



VT Women at Work

Fall 2008

Volume 4

VWW Joins the United Way

This spring, Vermont Works for Women was honored to receive the news that it had been invited to become a United Way of Chittenden County Member Agency. “The value of being affiliated with the United Way is far more than the financial support one receives for a program,” commented VWW Executive Director Tiffany Bluemle. “The real value, as I see it, lies in what the United Way knows about our community, its needs, and the people and organizations that are improving it. It provides one with access to volunteers and to conversations that shape public policy and funding decisions; it is an extraordinary resource for a small nonprofit.”

In a letter to the community, Executive Director Gretchen Morse reflected on her Agency’s decision this year to invite additional non-profits to apply for United Way of Chittenden County program funding.



United Way of Chittenden County

After a “deliberative community process, the Board embarked on an intentional path to become more focused and to be better stewards of our mission to mobilize the community to improve lives and to create measurable change in community conditions. It is evident that today’s social problems are complex and require relationships and cooperative action that goes beyond the work of a single agency or organization. It is not enough to only meet the immediate need: but, in addition, United Way must use its influence to bring people together to commit to strategies that prevent problems from occurring in the first place.”

United Way of Chittenden County has as one of its new priorities for funding that “Youth and adults have the job skills and life skills they need to work.” Being awarded program funding from UWCC has allowed VWW to expand its work with incarcerated

women to offer participants who need them supported, structured, transitional jobs. After eight years in the field, it is clear to us that many women leaving prison can benefit from employment that is initially part-time, is supported by outside classroom work and counseling, and that involves an intentional, ongoing collaboration between our organization and regional employers with the capacity to hire and support trainees with limited work experience. The transitional jobs model is based upon program models in other parts of the country that have been especially successful in transitioning men and women from public assistance or prison to sustained, full-time work. The jobs are generally temporary, last from three to nine months, are part-time to accommodate immediate commitments to family or required substance abuse, trauma or counseling programs, and serve as a stepping stone to full-time, sustained employment.

Many thanks to the United Way of Chittenden County’s Basic Needs Impact Team volunteers for their vote of confidence in our work and UWCC’s commitment to helping women achieve financial independence. ■

VWW Receives Grant Award

Last winter, VWW received a grant of \$80,000 from Jane’s Trust to develop its capacity to provide support to sites interested in replicating three of its program models: Rosie’s Girls, Step Up to Law Enforcement, and its modular home building program for incarcerated women. Because we view replication as a program, our work under this grant is focused in part on developing an approach to replicating all three programs – to assess the extent to which we want to be involved in assisting individual sites, to determine the extent to which current staff can provide such assistance, to explore how we can best use web-based activities and materials to facilitate training and communication, and to determine the cost of sustaining support for replication sites.

Jane’s Trust was created through the beneficence of Jane B. Cook, who died in July 2002. Mrs. Cook was known in the communities where she lived as a down-to-earth woman who was generous to the core. The Trust will continue for a thirty-five year period the legacy of generosity that she established during her lifetime.

We’re grateful to the Trust for its vote of confidence and for the opportunity to approach the issue of replication in a thoughtful, deliberate way. ■

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Mission

VERMONT WORKS FOR WOMEN helps women and girls explore, pursue and excel in nontraditional careers that pay a livable wage.

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- Tiffany Bluemle, *Executive Director*
- Laurie Caldwell, *Project Director*
- Lily DeForge, *Finance Manager*
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Vermont Works for Women Gets a New Home

We certainly didn't think about building when we learned last October that our lease in Essex Junction would end in April and we would need to find new space. But we did think our new home should root us in a community where we are needed and that provided easy access by public transportation. We also wanted to be closer to colleagues with whom we could collaborate and who could refer clients. And we wanted to have enough space to accommodate growth over time – or be able to sublet if we needed to in leaner years.

