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Building Confidence • Teaching Skills • Changing Lives

TESTIMONY ON EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES – August 21, 2015

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WHO ARE WE?

Vermont Works for Women provides innovative training and education programs for women and girls to **develop skills and capacities critical to long-term economic self-sufficiency.**

Specifically, our **programs for girls** focus on 1) cultivating **confidence, courage and leadership** qualities; 2) building positive relationships among girls; and 3) expanding their sense of what's possible (both personally and career-wise). Our programs are experiential, exploratory, outdoor, adventure-based, and emphasize STEM and trades fields, where applicable. They include:

- **Rosie's Girls** – 3-week STEM & trades based summer camp for middle school girls
- **Dirt Divas** – 1-week mountain biking/leadership summer camp for middle school girls
- **Rock and Adventure** – 1-week, school-vacation based camp focused on rock climbing and outdoor winter sports.
- **Women Can Do** – 1-day career-immersion conference at Vermont Tech for 500 high school girls, focused on STEM and trades career fields.
- **Youth Advisory Council** – A leadership opportunity for graduates of VWW programs to inform the organization's policy and approach to youth programs.

A FEW OUTCOMES:

- Rosie's Girls and Dirt Divas serve 120-134 middle school girls each summer in four Vermont counties (Washington, Chittenden, Lamoille and Caledonia).
- Women Can Do attracted 464 high-school aged young women in 2014 from county in the state; 91% said the conference expanded their sense of what they are capable of.
- 84% of Dirt Divas campers showed an increase in their ability to form positive relationships with other girls.
- 79% of Rosie's Girls campers showed an increase in their overall resilience.

ACT 77 presents as a vital opportunity for youth-serving organizations, such as Vermont Works for Women, and Vermont school districts to offer students a broader, more experiential range of relevant educational opportunities and pathways to mastery. Here are some practical examples of our how programming could provide necessary and valuable educational learning opportunities (ELOs):

VWW PROGRAMS OFFER TRANSFERABLE SKILLS:

AOE graduation proficiency	Performance indicator	VWW program activities
Clear and effective communication	Collaborate effectively and respectfully.	High school students at Women Can Do work with as a team to design and build a self-propelled robot.
Self-direction	Persevere in challenging situations.	Dirt Divas campers challenge themselves to learn technical mountain biking skills of increasing difficulty throughout camp.
Responsible & involved citizenship	Participate in and contribute to the enhancement of community life.	Rosie’s Girls, Dirt Divas, and Rock & Adventure participants design group agreements to create safe, supportive environments free of peer aggression , and learn respectful ways to hold each other accountable.
Informed and integrative thinking	Apply knowledge from various disciplines and context to real life situations.	Rosie’s Girls campers learn measurement and carpentry skills, as well as how to use power tools to build a doghouse for an animal shelter (community service project).
Creative and practical problem-solving	Generate a variety of solutions, use evidence to build a case for best responses, critically evaluate the effectiveness of responses, and repeat the process to generate alternate solutions.	Youth Advisory Council members grapple with a VWW “No Body-Talk” policy that encounters resistance from campers. The Council designs a youth-centered approach to the policy , renaming it “X-ray Vision,” and creates experiential activities to implement the new approach.

As a provider of ELOs, we at Vermont Works for Women would offer several recommendations for success:

- **Robust school district and educator “buy-in” that ELOs provide added and valuable pathways for student achievement.**
- **The willingness of school administrators and educators to take the time to learn about the range of ELOs available.**
- **The inclusion of ELO representatives “at the table” as Act 77 implementation proceeds statewide, so that their voices and concerns are considered.**
- **The provision of basic training on the components of the law; and ongoing training for ELOs as implementation progresses.**
- **Identifying and naming what each entity will be responsible for (i.e. AOE, ELOs, school districts, etc.), as well as the assignment of ELO point-persons at schools.**
- **The development of a unified system and communications structure between entities that allows all to progress on a parallel track.**