



BY AMY KORPI

# Harnessing Girl Power

Can you imagine what would happen if girls took all the energy they spend worrying about their image and put it into painting, writing, theorizing, science, or sports?”

This question, posed by Joan Jacobs Brumberg, researcher, writer, and Cornell University professor emeritus, echoed in my mind as I learned more about This Is ME, a Chicago nonprofit that provides enriching and esteem-building opportunities to girls ages 9–15. A volunteer coalition of concerned women, This Is ME offers a respite from pressures like measuring self-worth based on superficial standards.

According to its volunteer resource development coordinator, Jennifer Casey, This Is ME began when Heather Sattler, founder and executive director, was motivated by research showing that girls tend to experience a drop in feelings of self-worth during these formative years—and more so relative to boys. She was also moved by findings that girls are more likely to thrive if provided a safe place to be with their peers, discover their talents and interests, and share their struggles and triumphs under the guidance of concerned women.

Five years ago, Casey was drawn to This Is ME for these reasons and more. Seeking greater involvement in a nonprofit organization, the mother, stepmother, and aunt to girls met with Sattler. “It was a perfect fit,” Casey recalls. “Like many women, I remember my pre- and early teen years as an in-between time in life. You’re not a child anymore, but you’re not an adult, either, of course. It’s kind of a meandering time.”

This Is ME’s current offerings include two after-school programs, a monthly program at a library (which Casey ran for three years), and a six-week workshop each spring and fall. Recent workshops have featured an “exploration” theme surrounding careers, music, and culture. “The cultural program was especially interesting, with women from different ethnic backgrounds sharing their customs, foods, languages, and more,” Casey says. “It was a great way to expand our participants’ worlds and introduce them to some fascinating women.”

In addition, This Is ME offers a Homework Heroes program in partnership with the Junior League of Chicago. Under the guidance of female volunteers, girls meet weekly during the school year to do their homework and learn other life skills lessons in a motivating and supportive environment.

“Our overarching goal—which ties together all of our programming initiatives—is that girls will learn about themselves, grow in confidence, express themselves more clearly, increase their decision-making abilities, and take on more leadership roles as a result of their participation,” Casey says. “Largely volunteer-run, This Is ME has served more than 660 girls since its inception. I am proud and amazed that we are celebrating 10 years of helping Chicago girls thrive.”

*Amy Korpi is managing editor of Creative Living. “Good Works” highlights the philanthropic and volunteer activities of Northwestern Mutual clients like Jennifer Casey, whose Financial Representative is Jeff Sons of Schaumburg, Illinois. To suggest a nonprofit for this column, contact the editor at [coneillgrace@tmgcustommedia.com](mailto:coneillgrace@tmgcustommedia.com). Please note this column features Northwestern Mutual clients only.*

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