

Do-Gooders

By Katie Zezima

WHEN Dallas Jessup heard the statistics — that one in four girls would be sexually assaulted and that thousands of others are abducted each year — she wanted to fight back, something that comes easier to her than most others. A black belt in tae kwon do at 13 and an expert in Filipino street fighting, Ms. Jessup wanted to share her self-defense skills with girls.

“I have the skills to protect myself,” Ms. Jessup, now 19, recalls thinking. “Most girls don’t. Why don’t I help them out?”

Ms. Jessup wanted to make a video on self-defense techniques, and her mother urged her to take a script-writing class at a community college near their home in Vancouver, Wash. Ms. Jessup told the professor of her plans, and within two months he helped her secure scores of extras and \$600,000 in cash and in-kind donations. The film, “Just Yell Fire,” demonstrates fighting techniques like chokeholds and gives tips from law enforcement officials.

The experience kicked off a career. While still in high school, Ms. Jessup flew around the world speaking about self-defense

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and female empowerment, and has testified before Congress. The video is available at justyellfire.com as a free download. Organizations can sell it with proceeds going back to her nonprofit organization; speaking fees go toward her tuition at Vanderbilt University, where she is now a sophomore.

Ms. Jessup says “Just Yell Fire” and her public speaking were a big part of her college application and interview process. “I’d hear from girls who got away from situations because of what I taught them, and that’s so much more important to me than a 100 on a test,” she says. “A 91 was fine.” She told the admissions staff: “Who are you going to let in? Another 4.5 G.P.A. student or a young revolutionary who is going to change the world?”



Dallas Jessup teaches girls to defend themselves.

Ms. Jessup has curtailed her travel and pulled back from the day-to-day running of the “Just Yell Fire” Web site to concentrate on school. She is a communications studies major and wants to go into broadcast journalism, something she saw first-hand while being interviewed about “Just Yell Fire.”

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