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Running and self-esteem

By Staff Reports · - Updated 05/11/06 - 7:10 AM

Not every girl can look like the latest pop star or glamorous fashion model. But getting that message through to girls often can be difficult.

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In an era when pressure to conform, self-doubt and lack of self-esteem can lead to eating disorders, depression and even suicide, it is vital that girls do get the message that being different, looking different and being proud of who you are is important. The program Girls on the Run not only tells that to girls but also helps teach them how to combat a negative self-image and how to prepare for a lifetime of self-respect and healthy living.

Charlotte triathlete Molly Barker founded Girls on the Run, a Charlotte-based nonprofit organization, in 1996. Since then, she has spread the program's message to hundreds of schools and communities nationwide.

Thanks to a grant from the Springs Close Foundation and the support of the Leroy Springs Complex, the program came to Fort Mill in 2003. It now serves nearly 200 girls in York, Chester and Lancaster counties.

First and foremost, it teaches girls about running and about their physical capabilities. The 12-week course culminated Sunday in a 5K Family Fitness Celebration at the Baxter Village Community Center in Fort Mill.

But the 12-week session also featured a different lesson, one about how to be comfortable in your own skin. Participants analyzed female images in magazines and on television, and discussed how those images affected their view of themselves. They also learned tips for avoiding drugs and alcohol.

They emerge from the session knowing they can enter and finish a race of more than three miles.

"You can walk, skip or run, whatever you want to do, as long as you're moving forward," said Lindy Morris, regional director of Girls on the Run. Fittingly, all of the girls wear the number "1."

Once girls complete this program, they not only have learned more about themselves but also about others their age. This combination of physical training, camaraderie with peers and other lessons helps build a foundation that should help strengthen these girls for years to come.

Keep up the good work, and keep running.

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