

G DAY

Celebrating Girls As They Are

by Hilary Mandel

Madeleine Shaw is a social entrepreneur known for her long-standing commitment to gender equality and progressive business practices. She is the co-founder (with her long time business partner Suzanne Siemens) of Lunapads.com, a vertical, multiple award-winning web retailer of natural personal care products whose signature products are responsible for diverting over 2 million disposable feminine hygiene products from landfills every month.

Madeleine's latest creation is G Day, a community-based rite of passage event series welcoming 10-12 year old girls into adolescence. Since 2014, G Day has taken place in Vancouver, Toronto, and Victoria, with more cities to come. The third G Day Vancouver will take place on Friday, October 23 at Creekside Community Recreation Centre. Here, Madeleine explains how she came up with the idea and what the day looks like.

I decided to launch G Day because of my own experience as an adolescent. I was fascinated by the idea of becoming an adult woman and fantasized that when the big day came, there would be a celebration. The notion of transforming into an adult was special, even kind of magical. My fantasy didn't come true, and I was left with a deep sense of disappointment.

This notion came back to me in 2012, when I was asked to speak on the topic of Women Transforming Cities. I imagined a place where families could bring their daughters to celebrate them as they approached adolescence. While we still celebrate other major rites of passage (graduations, weddings, funerals, etc), we've largely lost the notion of honouring the transition between childhood and our earliest steps on the road to adulthood. I love the idea of gathering as families and communities to resurrect what has historically been a tradition in cultures worldwide. We want girls who attend to feel bonded through their shared life experience. After age 13, there is a very different self-perception around being a "teenager."

We welcome girls ages 10 to 12 and their 'Champions;' parents, aunts and uncles, godparents to start the day with intergenerational dialogue and setting intentions. The girls' programming includes interactive presentations around topics like self-esteem, adolescent girls in the developing world and leadership, as well as activities like dance, yoga and art. There are opportunities for the girls to get to know one another and address the group as a whole about what's happening for them.

G Day is a unique opportunity to bond with other girls and experience Sisterhood. These girls are starting to receive powerful media messages about social comparison and competition that can result in poor self-image as well as unhealthy relationships. The more the girls see what they have in common by celebrating this unique time in life together, the less likely they are to, say, bully or compare themselves to other girls. The girls will have the benefit of being exposed to a wide variety of role models, and will hear the personal stories of women who have made interesting career and lifestyle choices. G Day is also simply a lot of fun!

Visit www.gdayforgirls.com/vancouver.