The O'Brien Community Center in Winooski on Malletts Bay Avenue is designed to house facilities and programs that will serve Winooski citizens of all ages, interests and income levels. The Center has been developed in partnership with community members over the course of several years, and is supported by Winooski voters, who approved special bond financing last year. The Center incorporates a community kitchen, a gym, a common area and community meeting and dining space that can be used by local organizations. It houses a number of proven nonprofit organizations – among them, a satellite extension of the YMCA, an office of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, the Winooski Teen Center, the Winooski Boys and Girls Club, the Association for Africans Living in Vermont, and the Winooski Coalition for Safe and Peaceful Communities. The Center is also home to community medical and dental offices accepting low- and moderate-income



patients. We will occupy a space that was formerly a bank on the west end of the Center, but not before extensive renovations, enlarging the space both “up” and “out.”

THE SPACE

The building's architect is Ann Vivian, who has designed many wonderful spaces in Vermont and the eastern U.S. Her design for a two-story office building will make full use of a southern exposure that can reduce our dependence on heat and electrical light, will be energy efficient, and will be built in part with recycled materials. The exterior façade, which will be constructed of corrugated metal and tinted concrete panels, is distinctive enough to provide a “cap” to one end of the Community Center while echoing the Center's storefront windows and silver and brown tones.

Perhaps most significantly, the building will be constructed in part by the hands of graduates of our programs through scheduled opportunities for community service

VWW Research Featured in National Publication

A year and a half ago, VWW was one of three organizations chosen by the **Vermont Women's Fund** to participate in a new grant program focused on economic justice and independence. The grant's flexibility and the Fund's clear interest in women's economic independence allowed us to conduct research to learn more about women's pathways to prison; develop an understanding of their past employment histories, attitudes towards work, and plans for the future; and to take note of their suggestions for interventions that could prevent future criminal activity, encourage self-direction, and support independence. The research was conducted by researchers Judy Harden and Jean Lathrop, and

benefited from the expertise of Wendy Love and Lilly Talbert of the VT Commission on Women, Colleen McKinnon of the University of Vermont, and Margaret Luce. We are indebted to these women, and to the Vermont Women's Fund, for their interest in the project and for their wise counsel.

The purpose of the research was to better understand the employment preparation and work experiences of women currently under the supervision of the VT Department of Corrections. In recent years, because the number of women in prisons across the country has increased at an alarming rate, correctional research

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Constructing Futures: A Profile of Success

Just five weeks after driving the last of countless nails as a participant of VWW's Modular Home Building Program at the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor, VT, Robin was hired to do so as a carpenter for the national, employee-owned Bonitz construction company in Augusta, GA.

For the first time in her 38 years, Robin was positioned to turn down jobs offering less than a livable wage, including those with fast-food establishments and a slaughterhouse where she felt she was treated as a "hopeless and desperate felon." She identified well with the other applicants there, paroled without skills and begging for the position, as just one year earlier that had been her reality.

In 2004, she was released from the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York after five years of incarceration, before which she was uneducated and had not been legally employed. She left with a full scholarship to Marymount College in Manhattan, NY where she immediately matriculated as a fulltime student. Despite her academic scholarship, Robin was in dire need of part-time work to cover her living expenses.

While Robin takes full responsibility for her decision to commit a crime one weekend while visiting Vermont, she says she felt she had no other option. Initially, Robin fled to Georgia, but a few weeks later, in June of 2007, she went back to Vermont and turned herself in.

By the first of August she had joined the Modular Home Building Program. Two months later, by virtue of her exceptional work ethic, physical strength, humor, motivation, and natural ability to lead, Robin was promoted to crew leader, a position she held until her release on June 5th, 2008. An exemplary participant, Robin took advantage of every opportunity to further her competency in the trade. So too did she seize opportunities for self-reflection and growth, thereby serving, through example and counsel, as a moral compass for her fellow crewmembers.



I'm the perfect example of why the women of Vermont need the Modular Home Program; it's changed the course of my life.

Today, albeit remotely, Robin is setting another example for her fellow crewmembers still incarcerated in SESCOF. At \$13.75 per hour and poised for full benefits in six months, Robin is proving the potential for self-sufficiency. Wielding her hammer, purchased along with other necessary tools through the Working Women in Transition Program (a project of VWW and the US Department of Labor's Women's Bureau), she is smashing glass ceilings for previously incarcerated women.

