

## #196 — Girls Who Code, with Chrissy Ziccarelli

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### SPEAKERS

Chrissy, Winston, Rena, Paul, Student, Transition

#### **Chrissy Ziccarelli 0:00**

It's not just important to educate women on how to code but you have to really change their perception so they feel like it's somewhere they belong. Back when computers were first introduced and you know the size of the room that I'm standing in, about 40% of engineers and computer scientists were women.

#### **Rena Clark 0:21**

The topic for today's podcast is Girls Who Code with Chrissy Ziccarelli. Unpacking Education is brought to you by avid.org. AVID believes in seeing the potential of every student to learn more about AVID visit their website at avid.org. Welcome to Unpacking Education, the podcast where we explore current issues and best practices in education. I'm Rena Clark.

#### **Paul Beckermann 0:52**

I'm Paul Beckermann.

#### **Winston Benjamin 0:53**

And I'm Winston Benjamin, we are educators.

#### **Paul Beckermann 0:57**

And we're here to share insights and actionable strategies.

#### **Student 1:01**

Education is our passport to the future.

#### **Rena Clark 1:06**

Our quote today is from Reshma Saujani, founder of the nonprofit organization, Girls Who Code and here's the quote, "Girls Who Code is building a pipeline of women in tech... One of the best ways to spark girls' interest is to share stories of girls who look like them." All right, Winston?

**Winston Benjamin 1:30**

Um, so one of the things that I'm taking away from this is this idea of real representation, not tokenism. Because a lot of times you can put a picture up and say, oh, we got one. But is it really like, how are you building the system so that people feel comfortable being there? And that takes more than one, right? Like, how are you really providing opportunity for multiple people to feel like they can truly be themselves, while existing in a space that was not built for them? So I think it's a, it's not just about telling them stories, but providing a real story that feels genuine because we can, media can change the way a story feels, by providing genuine stories is as valuable.

**Paul Beckermann 2:15**

I think that's really important, Winston, that being genuine, people can see through that. And, you know, seeing is believing. So if you see something, and that's me there, I could do that. That is such a powerful thing. And I kind of feel like this is a process of defining what is possible for certain people who maybe didn't think they were part of that definition before.

**Rena Clark 2:37**

And I'm excited that we're going to dig into this a bit deeper. And I would like to welcome our guest for today, Chrissy Ziccarelli, welcome.

**Chrissy Ziccarelli 2:46**

Hi. It's great to be here.

**Rena Clark 2:48**

And Chrissy is from Girls Who Code She's the Senior Director of School and Community Programs. So welcome again. And if you could just take a moment to, for our listeners to introduce yourself, I'd really appreciate it.

**Chrissy Ziccarelli 3:03**

Of course. So yeah, as you said, I am the Senior Director of School and Community Programs at Girls Who Code. I've been there for about seven and a half years. And we just turned 10. So that's a pretty strong tenure. No, well, actually, we just turned 11, we just celebrated. So got it in right under the wire. But yes, it's for the majority of my time at Girls Who Code I have been focused on our after school clubs program, which runs from third grade all the way through 12th grade. It functions as a pretty typical after school model, usually in schools and libraries and community centers. And I do all of the work overseeing outreach and application and then supporting folks all the way through the school year or whenever their clubs cycle runs. So we have about 6,000 clubs in all 50 states, and they all end up rolling up to me and my team. So it's really great work to see the way that this really scalable. And like it's our biggest program and how all the different ways that it shows up in each local community that decides to implement our program.

**Rena Clark 4:17**

So you gave us a mini overview of what it is, this club program. But can you talk too a little bit more about how it was established?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 4:25**

Girls Who Code as a whole? Yes, of course. So Reshma is actually our founder is a lawyer and a politician by trade. And when she was on the campaign trail back in must have been 2011-2012. She was in schools a lot and was touring computer labs and computer science classes and noticed that there were not many girls and when she would go to tech companies to speak and get endorsements there were not a lot of women. And so when that campaign And ended up ultimately not being successful. She couldn't stop thinking about this dearth of women that she saw working in technology, and even in the pipeline to get into those jobs in technology. And so she didn't know anything about computer science herself, and called on a lot of smart people both working in education and in the tech industry. And they came up with a model that is now one of our summer offerings. That was an immersive experience where a classroom of 20 girls worked within a tech company to both learn the basics of computer science and also understand what it really meant to work as a computer scientists within a for-profit company or within a startup. And then they found that the really the strongest thing was the network that those 20 students built with each other. And so then out of that built, flourished all of the different programmatic bottles that we have and girls who codes that's what's been going on for the last 11 years.

