

## A Club of Their Own

Over the past few years, I have attended many STEM events. These events were open to all local high school students, yet significantly more of the attendees were male than female. In fact, I was often the only girl from my school in attendance. I did not understand why other girls at my school and in the region were not taking advantage of these amazing opportunities.

Even as someone who had attended these events, I still had not been exposed to many different engineering fields and had received little information about what it is like to be a female in STEM. However, I learned that what I had been experiencing was not just a local problem - there is a serious gender gap in STEM fields.

I wanted to do something to change this, so I decided to start a Society of Women Engineers (SWE) club at my school, where local industry professionals give girls a first-hand look at what it is like to be a female in STEM and suggest ways to prepare for college and career. After the idea was approved, I started spreading information about the club and its mission. At our school's club fair, over fifty girls signed up without hesitation! They said they were interested in STEM, but had not known about any opportunities.

Since the club fair, we have had many more girls sign up, and our club is now in the middle of its fifth successful month. We have had guest speakers from a plethora of industries and are working with numerous organizations to get more. I also wanted to inform girls about local STEM events, so I created a club website where opportunities are regularly posted. At an annual engineering event, nine times more girls from my school attended this year than last year! Our club has even been featured in the national SWE newsletter! We are also looking to do outreach events at our feeder schools, so that we can spark girls' interest in STEM at a young age, making them better prepared to take advantage of opportunities available at the high school level.

One of the main reasons girls do not pursue careers in STEM is that we unknowingly push them away. We teach them about male inventors and neglect all things woman-made. We tell them to play with Barbie dolls, while their brothers get to build robots. Our culture has decided that girls should not be allowed to handle power tools or perform science experiments.

Even people who are all for women in STEM have been affected by these stereotypes. I, for one, have questioned my actions while embarking on engineering ventures. I love engineering, but I was hesitant to defy societal standards. However, after connecting with many female professionals, I realize I have little to fear. Hopefully, through help from clubs like mine and STEM-promoting organizations, other girls will realize this too and we can begin to close the gender gap in STEM fields.