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Sister Code retreat for teens in Orinda

Submitted by Leslie Darwin O'Brien



Masked Sister Code participants at its September retreat. Photo provided

Songmaker Sessions and Beate Walden, internationally-renowned musician, photographer and empowerment coach led the young women through the five Sister Code principles: community building, the practice of courage, creativity, collaboration, and the power of confidence.

The morning began with a guided meditation, mindfulness, a question box which provoked deep and meaningful discussion around how COVID has changed our lives, social media, body image, friendship, and school, while considering the Sister Code (which the participants wrote): 'Speak your own truth. Be respectful. Create a space where we can talk that's full of care and kindness. Value the people in our lives and never take them for granted. Let go of the idea of perfection. Practice courage through 'doing it anyway'. No self-deprecating remarks. No put-downs. Only say sorry, when you are truly sorry, not as a filler word. We have each other's backs. Listen and ask.'

Surrounded by inspirational quotes which contained messages of openness, problem solving, inclusion, self awareness, and strength, the girls used photography and songwriting to examine their inner selves. Beate Walden guided them to see the light in each other and to use the camera as an instrument to appreciate each other. Courtney Fortune led a songwriting workshop and by the end of the day, the young women had collaborated on a song. Leslie Darwin O'Brien shared stories of deep revelation and powerful encounters.

One participant said, "We came here and did not know each other, and now I feel so close to everyone in this group. I have never experienced anything like this."

Sister Code is a project of Terry's Kids, a 501c3 that brings music education programs to underserved communities and makes the world better through music. Founder Terry Miller said, "With our current environment, teen mental health is an urgent issue, so Terry's Kids is proud to sponsor Sister Code. It is an honor to bring these three mentors to young people in Orinda. We look forward to nationwide Sister Code retreats, once the world opens up."

The founders look forward to sharing Sister Code with self-defining sisters of all ages. Women's conferences are in the works.

For more information, visit www.joinsistercode.org or www.tmkids.org.

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