**Winston Benjamin 4:25**

Wow, that's a lot of purposeful driven action, right? Like you have if you see, you saw something. But something that that a lot of times, like we said earlier with this idea of like tokenizing In your in your vision and mission statement, you have clearly on your website to where, so I just have a question about holding yourself accountable. And why this is important for you to have a statement on your website, which says Girls Who Code is on a mission to close the gender gap in technology and to change the image of what a programmer looks like and does. I just have a question, why is it so important to for that to be such a bold statement that anyone can see and call you on it? If that makes sense? In terms of the question that I'm asking.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 6:54**

Particularly the second half of the image of what a programmer does? Yeah. Well, back when computers were first introduced, and you know, the size of the room that I'm standing in, about 40% of engineers and computer scientists were women. And when the personal computer was marketed to the mass public, they made the decision to market it to men. And so you see, along with the rise and adoption of the personal computer, there was a decline in the number of women that were working in that workforce. It's like, it's happened in a couple of different industries, like pharmacists primarily used to be men. My mom's a pharmacist, so I know this, and slowly over time, the profession got overtaken by women, it's kind of the inverse of what happened. So because the image of who uses computers and who computers are for, really led that change in the makeup of the workforce, in terms of gender, we feel like, it's not just important to educate women on how to code, but you have to really change their perception. So

they feel like it's somewhere they belong. And more importantly, we also feel like we don't want our entire mission to be about educating girls, because particularly for our high school and college age students, they already have the knowledge, it's more about believing in themselves and feeling like they're belonging, rather than saying you don't know this, let us teach it to you. We start from the space that is like you do know this and you are capable of it. And here are ways that you can find that connection or see yourself or see your interest in whatever industry you want to be in using technology.

**Winston Benjamin 8:45**

I appreciate that you were able to delineate like for younger kids, and also for the adults who are in the game, right, like a young person who's already been pushing through would feel minimized if you spoke to them that way. So I appreciate the way you validate that.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 9:00**

Yeah, when you work with eight year olds all the way to 24 year olds, you have to be able to distinguish a little bit on what each population what each age group needs.

**Paul Beckermann 9:12**

You know, that's an interesting segue to my question, because you mentioned the after school program, which kind of targets a certain age group. What are maybe some of the other programs and opportunities provided by Girls Who Code? What's kind of the arc of of what you offer?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 9:27**

Yeah, so the clubs that I mentioned, I said, started in elementary school. By far, they're the most popular and widespread in middle schools. That's really the audience they were initially designed for. And we found that it's where they really found their home kind of. There are lots of high schools that are also implementing clubs successfully and doing really exciting things with the model. They're not just learning from a teacher, they're oftentimes going out into the community and finding elementary school students and helping them start their own clubs and things like that. But outside of our clubs we have, we still have that summer immersion program that our company was founded on. So we have about 75 classrooms that run each summer. It's now a two-week virtual experience for high school aged students. So rising ninth through 12th graders, and they get to do a couple of different designs, a couple of different projects, learn about web design, AI, machine learning, cybersecurity, and then also get to hear from speakers at some of our corporate partners, and get to know each other. We have a self-paced version of that program as well, because we found that the the commitment of being on zoom all the time, or just, you know, people have different needs over the summer. So we have an asynchronous version of our summer programming that is available as well. And then for college age students, we have College Loops, which is sort of like our clubs they run throughout the school year, but they're a peer-led model. So the College Loops elect a president and a leadership board, and they are a little bit more self directed in determining what activities they do. And then we have a set of workforce programs. So we have, and they're for college through early career students. So we have a Hiring Summit, that's like a virtual interview hiring summit that you would see in

person. We have a Technical Interview Prep program. And then we have a couple of other speed networking, mentoring, and like leadership development programs, as well for folks that are in that like late college, early career area. So trying to support everyone at the right stage throughout the pipeline.

**Paul Beckermann 11:45**

That's awesome. I had no idea that you've covered such a wide, wide group of people. That's, that's impressive. Cool.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 11:51**

It is, it's a lot.