"I'm the perfect example of why Vermont women need this program, it's changed the course of my life. Without it I would have had to settle for \$800/hr. doing something that I don't find fulfilling," says Burton by phone from Georgia. Ecstatic over her new job, she explains, "I feel confident, I know I have the skills I need to do this." ■



Donna Guiel and Gayle McKinnon-Alexander of Chittenden Bank present a check for \$2,000 to VWW Executive Director, Tiffany Bluemle, in support of the modular home building program for incarcerated women. In 2009, the program will move to the correctional facility in St. Albans, where all incarcerated women in Vermont will be housed.

New Mentoring Program Video

The Vermont Women's Mentoring Program, a partnership between Mercy Connections and VWW, is pleased to announce the completion of a new video showcasing the program. Featuring mentors and mentees from our own backyard, the film shares the many struggles and successes of participants, and highlights program partners and staff members as to the impact on women's lives. Special thanks to Jess Wilson at the Center for Media and Democracy, who produced and directed this moving film, "It was an honor and a great responsibility to tell the story of the women who participated in this video. Their honesty was inspiring and heart-breaking. Talking with them is an experience I won't soon forget and for me has put a human face on an issue that we as a community can't afford to ignore." Thanks to the John Merck Fund, Merchants Bank Foundation, The Sisters of Mercy and Ben & Jerry's for their support of this project. You can see the video on www.vtworksforwomen.org, just click on Programs for Women. ■

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Our Newest Rosie's Girls Partner

The Cincinnati chapter of the National Association for Women in Construction (NAWIC) and the Greater Cincinnati YWCA have joined forces to bring the Rosie's Girls Summer program to middle school-aged girls in Cincinnati, Ohio this summer. The team has been working hard for over a year to fundraise for and plan the program which will run from July 14 through August 1, 2008 at the Woodward Career-Technical High School in Bond Hill, Ohio.

The idea for a Rosie's Girls program in Cincinnati was hatched almost 5 years ago, when Janice Urbanik heard of the program through her work. "What we love about the program is its holistic, whole person focus and the fact this it was a turnkey program – We didn't have to develop it ourselves," explained Janice about the appeal of the program.

Liz Shayne, consultant to the Rosie's Girls program, has been working closely with representatives from NAWIC and the YWCA. "This has been an extremely motivated, organized and enthusiastic group. They marched right over any and all stumbling blocks in the planning phases and are poised to run a successful program." The Cincinnati Team has also had the opportunity to communicate with Rosie's Girls staff members from sites around the country to ask questions and learn from their experiences. "The support we received and everyone's willingness to share information and ideas is astounding," replied Eileen Hopkins, Director of Employment and Literacy at the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati, when asked about her conversations with other Rosie's Girls sites.

In 2008, Cincinnati joined 5 other Rosie's Girls teams in offering a total of 11 Rosie's Girls sessions in Vermont and nationwide. Plans are brewing for additional programs in Rutland and Bennington in Summer 2009. ■

Rosie's Girls Coming to Rutland

A small group of women dedicated to empowering young girls in the Rutland, VT region have stepped forward to organize efforts to bring Rosie's Girls to the area during the summer of 2009. Susan Dodge-May will act as administrator and has been spearheading the efforts to find a site, staffing and funds for the new program. Susan currently works as an administrator for the nonprofit Vermont Higher Education Council. Along with Rebecca Majoya, assistant director of The Mentor Connector, and the support of VWW's own Liz Shayne, the group has drafted grant applications for the program and has had great success so far. Stafford Technical Center in Rutland has been named as a possible site, and women working in the trades or in education in the region are being sought as camp counselors. For more information, contact Susan Dodge-May at 802-459-2062 or sjejm@aol.com. ■

VWW Research Featured in National Publication

continued from page 2

has begun to focus on incarcerated women and their pathways to crime. Public debate about how to reduce the number of women cycling in and out of prison has often tended to focus on the need for increased residential and outpatient programs for treating alcohol and other drug dependency issues.

Often left out of the discussion is the role that *stable employment* plays in a woman's successful transition out of prison, in her ability to resist relapse, and in her success in avoiding re-incarceration.

