

NORTH STAR CLUB

Generating Excitement Among Middle School Girls

Discussions about fitness plans and healthy foods. Kick-boxing demonstrations. Horseback riding adventures. Community service at the Humane Society and Anna Marie's Shelter. Reading books.

These are just a few of the activities that the North Star Club at Sartell Middle School has been involved with or has planned for this school year. The North Star Club, which is designed to build self-esteem of seventh and eighth grade girls, received \$2,000 last spring from the Central Minnesota Community Foundation Women's Fund to help defray the costs of these activities, speakers, transportation, purchasing supplies and staff time.

The North Star Club idea came from a master's program project Sartell Middle School teacher Jennifer Richason was working on. She conducted a written survey about four years ago that, in general, demonstrated sixth grade girls had a high level of happiness and confidence but by eighth grade there was a dip in overall self-esteem.

As she read the book *Reviving Ophelia*, Richason was struck by the metaphor of comparing young girls to boats in a stormy sea - they could turn to the shore (their parents) or to the other boats (their friends) for support. But if they looked to the North Star for guidance, they would be able to find their true selves and navigate their way to becoming confident women.

Using this metaphor, the North Star Club was born. Seventh and eighth grade girls began meeting twice a month last January. All seventh and eighth grade girls are encouraged to attend and six female staff members - four teachers, the band director and the guidance counselor - help guide the group's meetings and activities.

On average, 40-45 students attend the meetings. The first meeting is held early in the month for 30 minutes over lunch and the students decide what their monthly theme will be. In October, it was "Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies."

The lunch discussion revolved

around food choices, exercise and the images that are portrayed in the media. The second meeting was a trip to Gold's Gym for a kick-boxing demonstration.

The girls also become active with a community organization. In November, they will be volunteering at Anna Marie's Shelter in St. Cloud. In January, there will be a book discussion.

"Our focus is to help these girls understand that they are strong and capable of being anything they want to be," Richason explained. "This program has been a series of nice teachable moments. We want to leave a legacy of strong young women who grasp and understand what it's like to be a woman today."

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Club leaders and founders Jennifer Richason (teacher) and Betty Arveson (guidance counselor) lead a discussion group of young women.

The St. Cloud Times/Style Magazine is a proud supporter of the Women's Fund and its mission.