**Rena Clark 11:52**

Ya know, it's great. And I, I actually had a Girls Who Code coding club in fifth grade. So it's, I'm familiar with that age, kind of the verge of middle school, and I didn't really know about all of your programs are doing for, you know, up to 24 year olds. So it's good to hear that there's a lot more opportunities for girls going forward. And then thinking back to your mission and how this whole thing got started. What does success look like for Girls Who Code? Or do you have a success story that you could share?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 12:28**

Yeah, we always joke that we're trying to work ourselves out of a job. I don't know that that will happen in my, my tenure with the organization. But it's a dream that we all have. And we talk a lot, you know, we have metrics that we look at we in particular are looking by 2030, so in the next seven years, I'm helping to close the gender gap in entry level tech jobs through through our programming, which is really exciting. But in terms of success stories, what's really exciting, we have on the team that supports our college and career programming, so all of those early workforce opportunities. We have a council of different members who identify as alumni from our programming. Some of them did clubs in middle school and stuck with it. Some of them just joined us in college. But there are two members of that Alumni Council that didn't have any computer science education outside of their Girls Who Code clubs that they did throughout high school. And they're both now majoring and on track to graduate with computer science degrees. So it's always really like heartening to hear that we not only sparked someone's interest, but that they felt and were prepared to enter a college major or college track, continuing to explore the interest that we ignited in our after school program.

**Winston Benjamin 14:01**

Oh, I just want to let that breathe for a second. Because that's so powerful to actually, like work within and outside of the system at the same time. Right? Like that's really subversive, and trying to push on equity. So there's something you mentioned this earlier that you're technically in your 11th year, but you just celebrated your 10th anniversary. So did you just want to give a big shout out to the 10th anniversary? What what! Congratulations.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 14:26**

Thank you.

**Winston Benjamin 14:28**

Right, we just want to say that but we know that too. In order to celebrate you'd hosted a three day code fair. And um, could you just tell us and the audience just a little bit about that? What was it? How did it go? And how was the just the celebration of 10 years?

**Chrissy Ziccarelli 14:43**

My gosh, Code Fair was like nothing I had ever seen before. We rented a really beautiful space and essentially constructed a museum interactive experience with a bunch of different exhibits that were co-designed and co-created with a couple of our partners. So there was a place where you could take a photo of your aura and get all of the hex codes and learn how to build a filter with it. There was an activation where you could listen to plants growing through like the technology in the planter that they were in. We had a Metaverse disco, there were just, I think, eight or nine different activations, where you just got to go walk into this room in this experience and like interact with technology and art and all these other cool like topics and things that you wouldn't necessarily put together. So it was super exciting. We had some of the, all of the alumni that were on our Alumni Council that I mentioned earlier, were able to attend, we did workshops for some of our clubs that were able to come from New York and even further. We had one club come from Chicago all the way to Manhattan, we had some of our volunteers came out from all across the country. It was really awesome. I think nearly 3,000 people came over the course of three days to walk through this museum/experiential tech exhibit that we were able to build. It was really cool.

**Winston Benjamin 16:24**

That's dope. And like you could see the joy on your face, I know our audience won't be able to see the joy. But I'm going to describe, right, exactly the the way you talk about the positive of that experience is so catching. So I appreciate you, hearing it.

**Chrissy Ziccarelli 16:43**

Well and we realized, you know, schools have been back in person for a while, but our programming moved online and the you know, our clubs is our biggest program. But it's also sort of the most decentralized where I support a lot of volunteers, but it's always been virtual. And sometimes we get to meet them in person. But a lot of our other programs that had been really like personal and market based, and we saw them all the time, haven't come back and have remained online. And so it was the first time for some of us in three years that we were meeting with students and teachers face to face. So it was like really powerful, I think for everybody.

**Winston Benjamin 17:26**

Awesome.

