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# Female offenders can learn coding

## ■ Group seeks to inspire girls on opportunities

**By Rachel McGrath**  
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Female offenders held at the Ventura County Juvenile Justice Facility are being encouraged to take an interest in computer science, thanks to a program by Carpinteria-based Girls Inc.

The nonprofit's mission is to inspire girls and provide them with educational opportunities and life skills.

As part of a focus on encouraging girls to become interested in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), Girls Inc. has held "coding parties" in support

of Google's Made With Code initiative.

The nonprofit hosted workshops at the Juvenile Justice Facility in El Rio as part of the outreach, and leaders in the organization said about two dozen teenage girls were able to participate.

"The program opened these girls' eyes to the relevance of coding in their everyday lives. It also showed them the potential for them to make a career in a field where females are grossly underrepresented," said Correctional Services Officer II Rylan Chieruzzi.

One young offender, who could not be named for legal reasons, said she found the coding workshop interesting and thought it focused on a skill she could learn that would provide a way to

make a lot of money.

The workshops included a brief overview of how coding touches every part of the world and the option of taking part in one of five projects, ranging from composing a soundtrack to building a 3-D avatar with personality.

Girls Inc. for 15 years has been providing gender-specific programming for the Ventura County Probation Agency. The organization offers services for both youths awaiting trial and those serving their sentences at the El Rio site.

The programs address STEM education, pregnancy and drug-abuse prevention, media literacy, economic literacy, adolescent health, violence prevention, self-esteem building, job skills and college-bound education.

"As parents, teachers

and role models, we all have a responsibility to help make coding relevant and exciting for girls, and to provide them with just as much encouragement as we do for boys," said Victoria Juarez, executive director of Girls Inc.

"Google's Made With Code initiative falls in line with our commitment at Girls Inc. to teaching girls that no matter what they want to do with their futures, STEM skills — including computer science — can help them get there."

Chieruzzi, a probation officer assigned to juvenile facilities, said Girls Inc. staff members work effectively with the young offenders.

"I get to see firsthand the great impact that they have on their lives and the confidence they foster," Chieruzzi said.

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