

Girls Forming Bonds to Beat Life's Hard Knocks

Sutherland Shire Leader April 2004

By Kathryn Barton

The past does not equal the future.

That is the motto of a new mentoring program to raise the self esteem of young girls who have suffered a few of life's hard knocks.

The SISTER2sister project is a five day school holiday program to help girls make choices to lead them down a more positive path in life.

Catherine Riddle, 15, of Woollooware lives with her father and older brother.

She wants to be a journalist.

Meantime, she's looking to make friends with girls her age in similar circumstances.

She was thrilled to be nominated by a teacher at Port Hacking High School. "I'm just so pleased she noticed me," Catherine said.

"She gave me all the details and I felt so special. I knew it would be lots and lots of fun."

Her mother died when she was three years old, so she had to struggle to find a female role model, had low self esteem and was very shy.

Jessica Brown of Life Changing Experiences Foundation said schoolgirls who need guidance to help them maximize their potential can gain much from the program.

The foundation, a not-for profit organization that raised money for underprivileged or disadvantaged teenage girls, received nominations from schools and other interested parties.

Ms Brown said the course gives girls high-profile role models who've "overcome obstacles to get on with their lives."

“Each girl is assigned a ‘sister’ at the program and that sister will be theirs for a year as someone to give them guidance and support,” she said, adding that more big sisters were needed to balance the many girls on her books, including about 10 from St George and Sutherland Shire.

Ideally mentors are aged between 20 to 40 as the age group proved to be a “good bond.”

Catherine’s mentor, Jenny Knox, 23, of Blakehurst said she had already bonded with her charge and hoped to make a good impact on her.

“We’ve been chatting quite a lot on the phone and we’re going out shopping and doing girl stuff,” she said, adding that she, too, was learning from the program.

Ms Brown said next year girls attend a course to assess improvements and successes.

“The course provides a safe, relaxing and fun environment that provides strong support and makes participants feel special,” she said.

Also on the agenda are self esteem, body issues, overcoming obstacles, money management, career advice, etiquette, grooming and deportment, exercise and fitness, resume writing, interview skills and a bridge climbing experience.

For web site and details, call 1300 553 629