

Girls Can Too looking for participants

The Girls Can Too (GCT) program will be operating again this year at Bolton Camp.

GCT offers young women the opportunity to volunteer for a week in July or August assisting with ecological restoration projects at the Camp. The program provides girls in Grades 7 to 12 with hands-on learning experiences in ecology and restoration. From creating habitat to restoring trails, female youth will participate in building projects that will provide them with a variety of hands-on skills, as well as improve the ecosystems in the Caledon community that are vital to the health of the Great Lakes region. The program also includes mentorship and training opportunities with females from a variety of professions, and empowers young women to get involved and get outside.

High school students can earn up to 35 community service hours by participating in the program.

GCT was conceived by female students who worked and volunteered together at the Bolton camp site in 2014, and recognized the limited opportunities for young women to learn about the environmental and skilled trades in the Caledon community. Although they had volunteered for field labour restoration jobs, they noticed that a lot of their female peers had signed up for administrative type tasks. Once the work commenced on site, their female colleagues wanted to help rebuild the cabins and restore the landscape, yet thought they didn't have the necessary skills to contribute to those activities. As a result, they began to informally show their female peers how to use a hammer or sand cabins, and realized that with the proper instruction and encouragement, they gained the confidence to tackle these labour-oriented tasks.

The students worked in partnership with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to launch the GCT program at Bolton Camp in 2015. Since then, they have engaged 45 high school students.

Through surveys and interviews with program participants, partners and the community, organizers have identified a need to make this program available to younger students. As a result, they are expanding the program for this summer to include an additional two weeks focused on providing females aged 11 to 13 with the opportunity to participate.

Projects planned for this year include restoring woodland and riparian habitat through planting; restoring parts of a trail; building a pollinator garden; repurposing ash trees affected by the emerald ash borer; building and installing habitat structures for bees, birds and bats; refurbishing furniture for trail seating; installing a rain barrel; surveying bee species and other wildlife; and monitoring and removing invasive plant species.

For more information on the program, go to trca.ca/girlscanto