

# ISC Miami Hosts Women of Tomorrow

Story by PA3 Barry Jeffrey Bena, D7 Public Affairs

MIAMI -- “Crew man your gear, we’re taking on water!” Although trained for that moment, those words can be a Coast Guardsman’s worst fear if it were really happening. If on a ship or small boat, those words mean the ship may go under and it’s time to act fast. The crew grabs their necessary damage control gear and work together to stop the flow of water into the vessel.



Petty Officer James Chesteen, from Sector Miami shows the Women of Tomorrow group what tools might be found in a ship’s damage control kits. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Jennifer Johnson, D7 Public Affairs.

A group of 75 young girls recently got a chance to experience being aboard a sinking vessel, albeit under very controlled conditions. In fact, there was not actual sinking vessel, but it was about as close as those girls wanted to get. They were in a simulated boat compartment taking on water and it was just one of the interactive exhibits which took place at Coast Guard Integrated Support Command Miami for the Women of Tomorrow Jan. 12.

The WOT group inspires and empowers young women, who are at risk of not graduating high school, to excel and live up to their full potential through different programs. WOT was started in 1997 by Jennifer Valoppi, a television anchor, and Don Browne, Telemundo Network President. Currently in its ninth year, the program reaches out to more than 1,500 girls in the Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

“They need to realize that it’s important to graduate, no matter what the difficulties are,” said Lt. Cmdr. Stacey Mersel, the executive officer of the Coast Guard Cutter *Valiant*.

The 75 girls were welcomed onto Coast Guard Island by a group of Coast Guard women who were willing and eager to help these young girls any way they could. The girls were guided around the different units and divisions of ISC Miami to give them a taste of the different missions the Coast Guard performs.

“I mentor young women monthly, whenever I’m in port,” said Mersel. “I’m proud to partake in this great program.”

One stop on their tour was a visit to Coast Guard Station Miami Beach, Fla. There, they took part in a modified man-overboard drill. Each girl had a turn in tossing a life ring and rescue heaving line as far as they could as if a real victim needed it.

They were also given a tour of the station's 41-foot Utility Boat, 25-foot Response Boat-Small and 33-foot Special Purpose Craft.

They also had an opportunity to board and visit with crewmembers from the Cutter *Farallon*. There they learned a few things about the ships weapons and its capabilities.

Right in front of the *Farallon* was another stop on their tour: the simulated flooding compartment.



Janelle White, Alyson Calloway and Kiana Cole, all from Miami Senior High School, work together to quickly repair a simulated water leak. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Jennifer Johnson, D7 Public Affairs.

In groups of three to four, the ladies were all given a chance to test their damage-control skills. They were placed into an interactive water exhibit made to look like a compartment on a ship. They were given mallets and pieces of wood beforehand to stop the flow of water. The crew from the *Farallon* opened up the nozzles and let the water flow. Within seconds, water was rushing from the pipes and the girls fought valiantly using the tools given to stop, or at least slow, the flow of water.

After lunch they were given a chance to speak to Coast Guard women in a discussion panel about all facets of the service such as their careers, goals and life experiences. Panel members ranged from petty officers to commissioned officers in career fields like aviation and marine science.

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“I believe this opportunity gives us the ability to show these young ladies there are opportunities out there for everyone. These women can succeed, and I hope we have helped them see that,” said Petty Officer 3rd Class Maydolys Alvarez, a yeoman at ISC Miami and discussion panel member.

As the day came to a close, the girls were given various Coast Guard items, such as souvenir cups, pencils and notepads, to take home with them along with the thought of possibly joining the Coast Guard along with the memory of their experiences that day.

The Coast Guard is in its third year reaching out to girls who are at risk of not graduating high school, the WOT is in its ninth year. With the continued collaboration between the two organizations, the future can look bright for those 1,500 young girls who may have thought otherwise.

“Even if we reached one lady, that is great,” Mersel said.