

Maths campaign gets girls crunching the numbers



Angelica Fortinez, 17, Sarah Castricum, 17, and Toni Solaki, 18, from St Francis Xavier College in Melbourne. Picture: David Geraghty

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Selfies have been recruited to bust stereotypes and highlight how studying maths can open up a wealth of life-changing, engaging and fun career possibilities.

Toni Solanke, a Year 12 student at St Francis Xavier College in Melbourne, and her classmates are on-board the Choose Maths national careers campaign, saying it's important girls know "it is OK to pursue your passion".

"Sometimes that message is lost because, on almost every platform, maths and science are seen as subjects and career paths geared for men," 18-year-old Ms Solanke says.

The campaign encourages girls to photograph themselves next to the *Be More than A Number* billboards, and post the image on social media. It is part of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute's work to encourage more girls to study maths and is also timed to coincide with National Science Week.

The Choose Maths ambassadors — female maths professionals — are sharing their personal stories as part of the campaign, showcasing the impact of maths in health research, computer coding, astronomy, mining and fire management.

Lee Turnley, a composite research engineer for Boeing Research and Technology Australia, says one of the biggest barriers to demystifying maths and science careers is the difference between the job title, which is often just words, and what a person actually does and how they help people.

"Everyone knows what a doctor does because you go to them and you see them ... but your programmers, your engineers, your analytical scientists, your statisticians — it's this back world of titles without real understanding for students of what you would do if you're in that field," she says.

Fellow ambassador Lyndal Henden, a bioinformatician at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, agrees that career opportunities need to be better showcased.

"It's also about breaking the stereotype of what does a scientist look like, what does a mathematician look like," she says. "You don't have to be that typical old person that's sitting in the classroom doing maths all day. You can be young, fun, coloured hair, make up, nail polish everything."

Choose Maths program director Janine McIntosh says the campaign is particularly targeting students when they are making choices about subjects.

"We really want them to think about going with something that's going to make them be part of their own future, and with this campaign we're saying maths is going to get them there," she said.