The women in our study had little or no education, little or no work experience,

not much opportunity to address either in prison and no sense that a good job would help them out of the severe financial difficulties that in many cases contributed to their incarceration. Two-thirds of the women surveyed indicated that they were unemployed at the time of arrest, and only half had ever supported themselves through employment. Of the third that had been employed at the time of their arrest, well over half had been employed for less than a year; a third had been employed for fewer than three months. Almost half had relied on public assistance, and half reported income from illegal activi-

ties. Ten percent reported supplementing this income with child support or family loans.

The study confirms the role of women's economic marginality in behaviors that lead to incarceration and makes a strong case for doing more to prepare women for financial independence.

VWW's research and an article on its prison-based program in modular home construction are featured in the June/July issue of *Women, Girls and Criminal Justice*, a national journal published by the Civic Research Institute. A full copy can be obtained by emailing tbluemle@vtworksforwomen.org. ■

VWW Launches New Program for High School Girls: "TechGrlz"



TechGrlz is a collaboration between VWW and the Center for Technology, Essex (CTE). The program provides a highly structured, alternative educational experience for female students in their 2nd semester of the 9th grade and/or 10th grade who are struggling in traditional academic environments and who have failed to meet course requirements and are at risk of failing out of school. It is highly experiential, intensive and requires active participation - and reflection - in a small team-based environment. Course contents were developed in partnership with staff at CTE and are based

on VWW's twenty-one years of experience helping women explore, pursue and excel in nontraditional careers. The program also engages working professionals in the business community as presenters and role models for students, and encourages self-reflection as a way for students to assess what careers appeal to them and to plan for how to get there. Here's what one program graduate had to say about her experience this past spring:

PROFILE OF: E.K. Perley. 17 years old. South Burlington.

Why did you decide to join TechGrlz?

I decided to go with TechGrlz because I was struggling with attendance in school. I heard about it and I was doubtful at first because it was a new program. But it seemed like a good opportunity to learn new skills and gain credit.

What made TechGrlz successful for you?

The instructors got to know us individually, our passions, our dislikes, and the best ways to motivate us. The variety of personalities made for an interesting social situation.

We all came in for our different reasons. What motivated me was I could see there was a lot I could get out of the program. I really enjoyed the activities we did at TechGrlz. There were a lot of opportunities to learn skills unusual to teenagers.

It gave all of us a chance to pick ourselves up, regain our balance, and move towards a successful future. This was a chance to prove to not only others, but ourselves that we were capable. Never once were our goals discouraged, whether they required steel toes or stilettos.

You're going into a welding program at a local tech center next year.

Why do you want to do welding? I just love it. I love metal. Working with metal, working with hot metal. Metal has this balance to me. It's flexible and so strong. It can be clean and simple and beautiful and infinitely complex. When I was in the 9th grade I went to the Women Can Do conference and learned how to use a mig and a plasma cutter and loved it and thought it was so cool. I've also been blacksmithing since I was 12 whenever I get the opportunity.

Do you have any advice for girls considering joining TechGrlz?

Be open to new experiences. Be open to trying something. You need to be willing to give things a go. A lot of us were really scared of the power tools at first, but once we used them we got comfortable with them. Leave behind the "I can't," and take with you the "I'll try."

What are your plans after high school?

I want to go to college and get a Bachelors in something math or science oriented, probably engineering. Tech schools are a great opportunity for those who want to go to college because you get experience in the real world. It's important to know that you can go to tech school and go to college and they complement each other. ■



10th Annual Women Can Do!

Our tenth annual Women Can Do conference will take place October 16th, 2008 at Vermont Technical College in Randolph. This year's conference will have over 30 hands-on workshops taught by skilled professionals on everything from auto repair to computer animation. High school girls from all over the state will converge on the VTC campus for a day of learning and fun, thanks to generous support from the Vermont Department of Education, Vermont Technical College, many state technical education centers and many other organizations and businesses. For a complete listing of sponsors, workshops, and tons of other information about the conference, log on to www.vtworksforwomen.org. ■





Step Up to Law Enforcement Runs Fourth Successful Class

From February to April of this year, nine brave women took the leap to go after their career goals by enrolling in Step Up to Law Enforcement.

