Our Girl Powered Story

About Us

Harper Malesardi

I am a junior at the Potomac School. Outside of robotics I love to rock climb and sail. I also play on my school's volleyball team in the fall. At school my favorite classes are physics and math. In the future I want to study engineering in college.

Zoe Dubelier

Outside of robotics I participate in many activities from hiking to history. I enjoy spending my free time exploring the outdoors and documenting my journeys through photography. In addition, I love school and studying history and I plan to become a history teacher in the future.

FLL

I started robotics in 5th grade after I realized that I could take my love for legos to a new level. I was on an all girls team in 5th grade where I learned the basics of robotics. In 6th grade I was on a co-ed team called the GoBots where we qualified for FLL States!

I first started robotics in sixth grade after my sister's good experiences in robotics pushed her to encourage me to join. The program at our school divided us by gender and encouraged us to grow our confidence on an all girls team. After spending that year learning the basics of the engineering process I was ready to face the challenges of a co-ed team.

VEX IQ

After being on both an all girls team and a co-ed team, I decided that an all girls team would give me a chance to shine. I was on the same 3-member team in 7th and 8th grade called the Gear Gals. As a team we knew we had to work extra hard to be seen as equal in comparison to the mostly male teams but we were able to qualify for states both years and moved on to motivate other rising 7th and 8th grade girls to join robotics after learning that there would only be one girl on the team once we moved to Vex. Now the Gear Gals name has spanned 4 different groups of girls teams at our school and continue to encourage other girls to do robotics.

For the next two years I participated in a co-ed team that competed in VEX IQ. During these two years I learned how to work with teammates in a more competitive environment. At the end of eighth grade the other girl on my team decided to quit robotics leaving me on an all boys team. The rule during that time was that high school teams had to be single gender. My desire to continue my participation in robotics pushed me to fight to change that rule, enabling me to join an all boys team my freshman year and giving girls at my high school the chance to do robotics even if there were not other girls in the program.

Starstruck

Going into freshman year, our teams were assigned based on who we were with in 8th grade so I was put on an all girls team. Despite struggles early in the season, we remained determined to show the male dominated field of robotics that we were just as capable as the boys. At the state championship, we placed 2nd in qualifications and qualified for the US Open championship. Despite our success, I knew it was time for another change after 9th grade, I wanted to be on a co-ed team again where I believed my experiences on an all girls team would positively help the team.

I started my high school robotics career on an all boys team. My sophomore year I joined a team of five boys to compete in Starstruck. Over the course of that year I learned about how to deal with conflicting egos and large personalities that caused tension on my team. I took the time to listen to every perspective and served as a mediator between the differing perspectives. The skills I learned to help me solve issues on my team have overlapped into my school and outdoor life and have been incredibly useful in participating on any team.

In the Zone

The next year not only was I on a co-ed team but I was also the only girl on my team. In the beginning I struggled to get my voice heard but I remained persistent and with the encouragement of our female coach, Mrs. Jarratt, I showed the that I was an asset to the team. Our team eventually found a balance of roles and we worked well together throughout the season to qualify for the World championship. Being the only girl on a team was obviously a big change from an all girls team but it taught me how to battle boy's views about girls and made me a stronger member of the team.

The next year my team became part of a program that mentors younger students and helps them transition into VEX robotics. Our two new members again put me on an all boys team, but with a new element of challenge. Not only did I have to continue to mediate conflicts and learn how to interact with different personality traits, I now learned about how boys view age superiority. Throughout the year I experienced ups and downs on my team that taught me stick to my own values even when there is pressure to just go with the flow.

Turning Point

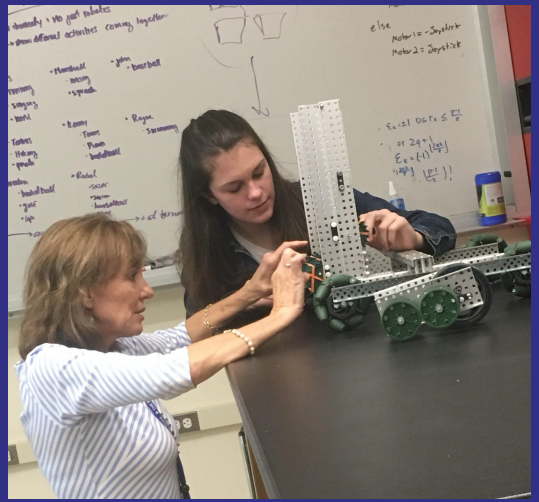
This year another girl has joined my team. She was previously on an all girls team and has similar experiences to me. I believe that being on the team with all guys last year helped shape their views of girls in robotics and has made the addition of another girl easier. Even though I feel like I have made an impact on my team, I know there is still a long way to go in order to feel comfortable and confident at competitions but I know that I have started to make an impact.

This year I had the opportunity to participate in the mentor program again, but this year with a 9th grade girl. I have had so much fun teaching her the many skills that I have learned over the years. I still deal with the same struggle with personalities and egos, but the helpful skills I learned in robotics will definitely help me in the rest of my life.

What We've Learned (We reached a turning point)

Our common experiences during In the Zone left us looking for a familiar face when troubles would arise. Even though we had known each other through school for many years, ITZ was when we became friends and realized that we needed to stick together. Robotics has taught us so much about male perceptions of girls in STEM and we have had the opportunity to see how much has changed in the world relating to women in STEM fields. We have learned that small steps make a big impact and while putting yourself out there in an unfamiliar situation may be uncomfortable, it is important to stand up for what you believe in to inspire others behind you.

Our Mentor - Mary Jarratt



Potomac School robotics has 5 coaches, 4 of which are men. Mrs. Jarratt has been a coach and an inspiration to us and other girls since we were in FLL. She encourages us to use our experiences to help engage other girls in STEM fields. She has always played an important role in making sure we felt comfortable and represented on our teams and is the reason we have stuck with robotics since 5th and 6th grades. She uses her experiences working in STEM fields prior to becoming a teacher and a robotics coach at our school. She has initiated many programs in and out of our school relating to getting girls involved in STEM such as Girls in Technology, and hosting a Girl Powered booth at our school's annual fall fair. She is and always will be a great inspiration to us, our teams, and many other girls.

"Here's to strong women. May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them."


THE END

Thank you to everyone who has helped us along the way!

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