This summer, 35 young women participated in the fifth annual 4G STEM Camp (Girls + Games +Gadgets = Genius). One of the main goals of the camp is to introduce girls to careers in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and math. Girls spent four days doing host site visits at local businesses, which this year included JUMP Simulation, Advanced Medical Transport, CSE Software, Caterpillar, University of Illinois—Springfield Therkildsen Field Station at Emiquon, and The Nature Conservancy in Illinois.

Of the girls surveyed this year, 88% of them stated 4G STEM camp had introduced them to new career possibilities, the primary goal of the camp. When asked about the most important lesson learned at 4G STEM camp, one participant wrote in her camp survey, “There are a lot of jobs that include STEM. I didn’t know there are so many career options.”

Another goal of the camp was to keep girls engaged in STEM activities. Sixty-six percent of this year’s participants shared they would be more likely to participate in additional STEM opportunities in the future because of this experience. A follow-up survey of participants from 2015–2017 found that many girls followed through and continued to participate in STEM activities such as STEM programs at the Riverfront Museum, school science fairs, U of I Extension STEM programs, FIRST Robotics, Code Girls, and school STEM events.

Pam Rumba, executive director at Common Place shared “4G STEM has been ‘stretching’ the young people that I work with for a number of years. Being on the campus of Bradley University to begin each day is huge for us. Traveling in the community and gaining entrance to buildings and businesses which work hard to explain themselves to our students is huge. I truly believe that gaining this knowledge helps our young people to engage more efficiently in their current school work as well as realize that the benefit of their good grades can be truly life-changing for themselves --and their families in the future.”

In addition to students, nine local teachers participated as mentors and learners in the program. This year was the third for teacher participation, which was included to help encourage more classroom exploration activities and community partners in STEM activities in the classroom. Engaging teachers in this learning experience helps expand the possible impact as these teachers create STEM career exploration activities with community partners in their schools.

Additional photos and videos, highlighting the 4G STEM Camp experiences, are online at https://web.extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/4gstemcamp/.

This year’s 4G STEM Camp gave the 35 participants a first-hand look at STEM related careers in the medical field, technology services, engineering, natural sciences, and higher education. Advanced Medical Transport was one of six locations the girls experienced throughout the week.