The program is a nine-week, intensive, pre-Academy job training program for women interested in careers in policing or corrections. Participants are exposed to over thirty professionals in the field who present on a variety of topics, from balancing careers with family lives to de-escalating aggressive emotion using communication techniques to stress management during and after critical incidents. Given the rigorous physical entrance requirements for policing, participants are enrolled in gym memberships and are matched with personal trainers with whom they develop individualized plans to meet their fitness goals.

The 2008 graduates all made sacrifices to participate in the program. They braved snow and sleet, juggled childcare needs, scheduled around other classes and homework and in some cases, put in long hours at a job before or after coming to class. To meet their personal fitness goals, some exercised five and six days a week, often finishing their workouts in the wee hours of the morning.

That hard work paid off. As of this writing, three of the graduates have been offered positions with the Department of Corrections in three different facilities in VT. Two have applied for jobs and are awaiting an interview. Three have applied for dispatch jobs, aiming to get in the door while working on final fitness goals or studying for their written entrance exams. In all of its programs, VWW provides post-program support for up to a year—we look forward to tracking the success of our graduates in the coming months! ■

VWW Introduces “Officer Schaller!”

Erica Schaller, a 2006 graduate of VWW’s Step Up to Law Enforcement program, graduated from the VT Police Academy and has been hired by the Burlington Police Department! This is a fine achievement as Burlington has a very rigorous set of standards for acceptance. Lieutenant Kathy Stubbing of the BPD remarked, “We were anxiously awaiting Erica’s graduation from the Academy. Law enforcement will again have benefitted from this program and what it has done to instill confidence in women and make them very interested in this field.”

Kristen Mullins, VWW’s Director of Programs, and Shauna Hauser, the Program Coordinator for the 2006 season, attended the graduation and proudly applauded as Erica stepped forward, her family pinned her badge to her uniform, and she became a fully certified police officer in the State of Vermont.

When asked about women in law enforcement, Erica said, “I think a lot of women don’t even think about this career as an option. It is a male-dominated career and when you’re looking for careers as I was, you just don’t think about it. So, to actually have a program like this makes women start thinking that ‘Oh, I could really do that.’”

And so she did! Congratulations, Erica, and good luck in Burlington! ■



Step Up to the Spring Trades!

In April of 2008, VWW piloted a new model of our trades-based Step Up program. We ran two, simultaneous, six-week job-training programs: one in carpentry and one in commercial painting. Both programs ran two evenings a week and one full day in order to make them more accessible to working women.

Eighteen ambitious and strong women enrolled. These women enjoy working with their hands, problem solving, and a tangible product at the end of a day’s work. Many were mothers who were struggling to raise their children alone or with another working parent. Several had been out of the workforce for some time and the idea of writing a resume or going through an interview process was daunting. All the women were new to the trades and the idea of walking onto a work site where they may be the only woman was intimidating in the extreme.

Seven came to learn the craft of painting; eleven to learn carpentry. From an industry overview panel where eight professional contractors gathered to share their wisdom to physical fitness and nutrition presentations, an introduction to blueprint reading, financial planning, cover letter and resume development to becoming certified in CPR, these

students spent two evenings a week developing themselves professionally and personally. VWW cultivated relationships with 17 professional contractors. Students in both programs participated in multiple, full-day job shadows



where they worked alongside professional contractors at residential and commercial job sites.

On Fridays, the painting students learned the skills (and the art!) of professional painting. In their introductory days, they learned surface and site preparation, patching, brushing, rolling, painting safety and tool cleaning and maintenance while painting an office. The carpentry class gathered on Saturdays. Led by successful business owner Amy Judd, participants worked on the design, planning and construction of an 8” x 12” custom, salt-box roofed, “deluxe” garden shed. Students were involved in everything from making a trip to the lumberyard to purchase materials, to framing, roofing, and window installation.

After completion of the program, seven graduates were hired by contractors. The remaining students are currently in the midst of their job searches and are receiving post-program support from VWW. If you need a good carpenter or painter, let us know! ■

VWW Welcomes New Members to its Board of Directors

Steven M. Gold

Steve Gold retired last summer from 35 years in Vermont State Government. His first 21 years were spent in the alcohol and drug abuse field, his next six in welfare reform, where, as Reach Up Director, he first became a supporter of Vermont Works for Women. Steve next spent four years as Commissioner of the Department of Employment and Training, then two as Commissioner of Corrections, followed by one as Deputy Secretary of Administration and finished his career with a year plus as Deputy Secretary of Human Services. Throughout the last 14 years of his State service, Steve was actively involved with VWW as a funder and strong supporter of the many excellent programs it developed for the populations his State organizations served. He is currently very active with the Council on the Future of Vermont and the Snelling Center for Government's VT Leadership Institute.

