

Believing in self an essential asset for both genders

Re Boys need attention too
Letter, Oct 17.

Thanks to David Hatton of Mississauga who raised an important point in response to the success and accolades around the esteem-building event for teenage girls, The Girl Event, which was launched in Mississauga on Oct 14 and is scheduled to cross the country in 2004. Hatton cautioned that boys need attention, too.

Inspired by the power of experiences, or events, to influence an audience and the notion that society could be different if people had a greater sense of self-worth, Sarah Varley and I formed The Esteem Dream Corp. in 2001. The Girl Event is the first product of The Esteem Dream Corp. and Sarah and I have always believed that our next mandate would be to create a similar event for boys.

While some would argue that girls need it more than boys and that they need it now more than ever, we maintain that believing in one's self is a great asset, regardless of gender or age. Indeed, there were a handful of grown men and women who were moved by the messages conveyed by the inspiring role models at The Girl Event.

The "organizers" of The Girl Event that you mention in your letter are just two entrepreneurs, Sarah and myself, who have made a significant financial investment in launching this initiative. Thanks to our partners, Procter & Gamble, YWCA Toronto, and Zellers, we were able to significantly offset the ticket price for the girls, but

there were no "public funds" directly allocated to this initiative.

However, if we are to proceed with future esteem-building events for girls and boys, we will need more partners who are committed to unleashing the potential of Canadian teens. Our vision is that a tri-sector cooperation between charities, government and corporations will work more effectively in addressing the issue of empowered young people. If any of the sectors were to continue going it alone. So, we certainly welcome those partnership opportunities.

The Esteem Dream Corp. started with girls because we had to start somewhere and we are two females. In our approach we separated the sexes because feedback from teachers and caregivers indicated that this would be the most effective way to reach teens. That said, the message of The Girl Event could have been delivered relatively unaltered to a theatre full of boys. No part of this experience was about girls in relation to boys, or to help them "feel every bit as equal" to their male counterparts. That is A given.

The Esteem Dream Corp. aims to inspire in all people, starting with girls, that you are in charge of creating a life you dream of, and that the keys to that life are embodied in the values of risk, respect, individuality, choice and responsibility.

Thanks again for the encouragement - we cannot wait to deliver the same message of empowerment to Canadian boys.

Jennifer Hilborn, Toronto