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Learning tools for success

By Anna Guido • Enquirer contributor • July 29, 2008

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BOND HILL - Tiana Key is just 12 years old and entering the seventh grade, but she's learning carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, welding and other skills that young girls traditionally don't even consider as an occupation.

Advertisement She's also learning karate and self-defense to help build her physical strength and self-esteem, and she is dabbling in other games and activities to broaden her sense of capability.

"I like working with power tools," the Lincoln Heights teen said. "The karate shows us how to defend ourselves in many different ways - without fighting. If I don't become a masseuse, I'd like to become an architect."

Tiana is participating in a summer program called Rosie's Girls, and it's aimed at broadening the career possibilities for her and other 11- to 13-year-old girls by exposing them to a unique combination of programs



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The Enquirer/Cara Owsley
Linda DiGirolamo, carpentry teacher and field supervisor, helps Amber Reid (center), 11, Lincoln Heights, and Ashley Browne, 12, Springdale, at Rosie's Girls at Woodward High School.

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designed to meet adolescent girls' needs.

The YWCA of Greater Cincinnati and Cincinnati chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction are joining to bring Rosie's Girls to Cincinnati for the first time. It was founded in 2000 by Vermont Works for Women and Strong Foundations Inc. and has taken place in communities in Vermont, California, South Carolina and Ohio.

"It teaches girls to break stereotypes and push past their limits," Cincinnati YWCA president Charlene Ventura said.

Rosie's Girls gets its name from the fictional character "Rosie the Riveter," who symbolized the emerging strength and power of women who went to work in the defense plants while men were fighting World War II.

The three-week day camp began July 14 at the new Woodward Career Technical High School on Reading Road.

Janice Urbanik, a member of the women's construction association, who helped bring Rosie's Girls to Cincinnati, is a role model for the 18 girls enrolled in this summer's program. Urbanik worked 18 years as a mechanical engineer for Procter & Gamble before moving into the construction industry, where she works as a building consultant for Construction Process Solutions.

Urbanik wants to get the message out to young girls and women that they have career options in nontraditional occupations that have higher salary potential.

Urbanik's research led her to Rosie's Girls, which she sees as a "real opportunity to help break the generational cycle of poverty."

The Cincinnati chapter of the association and the YWCA raised \$65,000 - all locally - to fund Rosie's Girls, YWCA executive vice president Debbie Brooks said.

Messer Construction was among the donors. Messer's Sue Millard, a senior project manager, said the

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company gives community grants annually through its foundation, and Rosie's Girls easily met the recipient criteria - economic inclusion, education and work-force development.

"It's better, but it's still challenging to recruit and retain women in construction," said Millard, who has worked in the industry for more than 20 years.

The 18 participants in Rosie's Girls were recruited from Cincinnati Public Schools and Cincinnati neighborhoods. Any girl with an interest was allowed to participate.

"They've really jumped into all of the projects," Brooks said. "They love the carpentry, they love the welding, they love everything. And they've really risen to the challenge of trying new things - things most of us haven't done."

Khonisa Anderson, 13, of Bond Hill, said she was drawn to Rosie's Girls specifically for the trade work - "the plumbing, electrical work and carpentry; things that I normally wouldn't be able to learn.

"If I want to be an engineer or an architect, these classes can help me further along in my career or give me a head start if I choose to be a plumber, electrician or carpenter."

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