Jolinda H. LaClair

Jolinda was appointed State Director of USDA Rural Development (RD) for Vermont and New Hampshire in 2001. She manages a staff of 64 and delivers over 40 loan and grant programs that provide

financial and technical assistance to foster growth opportunities for housing, business and community development. In FY 2007, RD invested more than \$133 million in VT and NH. LaClair serves on the Board of Directors for the Vermont Council on Rural Development and Housing Vermont, and is Chair of RD's National Training Committee. Prior to joining RD, LaClair worked for U.S. Senator James Jeffords for 15 years in roles ranging from State Director to Campaign Manager. LaClair has a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Vermont.

Polly Nichol

Polly Nichol is Director of Housing Programs for the Vt. Housing and Conservation Board, a position she has held since 1989. She serves on the board of directors of the Housing Assistance Council, a national rural housing non-profit, an active member of the City of Montpelier's Housing Task Force, the New England Housing Network, and the Vt. Affordable Housing Coalition. She was a founding board member of the VT Community Loan Fund and was instrumental in the creation of the Central VT Community Land Trust. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and received a Masters in Public Administration from the John

THANKS to all our 2008 supporters and a special welcome and thanks to our NEW friends!

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Jeff Parent Tim Parent

Calendar of Events

Vermont Women's Mentoring Program Mentoring Orientation at Mercy Connections

September 17, 2008

Mentor Training Sessions at Mercy Connections

October 1, 8 and 15, 2008

VWW's 10th Women Can Do Conference

Vermont Technical College
Randolph, VT

October 16, 2008

Senator Leahy's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference

Vermont Technical College
Randolph, VT

October 25, 2008

VWW's Modular Home Construction Program

Ribbon-cutting ceremony
Windsor, VT

October 2008

"Women's Career Challenge Day"

Randolph Technical Career Center
Randolph, VT

November 2008

Transitions to Employment – New Program

Fall 2008

Rosie's Girls 2008 reunions

February 2009

Step Up – Trades Training

Spring 2009

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**Overage from
NEW HOME**

and participation. One Saturday in July we hosted a demolition party which included 8 program graduates and 4 staff members – swinging sledge hammers, hammers, and crowbars; and hauling drywall, doors and counters to the dumpsters!

For more information about VWW or the project, please call Tiffany Bluemle, VWW Executive Director, at (802) 655-8900 x 101 – or email her at tbluemle@vtworksforwomen.org. ■

**Overage from
New Members of Board of Directors**

F. Kennedy School of Government. She is also a graduate of the Snelling Center for Government's VT Leadership Institute. ■

**Overage from
Rosie's Girls**

My experience at Rosie's Girls has been a blast. I loved carpentry and yoga. In yoga I learned how to control my breathing. In carpentry I learned how to cut, use a hammer, make a tool box and much more. I really enjoyed this program and am looking forward to next year

—2008 Cleveland Camper

This is a fantastic program for young ladies. I have never seen Tiana so excited about any program. She has definitely shown an increased interest in carpentry and being able to fix and build things. This program has increased her confidence level. I am very thankful for the opportunity for Tiana to participate. She is going to help her dad build a derby car for her brother.

—Rosie's Girls parent, Cincinnati

**Overage from
SPRING TRADES**

"I felt like there was definitely a high, yet attainable set of expectations for the participants in this program that (our instructors) helped us to achieve in a positive, compassionate and very fun way."

—Ali

"I came into this program confident that it would be a priceless and important experience in moving forward in my life. I am completely satisfied and grateful."

—Celia

**Overage from
LAW ENFORCEMENT**

"I really can't tell you enough how much I liked the whole program. It was awesome. I feel extremely lucky to have been chosen to take part in (it)."

—Julie, April 2008