

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/resilience-is-everything>

Julayne Virgil, CEO of Girls Inc. of Alameda County, discusses the importance of providing girls with the confidence and support to question and overcome negative gender stereotypes. She shares the story of a young girl in the program who pursued an interest in math, despite discouragement from her teacher, and then went on to excel in computer science in high school.



## Transcript

- When you come into this classroom, we don't ask whether you're male, female.. We don't ask that question.. You just, you come into the classroom, you sit, and you learn, but there's a premise in terms of how society interacts with each of us and the messages that we're told.. If you're told, you can't do that because you're a girl.. You can't do that because you're a boy.. You're actually not gonna be good at that because you're a boy.. You're not gonna be good at that because you're a girl.. Research shows that there are lots of these messages that girls are receiving every single day about what they should do, what they shouldn't do, what they can do, what they can't do.. Let me tell you the way that shows up.. We looked at a young girl named Donna and Donna showed up to one of our programs..

We were doing some math and we make it fun, hands-on, interactive environment.. Donna says, oh, you know, oh, I thought we all hate math.. Everybody hates math, right? We're supposed to hate math.. Everybody hates math.. We went, we said, no, we don't hate math and she goes, oh.. Oh, okay.. This is new to her.. This is not something that she'd heard before.. As Donna said, okay, I don't hate math.. Maybe I should look into whether I actually enjoy it and she found out that not only did she enjoy math, she was actually good at it..

You think about how that shifts your mind frame from being the, oh, everybody's supposed to hate math because that's what we do to, hmm, I'm actually good at math.. She actually had the space to find what she might be good at.. She started taking more math and she started exploring and then looking at what courses were available at her school.. Then, math led her to science.. Then, she gets this interest in science and she signs up for Computer Science AP which was offered at her high school.. Powerful, we're in the Bay area, Silicon Valley, she signs up for Computer Science AP.. Would you like to guess what her teacher told her? Teacher said, you know, you're one of a few juniors in this class, mostly seniors, and you're one of two girls signed up for the class.. I don't think you're going to be comfortable in this class.. You should probably drop it.. Right, wow..

So, this is what she heard.. What year is it? 2018, so this was two years ago, 2016.. We're in the middle of a, really, technology revolution where we need more people who understand computer science.. There's so much that's happening.. There's so much innovation and when you have a young girl who says, I'm interested in computer science.. I wanna sign up for this Computer Science AP class, she is being told don't.. You're probably not going to like it.. The good thing is that Donna had been very involved with Girls Inc., so she reached into her inner core and said, I know I'm gonna face some barriers and this is one of them.. She looked her teacher in the eye and she said, "Thank you very much for your opinion.. "I'll see you tomorrow in class." She went to class the next day and the next and the next..

Into it a couple of weeks and turns out Donna is one of the students that other students are coming to for help.. Who knew? (giggling) She's actually really good.. At the end of the semester, or actually this would probably be the end of the year, when they take the Computer Science AP course, there's only a few students who pass and guess who one of them is, Donna.. You think about what transpired there.. There was a gate, there was a barrier, and if Donna didn't have the confidence, if she didn't have the support, if she didn't think it was possible that she could do this, that could've been a gate for her that was closed.. Now, we have the opportunity to think about what can Donna do with this interest in computer science? The world is her oyster, right? There's so many, there's so much opportunity.. There's so many places she can go.. We have to really think about how do we make sure we stop the limiting barriers that are happening? They're happening in a

number of different factors...