Speak Up! Pittsburgh

By Rachel Gallant

Speak Up! Leadership Workshop is committed to helping young girls, ages 7-13, become interested in science and other fields where women are underrepresented today. Ayana Ledford, founding executive director of PROGRESS at Carnegie Mellon University, organized an interactive negotiation workshop earlier this year for the Women in Science at Duquesne University.

“The goal of Women in Science at Duquesne University is to create a network of women in STEM who know one another, can support one another and kind of have a unique perspective on the challenges that face women in these types of careers in which they might be unrepresented or might just face normal stereotypes,” stated Doctor Allyson O’Donnell, Assistant Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences and one of the founding members of the Women in Science at Duquesne University.

W.I.S. thought it would be a good way to get young girls interested in STEM careers and to show them that it is a possible career to achieve.

O’Donnell described Speak Up! as a series of interactive modules where they learn how to negotiate, stand up for their viewpoints, how to speak their minds. All the moderators and volunteers are women who the young girls can look up to as role models.

One of the volunteers at this event is Cassandra Hanley, a graduate student in the Department of Chemistry at Duquesne. “There are a lot of issues between different genders as far as the wage gap goes. Women are less likely to speak up at their jobs than men and I think that starts fundamentally when you’re young. Girls aren’t taught to speak up to get what they want,” says Hanley.

She says that by teaching girls to be empowered and to speak up when they want something, it will make it easier to level the playing field throughout their lives.

According to Ledford, “Women are really great negotiators, it’s just that when it comes to applying it to yourself, you might hold back because nice girls are socialized to not advocate on their own behalf.” That is where Speak Up! comes in. The activities that the girls participate in allow the girls to practice using the skills that they learn by applying them to difficulties that they might run into in their everyday lives or later in the future.

Speak Up! is a Pay What You Can event, in order to give all girls from different communities and backgrounds the opportunity to attend this program without worrying about the cost, explains Ledford. At every event PROGRESS raises enough money to cover the cost of the event as well as support their future projects, from the donations of the attendees and their families along with funding help from big companies.

This will be the first time that Duquesne University will be hosting this event. Around 100 girls are expected to attend this workshop on Saturday, April 1 from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. in Mellon Hall at Duquesne University.

For more information on this event, please contact:

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