**Paul Beckermann 17:27**

That sounds like it. So if people are listening, because I'm getting excited about this. So if our listeners are getting excited like I am, I want to get involved in this, I want to connect my kids to Girls Who Code. What should they know? How can they get involved? What's what's that about?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 17:43**

Yeah, definitely, I think the the place that most of your listeners could find us would be through our clubs. So you can go to [girlswhocode.com](http://girlswhocode.com). We have a page where you can search by zip code, or put in your address and see if there are any clubs near you. If not, you can start one. Our clubs, all of our programming, by the way, is free to start free to run. So finding a local club or starting one is a great place to start. And I believe the application period for our summer programs are over but we are or might still have a classroom or two getting added. So you can put your name on the waitlist for high school age students. And then that self paced asynchronous version that I mentioned, we also run that during the school year. So you can get on our newsletter list for announcements about that when that is happening. And then yeah, check out our workforce page to if you have any college age folks who are looking for just that little leg up in terms of job seeking.

**Paul Beckermann 18:48**

So if they go to your website, pretty much everything they need is going to be there.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 18:52**

On the program's page. Yep.

**Paul Beckermann 18:54**

Awesome.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 18:55**

Yeah.

**Rena Clark 18:56**

So you've accomplished so much, I feel like with just now 11 years, just from an idea, something central and you know, we're over here in Seattle, and we've got you're over in New York, and we got Girls Who Code over here, it's spread, it's national. So I'm just curious, what's next for Girls Who Code?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 19:15**

Um, I think if you asked Reshma, our founder, she would say world domination.

**Paul Beckermann 19:26**

I like it.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 19:27**

You know, we get the greatest ideas for new programs from all kinds of places. So I think keep like anything is possible and keeping our ear to the ground. I know we've said in our first 10 years, we served half a million students and in our next 10 years, we'd like to reach a million more. So that feels pretty ambitious. So I think that's the we're we're setting our sights for our next 10 years.

**Paul Beckermann 19:53**

Well based on the energy that you're communicating here, I think you can do it. Thank you.

**Rena Clark 19:58**

The odds are in your favor.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 20:01**

There's a roadmap. There's a plan, but I think really the energy is what yeah, gets us there day by day.

**Paul Beckermann 20:08**

That's awesome. All right, well, we're gonna hop into our next segment, which is our toolkit.

**Student 20:16**

Check it out, check it out. Check it out. What's in the toolkit? What's in the toolkit? Check it out.

**Paul Beckermann 20:26**

Hey, Winston, what's in your toolkit today?

**Winston Benjamin 20:29**

So as I was looking around, trying to think about, like, what would be something good, I realized that we had done a couple of things and talked about Scratch, which is from MIT, it's a really cool program. But the nerd in me nerded out, right, they have a book, Star Wars coding project using a step by step guide for your own coding of animation games and simulation using Scratch's platform. So I almost went crazy, lost myself, it was such a great idea. Because I'm a nerd. And I've always wanted to make an R2D2 in my life. So I'm gonna jump on this. So I recommend trying that out.

**Paul Beckermann 21:10**

Hey, Winston, did you know when I was at the ISTE conference, they had the real R2D2 there.

**Winston Benjamin 21:16**

Oh, my God. First of all. Go ahead, Rena.

**Rena Clark 21:20**

Oh, I was like, Were you at the Museum of Flight like two weekends ago?

**Winston Benjamin 21:23**

Yes. Okay, I was there. Yeah, I was there this weekend. It they had a whole bunch of R2D2s. They had a whole entire simulation. They had all the droids. Y'all I took pictures that my sister, we have planned to going together to try to do some stuff. So yeah, I don't. But yeah, I'm sorry, I'm gonna stop being a little kid right now. A little kid, and excited because...

**Rena Clark 21:46**

That's the thing when you find something you're passionate about. And even as you know, we've talked about this blending of art and technology. And when you find that joy, that's when you can really make things happen. And that's how I want work to be like. You should find joy in what you do. But I actually love the book. So you didn't talk about because there's a lot of Girls Who Code books out there. And even with some of my young readers or my own daughter, there's a you know, access to these books that just intro are kind of another way you can kind of see the social aspects of technology as well in a good positive way. So yeah, the books.

**Paul Beckermann 22:28**

Well, and obviously the website right? Girlswhocode.com Gotta go there. And if if people are interested in in coding and computer science, you know, you can go check out some of our past website, or podcast episodes as well. We've had guests on from Girls Who Game, Mission:MathMinds, we had an amazing sophomore in high school who started Mission:MathMinds to get more girls involved in math and coding, micro:bit, Winston mentioned Scratch, Wonder Workshop, there's there's so many great ones out there. But we do want to hand it over to Chrissy. What would you like to stick in the toolkit?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 23:03**

Hmm. I would say timers. I would go back to basics, I feel like it's been really powerful for me to try and multitask and really dedicate my full attention to something and just use different timers even just like on my phone. I have one on my phone where it senses when you flip it over so for 20 minutes just leaving my phone facedown and it's amazing what you can accomplish in that amount of time and get into like a flow state. So that's been kind of the thing that I've been using the most in my own, my own work.

