



**Strong, Smart and Bold**

Last month **Girls Inc. of Holyoke** partnered with the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, to host an **Entrepreneur Workshop** for **Eureka!** girls. The Institute's faculty was **Kassandra Castillo**, a 27-year-old successful entrepreneur from Vieques, Puerto Rico who lives in New York City.

At age 10 Kassandra wanted to travel with others to the mainland to take a stand for her tiny island. However, since her family came from very meager means, she had to find a way to raise money. Kassandra learned to make personalized buttons and sell them for just \$1. From this childhood experience Kassandra developed a life-long skill of being financially creative so she could realize her dreams. As a teenager, Kassandra became a top model so she could fund her college education.

During the Entrepreneur Workshop Kassandra showed the girls to make the very same buttons! She also used the Institute's educational tools, to invite young women to share their dreams for their life. **VIDEO**

"Our Girls Inc. Eureka scholars were very inspired by Kassandra Castillo's story," said Girls Inc. Executive Director **Suzanne Parker**. Kassandra is a wonderful role model who showed the girls how she uses entrepreneurship skills to work towards her goals and dreams."

The Entrepreneur Workshop is part of the Institute's new chapter, Sustainable Holyoke Youth Leadership Initiative (SHYLI). This summer Holyoke youth leader **J'Anthony Smith** served as the first delegate to the Institute's Youth Leadership Summit. He then traveled to Boston to take a two-week BizCamp with NFTE (Network For Teaching Entrepreneurship). He was convinced that Holyoke youth would blossom if they explored the world of entrepreneurship.

At the workshop J'Anthony welcomed Kassandra to Holyoke and shared his vision for SHYLI. In October, Holyoke High School students went on their first college field trip to University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. It was a life-changing experience, to imagine themselves pursuing higher education to pursue their dreams. J'Anthony is now a financial student at Holyoke Community College's Gateway Program. He wrote this essay:

*These Girls Inc. young women have big dreams: to be a nurse, a midwife, a forensic scientist or even a doctor. They have the passion, the energy, and the ambition that's needed for Holyoke to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*Kassandra, a successful-independent-entrepreneur, looked like and related to the girls. She made a big difference in these girls' lives. Her story was authentic, relevant, and inspirational. She turned on the entrepreneur mindset of these young women. So now they can be Strong, Smart, and Bold - and inspired to be young entrepreneurs.*

*Like many students they'll work hard to finish high school, then they'll face years of higher education that will put their dreams to the test, then may come grad school or medical school. The journey from the first day of college to our last costs thousands of dollars. Money that most of us just don't have. While there are many ways to pay for this debt: scholarships, grants, etc., many costs aren't covered by financial aid. There is a huge financial gap between who starts and who finishes.*

*The young women of our community aren't making it because their needs are being met. We need to find a way to meet these needs. This is where we, as a community, need to come in and invest in the futures of our young women. As community leaders we have resources that could be invested in them, especially intellectual resources. This is what's needed for our Holyoke community, for our companies, and for our country. The Institute's programs help catalyze the intellectual resources that can build into financial resources.*

*With this knowledge and tools learned at the Entrepreneur Workshop, these young women can find ways to financially contribute to realizing their dream of a college education. They can also contribute to their community, their organization, and their future.*

*This, as leaders, is what we need to invest in. Training the young leaders of today to be intellectual, financial, and political geniuses is what would help them - and us - out in the long run. Getting on the level of our youth, meeting with them face to face, and being a ray of hope that could provide guidance is what's truly needed to build our communities into a place that everyone would want to live in. This needs to become a movement from both the private and public sector. A movement to ensure a successful future for every single young leader that resides in Holyoke and our communities.*

"It was very touching to hear **Kassandra's** story and witness the youngsters' passion and commitment to their community," said **Teresita Castaño**. "I am impressed with the Institute's vision, spotting young ones with leadership potential, and hearts, and creating an opportunity to support their vision. It was also delightful to see longstanding organizations in our area, like 'Girls Inc.', working hand to hand with you."

#### **For more information**

**Girls Inc. of Holyoke:** inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold by providing them the opportunity to develop and achieve their full potential. We provide girls ages 5-18 with engaging and educational youth development programs that are cutting edge, research driven and designed to meet the specific needs of girls. Girls are at the center of everything we do; our priority is listening to girls, responding to their needs and providing them with the opportunity to make positive change in both their community and in their own lives. **Eureka!** is **Girls Inc.'s** hallmark 5-year Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education program for teen girls in partnership with the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Massachusetts. Ten Eureka scholars attended the entrepreneurship workshop offered by the Stone Soup Leadership Institute. [www.girlsincholyoke.org](http://www.girlsincholyoke.org)

**Sustainable Holyoke Youth Leadership Initiative** is a year-round program to educate and empower youth through innovative training workshops: college field trips, mentor/career development, entrepreneurship, coding, and youth leadership. This program was envisioned by Holyoke youth delegates at the Institute's 12<sup>th</sup> Leadership Summit on Martha's Vineyard. They worked with the Institute's faculty and emerging leaders from Vieques, Puerto Rico. By building on the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative ([www.vyli.com](http://www.vyli.com)) they aspire to envision a better life for young people in their community. [www.shyli.co](http://www.shyli.co)

**The Stone Soup Leadership Institute** is a 501c3 non-profit organization founded in 1997 on the island of Martha's Vineyard. Its mission is to provide educational tools, technical assistance and leadership training to develop young people to become leaders of sustainable world. The Institute's newest program is the **Sustainable Holyoke Youth Leadership Initiative**. The Institute is honored to collaborate with the Holyoke community to support program in schools, college and organizations. [www.soup4worldinstitute.com](http://www.soup4worldinstitute.com)