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## Connecting school-age girls with area professionals

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Strong Women Strong Girls Executive Director [Jocelyn Horner](#) was sitting at a coffee table with a SWSG volunteer talking about what opportunities the organization was not taking advantage of when the two were inspired by the volunteer's past experience in an artist residency.

The organization's traditional model allows professional women to mentor college age women and college age women to mentor elementary school girls, but Horner said she saw a way to grow that intergenerational female mentorship network by providing opportunities for professional women to interact directly with elementary school girls.

Using the format of a professional residency, SWSG launched the Role Models in Residence program. SWSG ran a pilot of the program during the 2018-2019 school year, and officially launched it this school year.

The program connects professional women in STEM careers with elementary school girls. During the pilot, the professional women conducted a few site lessons with the girls and concluded with field trips to the company or work sites.

While school curriculum may already include opportunities for young girls to learn about famous women, such as [Michelle Obama](#) or [Serena Williams](#), Role Models in Residence aims to help girls learn from the professional women who live in their community.

"Having real women that they can see, and women who are outside of their family, who they see are successful and engaging with them ... it makes the girls feel like they can do it themselves," said [Rachel Vinciguerra](#), monitoring, evaluation and learning coordinator at SWSG.

Vinciguerra said the program focuses on STEM skills and careers in an effort to close the gender gap in the science and tech careers that are predicted to continue rapidly growing in Pittsburgh.

"When we measured how girls felt about their own skills in STEM fields, having a sense that there were women in STEM that look like them and that anyone can be good at STEM increased their perceptions of all these things. They felt more confident," Vinciguerra said.

SWSG is running the Role Models in Residence program at four school sites in fall 2019 — [Manchester Youth Development Center](#), [ASTEP](#) (a program offered to students in the Hill District), [ACH Clear Pathways](#) and [Colfax Elementary](#). After some modifications to the field trip portion of the programming, SWSG decided the professional role models will participate in a college campus field trip in partnership with college-age women mentors.

Professional role models confirmed for the fall 2019 semester include [Nicole Bruno](#), junior account executive, [A to Z Communications](#); [Summer Burke](#), human resource specialist, [YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh](#); [Meghann Kinkley](#), water resources engineer, [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#); [Emily Connor](#), technical rotational development director, [Covestro LLC](#); [Michelle Montgomery](#), senior R&D specialist, [Covestro](#); and [Cheyenne Shankle](#), commercial rotational development director, [Covestro](#).

Kinkley became one of the first Role Models in Residence during the pilot programming last school year, and she continued participating in the official launch this fall. Her work revolves around managing the water in rivers and watersheds. Water



STRONG WOMEN STRONG GIRLS

Left, [Cheyenne Shankle](#), commercial rotational development director at [Covestro](#), visited [Pittsburgh Whittier Elementary](#) as a Role Model in Residence, sharing the story of her career in STEM with girls and making slime.

cycle lessons for the girls included an interactive game where the girls collaboratively operated an imaginary dam and managed the needs of the downstream community dependent on rainfall.

"It was really cute to see the girls go through the exercise once and sometimes they ran into trouble, and then to do it again and really pick up on the concepts," Kinkley said.

Bruno was introduced to Strong Women Strong Girls during her freshman year at Duquesne University in 2013, and she has been involved ever since. When she heard about Role Models in Residence, she knew she wanted to be a part of it.

"I wanted to give back the way my mentors when I was a teenager gave back to me and really helped me to grow and thrive," Bruno said. "If only I had their mentorship when I was younger, things would have been a little easier for me in my teenage years. I wanted to be that force and give that to someone else."

Orientation for participating Role Models in Residence for the spring 2020 semester will be on October 30.

Horner said as the program grows, she hopes to increase diversity in both the types of careers being displayed through the program and in the age, stage in career, race and ethnicity and hometowns of the women as well.

"For us it is about sowing those seeds early and helping girls connect the dots between a big dream they have and the steps to get there so it seems real to them," Horner said.

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