

FEATURE

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY
STEPHANIE PORTER/THE EXPRESS

Team Techsplorer

Girls get experience in Marine Safety and come out saying 'we can do anything!'

Krista Parsons was the first woman ever hired as an instructor at the Offshore Safety and Survival Centre in Foxtrap.

Of the 40 trainers working there now, she's still the only female.

"It's kind of strange, isn't it, considering it's 2002?" she says.

As a former coast guard employee, Parsons is used to working in a field usually occupied by men.

"Initially, the guys are like, 'What's up with this?' But once they see your ability...I'm sure we'll see more females in the future".

But Parsons has something to say to young women. Last Thursday, she spent a day with six of them.

The Grade Eight students at St. John Bosco School, are participants in the first St. John's-based Techsploration program.

The five-month long initiative pairs junior high school girls with female professionals in trades and technology.

The goal is to expose them to a new career option — and the realities and importance of working life.

Students from eight schools in the region are involved, linked with eight different role models.

Parsons began the day with a talk to participants about her job, and about believing they can do anything they want.

In the afternoon, Parsons led them through fire and water exercises.

As the day wore on, the girls became more animated, bubbling over with comments, queries and enthusiasm.

At least two girls declared they'd love to take more firefighter training.

At the end, they were unanimous. The visit to the OSSC was "better than school." Parsons was a "cool woman." And all believed women can choose any career.

"I learned that I can do whatever I want to do," said Lois Bragg.

When asked why there aren't more women firefighters, she added, "maybe they're afraid."

"Women think they can't do it," chimed in Samantha Hennessey. "But women can do anything that men can do."

Do they think the working world will change to reflect that?

"Yeah, it should. If it doesn't," says Amanda Oakley, "I'll complain."



Clockwise from top: Samantha Hennessey, Monica Norman and Amanda Oakley laugh as they suit up in firefighter gear; role model Krista Parsons stands by while Norman puts out a fire; Samantha Fowler and Dana Hennessey, ready for the blaze; inside the OSSC, Samantha Hennessey gets a quick lesson on climbing into a life raft; participants get ready for their first fire extinguishing exercise.