InspireHer program shows girls many paths to success

Anna Ropka is just 12, but already has a career in mind. She’s thinking about becoming a professional photographer.

Twelve-year-old Sydney Elfstrom attends Valley View Middle School in Snohomish with Anna. Both girls have listened as women in our community share the paths they took to achieve success.

“We’ve heard a lot of really good speakers,” Sydney said Tuesday at the second annual InspireHer breakfast.

A mentor program offered through Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County, InspireHer works with girls to foster healthy living, community involvement and academic success, and plant seeds for career opportunities.

Sydney especially recalled one inspiring talk. “Marybeth told us how she got to where she is,” said the girl, who heard Snohomish County Superior Court Judge Marybeth Dinglyed speak at an InspireHer event.

Dinglyed was instrumental in launching the nonprofit two years ago, and serves on its steering committee. She takes part in InspireHer’s character and citizenship programming, one of three areas of emphasis along with academic success and healthy lifestyles.

At Tuesday’s fundraising breakfast at the Everett Golf & Country Club, supporters donated more than $15,000. It will be used to pay for Boys & Girls Club memberships for girls, help girls participate in InspireHer workshops and other programs, and educate them on careers in STEM — science, technology, engineering and math.

“The idea is to lift these girls, lift up their energy and their idea of self through encouragement and mentoring,” said Mary Heffernan-Trestler, director of community education at Edmonds Community
College. Heffernan-Trester, also on the InspireHer steering committee, said girls have toured the EdCC campus “to experience what that college community looks like.”

On Feb. 6, girls are invited to an all-day STEM workshop put on by InspireHer at the Alderwood Boys & Girls Club. “We’ll bring in some cool demonstrations for active learning, and have a career panel of people who work in those really interesting professions,” Heffernan-Trester said. And girls, she said, will get the chance to ask questions: “How did you get there? What were your stumbling blocks? How did you overcome adversity?”

Kit Massengale, individual and corporate giving director for Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County, estimated that since 2014 more than 450 girls have participated in InspireHer programs, which are open to ages 8 to 18.

Last year, 300 girls received scholarships for Boys & Girls Club memberships. InspireHer developed partnerships with EdCC and the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation, and engaged volunteers from more than 75 businesses.

At one InspireHer event, girls watched the film “Miss Representation,” a documentary that challenges portrayals of women in the entertainment media with its emphasis on beauty and sexuality. “You can’t be what you can’t see,” White House Project creator Marie Wilson says in the film.

Among other InspireHer programs are Word Nerds book clubs; a Movin’ & Groovin’ program that offers dance, yoga, self-defense and other types of exercise; and Future U at the Alderwood club, which includes pen pal lessons in professional communication.

Jenny Keeney, a partner in an Everett tax and consulting firm, has overseen InspireHer’s healthy lifestyles programs for the past year. There’s more to it than nutrition and exercise. “It’s healthy thinking, with a focus on self-esteem and self-worth. We’re all different,” she said. “Beauty is unique.”

Keeney said girls enjoyed trying a different form of movement with a jujitsu instructor at one event. New opportunities and options are what it’s all about.

“I have a 5-year-old daughter, and we’ve read a book called ‘Rosie Revere, Engineer,’” Keeney said. InspireHer, she said, looks for women with “all different types of success stories” to share.

“The more you can show to kids out there, it shows them they can do it,” Keeney said.

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Learn more

Information about InspireHer programs at Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County is available at: http://bgcsc.org/get-involved/inspireher/