



Rosie's Girls Take to Air Over Vermont

*Article by Natalie DiBlasio
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Nervously, with radios buzzing in their headphones and questions pouring from their mouths, Evie Crady-King, 13, and Carley Puskar, 12, took off in a plane for a joyride over Burlington.

Planes went up two at a time, with three girls and a certified pilot in each for 30 minutes all afternoon Thursday at the Vermont Flight Academy, until each of the 25 girls at Rosie's Girls summer day camp had landed safely.

Rosie's Girls is run by Vermont Works for Women to help middle-school-age girls build self-esteem and explore career paths, Development Director Lucy Comstock-Gay said.

"We do a variety of activities with different trades that are nontraditional so that they realize that there are really no limits to who they can be and what they can pursue in their lives," Comstock-Gay said. "We want to help the girls find confidence in whatever it is that they do."

During the aviation day, the girls visited JetBlue for behind-the-scenes tours; explored the airport control tower, radio room and weather station; and learned about repairing planes.



The biggest hit? The plane rides.

"This is beyond insane — I don't even know a word for that feeling I had when I was up there," said Ella Workman, 11.

"My favorite was when we started going over the water and we could see everyone's houses," said Emmalea Hearthstone, 12. "I sort of want to be a pilot now — but I want to be a wildlife biologist already."

Comstock-Gay said she thought the aviation day was a great opportunity because the girls not only were exposed to new positions in the workforce, but they got to see women filling those roles.

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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"They met with Sandra who runs the flight academy, the general manager of JetBlue who is a woman, the operations person at the airport who is a woman and a lot of the pilots here who are women," she said.

Sandra Bolger, a pilot for 30 years, planned the event and said she hoped the girls would realize how many opportunities are available in aviation for women.



"The whole point of the camp is to help the girls find their voice, feel confident about themselves and realize everything they are capable of," Walsh said. "We also talk about issues facing these girls at this age, such as media literacy, body image and self-esteem issues."

Rosie's Girls have a "no-body-talk rule," where girls cannot talk about their own bodies, other people's bodies or each other's clothes, she said.

"I started flying at 14 because of a high school program that inspired me, and the confidence that I gained as a young woman has always stuck with me," Bolger said. "I always said, 'If I can fly an airplane, I can do anything,' and I love to see the girls feel that confidence. Today they just might walk away with a new sparkle in their eye — we are dedicated to making that happen."

This is the first aviation day, but the 11th summer that Rosie's Girls has been home to young girls' exploring carpentry, welding, electrical wiring, bike and auto repair, stonewall building and chemistry, Girl's Program coordinator Kelly Walsh said.

"We ask them to focus on what other people are capable of or something they are doing to shift focus from how we look to what we can do," Walsh said. "It really gives them an opportunity to not focus on appearance, which is great, because it has just become such a huge part of our culture, especially at their age." Walsh and Comstock-Gay said they agree the goal of the camp is not to push girls into any particular trade, but to show them their options and make them feel good about who they are.

"We see an enormous difference in the girls' confidence from day one and the last day of camp," Walsh said. "It's just incredible."

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