

Growing Girls Who Code

From VOA Learning English, this is the Technology Report in Special English.

American colleges and universities awarded about one million seven hundred thousand bachelor's degrees in the school year ending in twenty ten. Fifty-seven percent of the recipients were female. Yet only eighteen percent of the women earned degrees in computer and information sciences.

Reshma Saujani would like to change that. She launched an organization called "Girls Who Code" in two thousand eleven. Her goal is to get more girls interested in science and technology.

"It's predicted that we'll have about one point four million jobs that are open in the next twenty years in the science and technology related fields. But, only twenty-nine percent of Americans today have the skills to actually fill those jobs. And many of those Americans are men. And less than twenty percent of women are actually going into the technology and science related professions. And so we have an enormous gap."

And she says the underrepresentation of women in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, also known as STEM, is caused by a bigger societal issue.

"Girls and boys perform about the same in math and science. So there's not an aptitude issue."

Reshma Saujani says we live in a society that sends messages that girls should avoid these fields of study.

"I can still go to Forever 21 and buy a t-shirt that says 'allergic to algebra.' We still have that Barbie that would say that she hated math. And we still have this kind of cultural stereotype that a computer scientist or a programmer is kind of like a dorky, young white guy."

"Girls Who Code" has partnered with educators, engineers and business people. Twenty girls took part in the group's first eight-week program last summer in New York City. They learned how to build websites and mobile apps, and create business plans.

“We took girls on field trips to the NYPD, to Facebook, to Twitter. And we showed them how technology is a part of every, every industry. Whether it’s fashion, whether it’s medicine. And that you can really use technology to really change the world.”

Ms. Saujani says companies have been very supportive of the group.

“The private sector really understands that they have an enormous pipeline problem. We have a huge shortage of engineers. And they invest in “Girls Who Code” to really grow that pipeline.”

Google was the first business to invest in the group. Reshma Saujani says if not for Google, “Girls Who Code” would not exist. Twitter, General Electric, eBay and others have also provided support.

Ms. Saujani says the program has been extremely successful. She says all the girls who took part in its first group plan to continue their STEM training. And, she says, “Girls Who Code” hopes to train many more.

“If our goal at “Girls Who Code” is to really close the STEM gap, we realize that we have to teach two million girls how to code in the next twenty years.”