has drawn attention for its educational program for young girls.

Founded in Essex in 2000, Rosie's Girls is a three-week summer day camp for girls in middle school that consists of four main areas of education: skills (such as bike repair and use of power tools), arts (yoga, dance, mask making), physical activities (rock climbing, swimming, ropes courses) and responses to the media's messages about how a woman is supposed to act (typically media collages or presentations on important women).

"We had so many woman in our programs who said 'If only I'd had know (about these skills and opportunities) when I was young, I might have made a lot of different choices'," Bluemle said, explaining VWW's decision to start a program that targeted a younger audience.

"The objective of Rosie's Girls is to open the girls' eyes to the world and of work and to build the confidence needed for them to deliberate choices about whether or not to finish high school, whether they'll go to college, what major they'll choose, what career path they'll take, etc.," she added.

In the years since its inception the camp has spread to six other locations in Vermont, two in Ohio, two in California and six in South Carolina.

The camp is named after the fictional character "Rosie the Riveter," who represented the female workforce that went to factories during World War II while the men were away fighting, thus illustrating that women can be successful in unconventional careers.

When asked why the allowed age group was so small (11-13 years), Bluemle explained that the middle school years are a crucial time period for girls to decide who they are.

"Studies identify middle school as critical for girls in terms of what happens to their voices (or confidence levels) and what happens is generally not good.

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It's the point at which they're beginning to define themselves in important ways," she said, adding that high school girls tend to have already decided that they can't do certain things, as indicated by their lack of enrollment in science, math and engineering classes.

MIDDLEBURY CAMP

The Rosie's Girls Camp located in Middlebury is the only Addison County location and has been open since 2005. This year it runs through July 30. While VWW is directly responsible for funding and operating the Rosie's Girls camps in Barre and Essex Junction, the Middlebury camp is run by the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Vergennes.

Tuition for three weeks is \$725 with financial aid available to those who need it. The girls are all given a set of tools to keep, to ensure that they continue to use the skills they learn at Rosie's throughout their lives.

The Middlebury camp typically draws between eight and twelve girls; this year it has three participants. Though this number is unusual, Hallock said it has had a positive result because it allows for more one-on-one time with each girl.

Cara Johnson, also 13, decided to come to Rosie's Girls in Middlebury this summer because she aspires to take over the family business.

"I was interested in carpentry because my dad owns a logging mills, and my cousins and I are going to take over the business when we get older," she said.

After one week at the camp, Johnson said she has learned a lot about power tools and woodworking, and feels like she will be successful at running the logging mill when the time comes.

Hallock, a longtime Vergennes Union High School employee, is not directly involved with the Boys and Girls Club, but said she volunteered to lead the camp at the career center because it sounded like a neat program with a positive message for the girls.

"I want them to know that they can do whatever they want to do in life; I want them to lose the stereotypes," she said.

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