**DOES VEX NEED MORE GIRLS?**

What does Stem mean exactly? According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it means the stalk of a plant. That’s not exactly what I mean. What I mean is STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. I don’t know about anyone else but before Vex, I had absolutely no idea what STEM meant. Now, I’ve been building, coding and engineering robots for about a year and I can honestly say that STEM has become an innate part of my life. However, as I’ve moved on with my Vex journey, I have realised one thing – girls aren’t generally involved in Vex. As I go to an all-girls school, it was a bit hard to realise this at first, but as I went to scrimmages, I saw the other teams. To tell you the truth, I was shocked. There were barely any girls. So, that made me want to investigate and find out a bit more. Does Vex need more girls?

The first thing that came to mind to successfully find out the answer to this question was ask all my peers this. What comes to mind when you think of girl-power? Now, when I think of girl-power, I think of the fact that no matter how much my team was pushed down because of other teams (that mainly had boys, I would like to say), they never gave up. In the face of adversity, my team of all-girls kept pushing and persevering. If we found a problem in our robot or in our code, we didn’t sit there and cry, we just came together, brainstormed and thought of a solution. To me, that is truly the definition of girl-power – especially the use of it in Vex. So, when I asked my peers (that didn’t do Vex) what they thought of when it comes to girl-power, they said things like ‘Standing up for our rights,’ or they made puns (“Judy Hopps in Zootopia, lol). While these are all mostly admirable, that’s not the thing that surprised me the most. When I asked them about using girl-power in things like science or Vex, they just asked me, “What’s Vex?” If that’s not an indicator, that Vex needs more girls, than I don’t know what is.

Personally, the use of girl-power has helped our team immensely in making sure we have a diverse and inclusive environment. Before Vex, we were “acquaintances,” but now, we’ve become really good friends. Vex introduced us to a place where we could be ourselves, include everyone and still do something challenging yet fun. Because our team is so diverse, we all had talents and weaknesses which we used to help build each other up. Through trial and error (and many failed robots \*sigh\*), we all learnt what we’re best at and what we need to improve in. Ava, Sienna and Juliene are great at building robots; while Kerryn, Giselle and I code the robots to do many different actions.

Without the inclusivity and diversity of the Vex environment, we would’ve never found out these things or become as good of friends. However, this is only just the beginning. After investigating and seeing what my team has to offer, I can – without a doubt – say that Vex does need more girls. I also know that my team is willing to take the initiative to show the positive impact girls brings to Vex. If someone ever asked me, who was your STEM role model? Who inspired you in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics? I would answer them simply and say any girl out there who is willing to try because guess what? According to my dictionary, STEM means to try.