



Girls on the Run of Nebraska

4600 Valley Road, #321 ♦ Lincoln, NE ♦ 68510 ♦ 402-610-5355 ♦ www.GOTRNebraska.org

Published in the Feb. 4, 2016, edition of the Spencer Advocate.

Girls on the Run Celebrates 5 Years in Boyd County

Boyd County a Model to Expand Program Across State

Girls on the Run, a national after-school program that inspires girls to be joyful, healthy and confident with a curriculum that creatively integrates running, will mark its fifth anniversary in Boyd County this spring.

Girls on the Run is a national organization that combines education, exercise, mentoring and “girl power” to build confidence and character in third- through sixth-grade girls. An innovative curriculum integrates fun running games with character-development lessons to train girls to complete a 5K run/walk. Girls meet twice weekly for 10 weeks to learn about teamwork, communication, standing up to peer pressure, stopping gossip, positive thinking and how to make healthy decisions. The program teaches young girls the value of setting goals and working hard to achieve them in a noncompetitive, supportive environment. Completing the 5K at the end of the season provides an unforgettable sense of accomplishment and can be a springboard to future goal-setting and instill healthy habits long after girls exit the program.

Since its inception with 27 girls on the inaugural team in 2012, 130 third- through sixth-grade girls have participated on the Boyd County team that meets in Spencer. The site was the launching pad to bring Girls on the Run to other towns in the region, including O’Neill, Stuart, Atkinson, Ewing and Bloomfield. The area now hosts its own annual regional Girls on the Run 5K each spring in O’Neill, which will host these teams, as well as those from Cedar and Wayne Counties this year.

The program has been a valuable addition to the entire Boyd County community, said GOTR-Nebraska regional coordinator Jacky Hoffman, who brought the program to Spencer in 2012 and has coached the team ever since.

“It has been fun to watch the girls learn, grow and experience the uplifting lessons of Girls on the Run,” she said. “It has been rewarding to help girls set goals and work toward them. Seeing the girls finish at the 5K is one of my favorite things of coaching. Even girls who don’t necessarily like running are proud of themselves when they finish something so big, something they thought would be impossible.”

As a GOTR coach, Hoffman’s positive influence has touched many Boyd County girls’ lives since 2012, but her initial interest in the program was more personal. Hoffman’s family had recently moved back to the area after living in Elkhorn, where Girls on the Run is a popular rite of passage for third-graders. Her oldest daughter Lauryn, was sad to leave Elkhorn and faced some challenges adjusting to her new school in Spencer.



“Once school started, I knew I had to check into the GOTR program. Lauryn was experiencing some hard times as the new kid,” Hoffman explained. “I had heard such wonderful comments about GOTR while living in Elkhorn, and I knew she and other girls would benefit.”

Hoffman reached out to Amy Cyphers, the director of Girls on the Run of Nebraska, which is headquartered in Lincoln and had, up to that point, served girls in the Lincoln and Omaha metros and in the Tri-Cities.

“I still remember that first phone call with Jacky,” Cyphers said. “Although our plan was always to serve every county in Nebraska, we thought expansion would start in the larger cities and ‘trickle down’ to the smaller communities over time.

“Ten minutes into the conversation, I knew Jacky had the energy, interest and passion for the program to do something amazing – and she has,” Cyphers said. “Her Boyd County team has been hugely successful, and she has networked with community leaders and moms and teachers in other towns to grow the program in north-central Nebraska. We used Boyd County’s first GOTR season as a learning experience and model to expand programming across the state.”

GOTR-Nebraska now serves 1,800 girls at 100 sites that span 500 miles across the state every school year.

Hoffman refuses to take all the credit for Boyd County GOTR’s success, however. She credits the underwriting support from the Spencer Community Foundation, the Better Choices 4 Boyd County coalition and the North Central District Health Department, as well as school administrators who backed the program right away.

“The community has been nothing but supportive from the very beginning -- even though they knew nothing about Girls on the Run,” she said. “There wasn’t an abundance of school activities for girls, and school and district administrators and staff recognized the value of the program right away. I remember the first conversation I had with Superintendent Russell Lechtenberg. He was absolutely in favor of supporting a program such as Girls on the Run that would positively benefit our students.” Funding from the Spencer Community Foundation followed soon after, and GOTR attracted support from BC4BC and the NCDHD in later years.

“This whole experience has been a great example of community collaboration,” Hoffman said. “A beautiful trait of small towns is that everyone knows what’s going on and wants to help out a good cause. Everyone in Boyd County who has been involved in Girls on the Run in one way or another should be really proud of our team’s success and influence on programming across the state.”