**Paul Beckermann 23:44**

Cool. And believe it or not, we made a set of timers that you can access off YouTube or Vimeo. They're video timers you can embed them like in Google slideshows and things like that too.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 23:56**

The best. It's so much easier for classroom management, training, everything. You can say two minutes and be held visually accountable and have a cat meow at the end of it.

**Paul Beckermann 24:10**

What's better than that?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 24:11**

Much better than my morning alarm.

**Paul Beckermann 24:14**

Or R2D2.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 24:15**

Yeah.

**Winston Benjamin 24:17**

Listen. Don't get me excited. I'm gonna jump jump into the episode soon.

**Transition Music with Rena's Children 24:22**

It's time for that one thing. One thing, one thing. It's time for that one thing. It's that one thing.

**Winston Benjamin 24:35**

So next thing that we got is our one thing. A lot of times what's still running around your mind popping with that's going to create a conversation later on. What's something that's still rumbling around? Rena, what's your one thing?

**Rena Clark 24:48**

I just love when Chrissy kept talking about the way they serve, I would say not girls from young age to old, but the message is always the same. You are capable and you belong.

**Winston Benjamin 25:01**

Paul, what do you thinking?

**Paul Beckermann 25:04**

Well, after I got over the metaverse disco, which really got me excited, because it took me back to my disco dance lessons I had in fifth grade. I was like, I was gonna groove to staying alive here, with John Travolta. Beyond that, it was just the the broad range of people that are served by the organization. I was not aware of that. And I think that is super cool.

**Winston Benjamin 25:30**

So I'm gonna jump before I pass it to Chrissy. But the thing that stuck with me is that how you said 40% of, like, 40% of the population of working population in computers, when it was a giant room were women. And as soon as we marketed it for men, that completely changed. So going back to your point about the value of images, and knowing who and going into Rena's point about belonging, that's so important that like, I didn't know, that I didn't know. And I just wanted to continue to pass that message on, like, just know that there's more information out there for you to be aware of. So I'm gonna pass it off to you, Chrissy, what's something that's still in your head that you're like, I would love the audience to keep thinking about as we move forward?

**Chrissy Zicarelli 26:18**

Yeah, I'm thinking a lot about something we talk about in our programming for high schoolers and college age students, which is cultural capital. And a lot of times we see you know, students

that go through our pipeline really do have the technical knowledge to succeed, but they don't know when you're supposed to look for internships and how getting a job works or what a technical interview is. And it's not that they can't ace those interviews or secure those jobs. And so in addition to that image part, there's also the value of having a social network that can share some of that unofficial information that you only learned once you've been through it. And so I like to feel like we're kind of like a big sister to everyone that is going through and trying to learn more and get a job or just even explore coding. So that's something that I think about all the time and has been bouncing around in my head, this conversation.

**Rena Clark 27:17**

And that information, I think, is just so important. So I like it, cultural capital. Well, Chrissy, I know I've really appreciated having you on today and learning, like as Paul mentioned, like more than I ever knew before. And remember our listeners, you can go to go [girlswhocode.com](http://girlswhocode.com) for more information. But again, thank you so much for sharing your message and story with us. And maybe we'll talk to you again some you know, on your 20th celebration.

**Chrissy Zicarelli 27:47**

That would be great. Don't be strangers. Thanks.

**Rena Clark 27:51**

Thank you so much. Thanks for listening to Unpacking Education.

**Winston Benjamin 27:59**

We invite you to visit us at [AVIDopenaccess.org](http://AVIDopenaccess.org), where you can discover resources to support student agency and academic tenacity to create a classroom for future ready learners.

**Paul Beckermann 28:14**

We'll be back here next Wednesday for a fresh episode of Unpacking Education.

**Rena Clark 28:19**

And remember, Go forth and be awesome.

**Winston Benjamin 28:22**

Thank you for all you do.

**Paul Beckermann 28:24**

You make a difference.