

STEM GUIDES: Brokering in Rural Ecosystems

WHO THEY WERE

We hired 1-3 residents of rural communities to serve as STEM Guides”, connecting youth to informal STEM experiences.

INSIGHTS

Brokering is a highly nuanced activity that goes far beyond “pointing out” an opportunity to youth.

Brokering works best when youth regard the STEM Guide as a trusted adult and a STEM expert.

Effective brokering is a learnable skill that takes practice and effort to master.

Partnerships formed more readily when responding to a current need rather than aspiring to a shared vision.

The concept of a learning ecosystem with brokers is a radical shift in mindset for teachers, parents and the community.



WHAT THEY DID



STEM GUIDES built and deepened relationships with youth.

STEM GUIDES connected youth to STEM out-of-school, enabling them to discover their STEM interests.



STEM GUIDES strategically partnered with local organizations to introduce “new-to-the-hub” STEM resources.

CHALLENGES

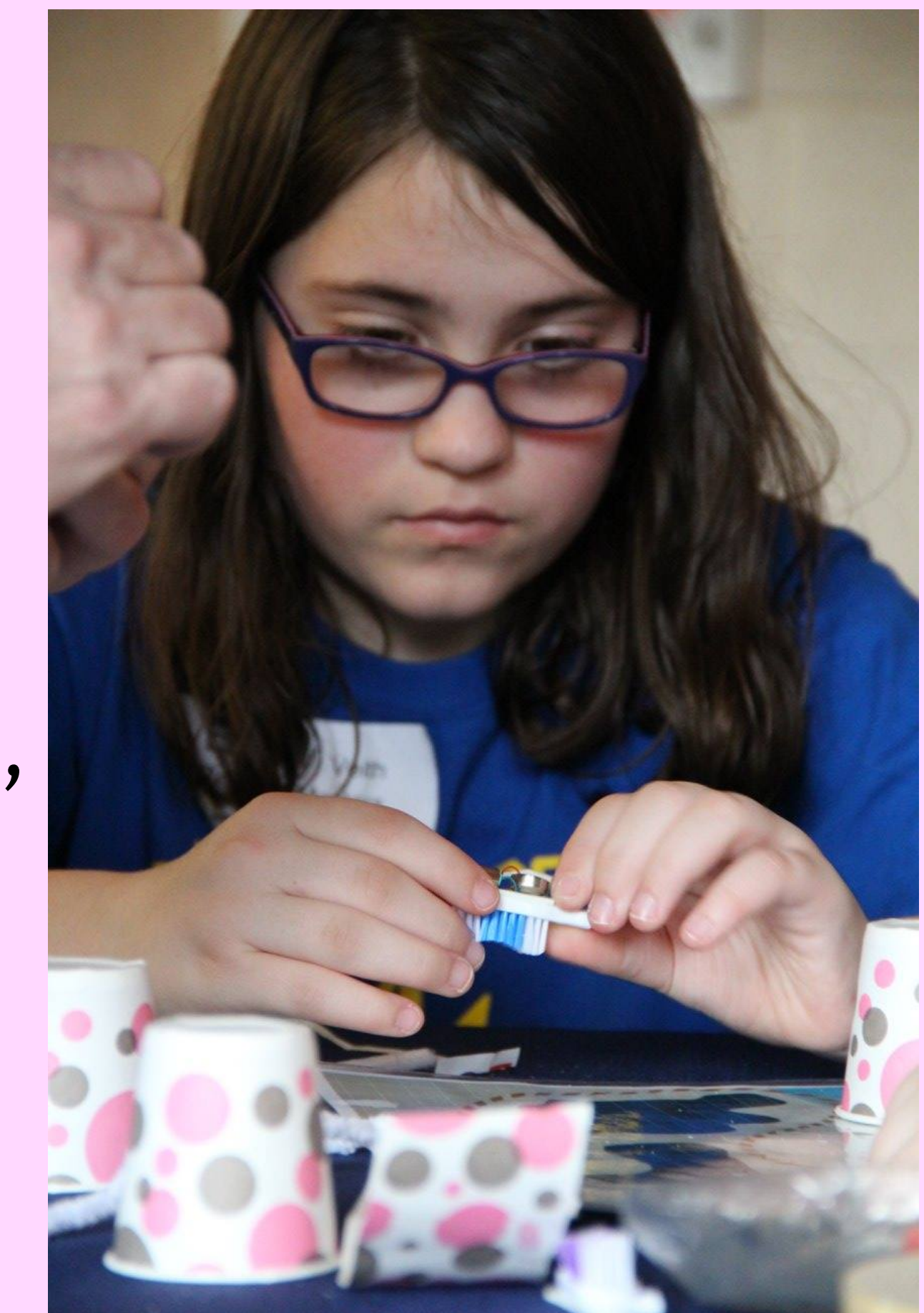
STEM Guides struggled to understand the unfamiliar work of brokering.

STEM Guides preferred to lead “new-to-the-community” experiences over other forms of brokering.

Lack of transportation, poor internet access, communication mishaps, and competition from better established activities (e.g. sports, jobs, drama, music) were common obstacles.

The demand for brokering, particularly at the outset of our work in each community, was less than we had expected.

Local institutions in rural ecosystems resisted forming STEM partnerships to increase connectivity and improve opportunities for youth.



QUESTION: Can multi-partner learning ecosystems truly work?

