

# Ready to Run? An Evaluation of a Northern Michigan Girls on the Run Program

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*Tales from the Field, a monthly column, consists of reports of evidence-based performance improvement practice and advice, presented by graduate students, alumni, and faculty of Boise State University's Instructional and Performance Technology department.*

## Girls on the Run

Girls on the Run® International (GOTR-I) is a non-profit prevention program operating in the United States and Canada that *encourages preteen girls (between the ages of 8 to 12 years) to develop self-respect and healthy lifestyles through running* (Girls on the Run International, 2008). The 12-week experiential wellness program combines training for a 5K event with self-esteem enhancing lessons twice weekly. Local programs apply for a franchise license to operate under established national guidelines. Part of the franchised agreement includes the use of curriculum developed by the program founder, Molly Barker. The Northern Michigan chapter successfully applied for licensure and has been operating since 2002.

## Evaluation Questions and Dimensions

A team of Boise State University's graduate students conducted an evaluation to assess the overall effectiveness of the Northern Michigan chapter (GOTR-NM). Together, with stakeholders, the evaluation team crafted the following questions to drive evaluation efforts:

1. How well is GOTR-NM building participant self-esteem?
2. What barriers prevent initial and/or full participation in GOTR-NM?
3. What areas of improvement exist for bettering the overall quality of program?

Using Scriven's evaluation framework (Davidson, 2005), the evaluation team, working with stakeholders, helped identify four key dimensional criteria and weighted the evaluation dimensions in terms of the relative importance, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation Dimensions and Importance Weighting.

Dimensions	Importance
1. Improved participant self-esteem	Extremely important
2. Quality of the curriculum	Extremely important
3. Accessibility of the program	Very important
4. Quality of the role model	Important

**Self-esteem** was identified as the strongest indicator of program success. To support the self-esteem improvement, the validated **curriculum** must be achievement-based and implemented as designed. For this reason, both the self-esteem and curriculum dimensions were rated "extremely important."

**Accessibility** determines whether or not participants are able to participate in the program. Once they are participating, barriers might still prevent them from experiencing full program benefits. This is the reason accessibility was deemed "very important." Finally, the quality of any character-based mentoring program is dependent upon the adult leaders. These volunteer mentor coaches must be carefully selected, trained, and supported to effectively carry out their roles. The **role-model** dimension was rated "important" to the effective execution of the GOTR program.

### **GOTR-NM Evaluation Findings**

The team evaluated the quality of each dimension of the program and synthesized the results to make judgment on the overall quality of the program. The team conducted surveys with coach mentors and program coordinators, interviewed with the participants' parents, and reviewed the data obtained from pre- and post- surveys administered to the participants during the program in 2007.

Overall, the evaluation team found GOTR-NM to be effective at increasing participant self-esteem. The cumulative evaluation rating of "good" was assigned because:

- The two extremely important dimensions of self-esteem and curriculum were rated as "good."
- If a more sensitive measure of self-esteem had been utilized by GOTR-NM, there is a high probability - based on the limited parent interviews and the GOTR-I program evaluation - this dimension rating could have approached "excellent."
- Even though the accessibility and role-model dimensions were assigned an overall rating of "poor," these areas were not considered critical.

From a cost standpoint, the program's return on investment is considered to be more beneficial than available alternatives. Unlike most after-school extracurricular activities, the GOTR curriculum is designed to produce higher self-esteem. The *at-risk* behavior such as drug use, delinquency and teen-age pregnancy reductions that are targeted program by-products are considered beneficial to individuals and the community.

### **Evaluation Recommendations**

Many funding sources require robust and accurate metrics to demonstrate the effectiveness of requesting programs. For that reason, the team made strong recommendations in regards to data collection:

- Consider incorporating behavior checklist for random sample of participants to be filled out by the mentor coach (Savin-Williams & Jaquish, 1981) before and after.
- Consider utilizing validated instruments like the ones used by Debate (2002) to measure participants' attitudes and beliefs before and after.
- Incorporate a more rigorous and systematic data collection process, including accurate coding, accurate administration of instruments, and comprehensive metrics to report findings.

The team also provided the program with recommendations in the following categories:

- Selection of mentor coaches - including revised application process and requirements
- Training of mentor coaches - including the use of the curriculum and data collection
- Accessibility - including creation of a marketing strategy

## References

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