

My Team is my Family



(Teams 5735Y, 5735K, and 5735B. All three teams qualified for State at the same Tournament.)

Girl Powered is an initiative that gives girls additional tools and support to encourage them to participate in STEM fields. Girl Powered is something that I avidly support and have directly benefitted from. When I hear the phrase, Girl Powered, I think of all of the hardships that many girls and female minorities face in the world today. Women are constantly told that they cannot do things as well as men, get paid less than men, or and are often are objectified when they are put in a position of authority. I understand this because I've had to fight for my own right to be a person of authority on teams that I have been a part of. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to become successful regardless of race, gender, or social status.

My name is Kaitlyn Oliver and my introduction to the STEM field was a rough one. When I decided to join Robotics, I had little to no prior knowledge in anything STEM related, let alone VEX. My interest in robotics first sparked during a school Career Fair, where I stopped to talk to a few members of the robotics team. They were driving around a few of their more simple robots

and invited me to come meet their coach after school. I agreed and a few days later, I managed to stay after school to talk to the coach. Little did I know, this coach and many of the people in that classroom, would change my life for the greater. For the first few days, I roamed around and helped many of the teams. I was trying to find out what I would like to do and where I would fit in the most. Still unsure of what I wanted to do, I decided to settle down on a team that could teach me what I needed to know, while also being very kind and supportive: team 5735B. There was one catch- it was an all boys' team. I had no problem with this, in fact, I often consider myself to work better with male peers than female peers. That year, I had the ability to attend both the State Competition and VEX Worlds. It's hard to believe how much I've grown since Starstruck last year.

This year I adopted a new team letter, 5735Y. Team 5735Y is composed of eight very individual and unique high schoolers. Each member of the team has their own interests and their own preferences, yet we still come together as family. Our team can be said to resemble a tightly woven net. We are entirely supportive of each other and we always have each other's backs. Even outside of Robotics, we tend to stick together. Each of our members provides something that the others lack. While some of our members are more mature and serious, other members are more silly. This creates an atmosphere that is playful, but also tightly reigned in. Together, our team creates something that we are all very proud of.

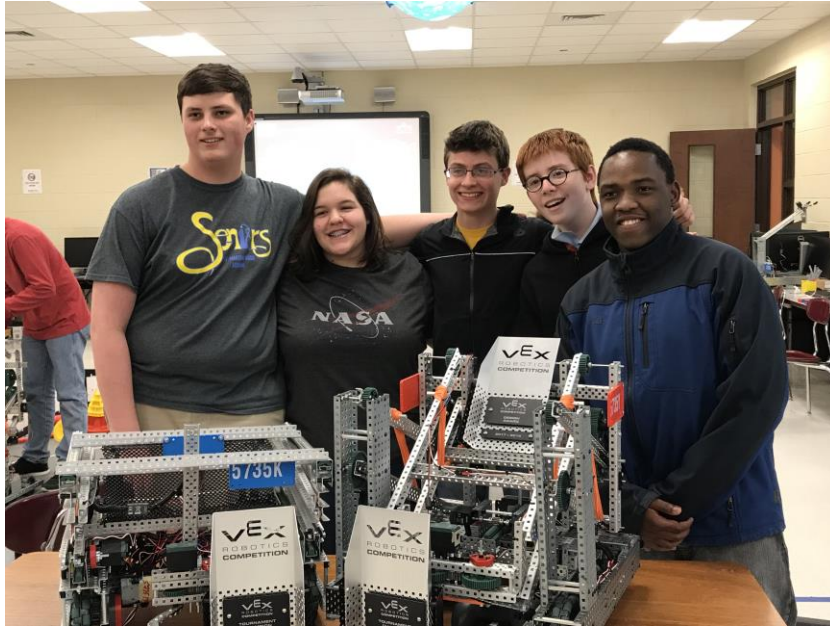
Even though our members are divided by sex, age, and race, we do not allow these factors to come between something that we all love, robotics. Although there are other minorities on the team, I am the only female minority. It has been a phenomenal experience being the only girl member on my team, as it has pushed me to work harder and smarter to prove that I am just as capable as any male.

Girl Powered is something that is very influential to me. It has inspired me to not be afraid of taking leadership and to express my thoughts and opinions. With this being my last year of high school robotics, Girl Powered is what inspired me to step up and take a Team Captain position. At the beginning of this year in my position of Team Captain was questioned and challenged. My authority could have been challenged because I was not the member with the most experience, or it could have been challenged because I was a female. Over time, my team has come to realize the benefits of having a female on their team. What use to be an unorganized and chaotic team, developed into a stronger and more organized team. What use to be a team that was constantly off-task, developed into a group of students that work the hardest. Once my team understood that I was not someone below their intelligence or skill level, we quickly became close. Things like building or discussing future goals became a task that was much easier to complete.

The team has grown significantly since the beginning of the year, not only physically, but mentally. I have been able to watch the boys on my team rethink and reprocess situations that they previously thought there was only one answer to. I have seen us accept anyone who walks through the Engineering doors with open arms. We never turn down anyone, regardless of how little they say they can provide for our team. You never know someone that you underestimated could do something dramatic to change the world. Through this school year, my team and I have reached a lot of firsts. We've had our first team interview, and our first team match. We even placed tournament champions together. My team is my family and I don't know what I would do without them.

Girl Powered is so important to me because it has changed how I see my life. I no longer hold my thoughts and ideas back, but I embrace them. I've come to understand that I am just as

important as any person that tries to hinder my success. This is why I encourage everyone, regardless of handicap, to follow their dreams.



(Tournament Champions. In Order: Kyle Creel from 5735K, Kaitlyn Oliver, Scott Beebe, John Haley, and Courtney Mamboweninga from 5735Y)