



Girl power

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

Girls can be tough on themselves anyway, and the media piles on extra helpings of esteem-damaging images and sexist rhetoric.

To combat the negative messages bombarding American girls, photographer Joan Rudder-Ward established a program called Being the Me I Was Created to Be. The owner of The Image Maker Visual Communications in Hesperia, Calif., Rudder-Ward designed the program to help girls build self-esteem, confidence

and leadership skills. She created a series of photography workshops ranging from one-day sessions to 12-week courses.

Her objective is to help girls discover their own beauty and creative talents through photography. The workshops require no prior experience with photography. Using single-use cameras, the participants make photographs for assigned themes that challenge their abstract thinking skills and help them learn photo-journaling techniques.

When the Being Me idea came to her in 2005, Rudder-Ward tried it with girls in a church group. They loved it. She expanded

the program to work with girls in the foster care system, then with girls in the juvenile justice system. The results were similarly positive. Rudder-Ward is currently working on launching the program in several school systems.

The program is flexible enough to tailor to any particular group, Rudder-Ward explains. "With school girls, we work on programs to inspire them to go to college. For girls who have aged out of foster care, we work on assignments to help them build confidence and pursue their dreams."

Observing a need for parents and caregivers to have better resources to help build self-esteem in the girls in their care, Rudder-Ward established the nonprofit organization, The Positive Image Network. "People are looking for resources like [the Being Me program], but they don't know where to find them," says Rudder-Ward. "The goal of the nonprofit is to bring all these things together in one database."

She hopes to expand Being Me beyond California and to teach others how to administer it, much of it through the Internet. "If people are interested in helping girls build self-esteem, confidence and life skills, we want to provide them all the resources we can," she says. ■

Find information about Being the Me I was Created to Be and The Positive Image Network on Rudder-Ward's Web site, www.the-image-maker-online.com.

Share your good works experience with us by e-mailing Cameron Bishopp at cbishopp@ppa.com