

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING



## Girls on the Run

International

**203,697** Average number of girls served a year (Fall and Spring season)

**43%** Girls from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ National partners
- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Corporations
- ▶ Individual contributions
- ▶ In-kind support

## Prioritizing staff development and training

Ensuring all children and youth thrive as they move through school and into their adult lives requires that they have the opportunity to develop the skills and competencies that will help them land their first job, navigate and overcome the challenges they will face, keep positive relationships, and make good decisions. While families are central to this effort, others who interact with students can and should play a supporting role. Afterschool and summer learning programs, which have long been a place for positive youth development, are helping students develop these skills and competencies. Programs are providing caring and supportive mentors, creating safe spaces where students can explore new interest areas and develop confidence in their abilities, showing students how to reach consensus and work collaboratively, and providing meaningful ways for students to engage in the program.

### Overview

*Girls on the Run (GOTR)* provides 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders with a supportive environment in which girls run with their friends and coaches while learning, practicing, and applying foundational skills, such as setting goals and managing emotions. The program applies an individualized approach, meeting girls where they are and working with them to inspire them to be joyful, healthy, and confident. GOTR understands that the coaches who work directly with the girls are key to the program's success and trains coaches to implement the curriculum; build relationships with the girls; foster relationships between girls; create a positive, inclusive environment; and create a mastery climate.

### A typical day for students

Each GOTR lesson is structured in the same manner to ensure that girls in the program know what they can expect when they arrive. The first activity of the day is "getting on board," which introduces a topic, such as standing up for yourself, through an experiential activity or game. Next, time is set aside to debrief and girls discuss what they noticed and share what they learned from the activity. Then the coaches introduce a skill or strategy for the day tied to the topic. Warm up games and a workout follows. Embedded within each subsequent activity is practicing/applying the skills that the girls learned during the lesson. For instance, girls will pick up situation cards at the beginning of each lap they complete that reads, "Your best friend borrowed your \_\_\_\_\_ and broke it. How do you respond?" Girls complete a lap with the card and think about how to use the strategy they learned earlier in the lesson to respond.

Coaches eventually catch up with them and girls practice the phrase, “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.” At the end of the practice, girls reflect on what they learned, celebrate one another with an “energy award”—a homemade cheer that recognizes one girl for her contributions that day, and are challenged by their coach to take what they learned and use it outside of the program.

## Outcomes

A 2016 external evaluation of GOTR conducted by the University of Minnesota found that the program was effective in promoting season-long and lasting improvement in competence, confidence, caring, character, and contribution—which GOTR refers to as the “5 Cs.” Survey results showed that 85 percent of girls in the program improved in at least one of the 5 Cs. Almost all girls surveyed reported that they learned critical life skills through the program (97 percent), which included the ability to manage emotions, resolve conflict, help others, and make intentional decisions. Girls who were least active increased their physical activity by 40 percent and maintained this after the season’s end.



## Challenges

***Academics alone are not enough for students’ future success.*** Employers are looking for employees who possess applied academic skills, as well as employees who are able to communicate effectively, work well in teams, and apply other social and emotional skills and competencies. According to a Business Roundtable survey, companies reported that an applicant’s basic reading, writing, and math skills were just as relevant to their company as an applicant’s communication and teamwork skills.

***Schools recognize the importance of social and emotional learning, but barriers to implementation exist.*** Although teachers and principals are strong proponents of social and emotional learning for their students, schools struggle with the implementation of social and emotional learning practices during the school day, which include lack of sufficient time focused on building social and emotional skills, training for teachers and administrators, and integration of social and emotional learning into educational practices.

***Too many children and youth today have faced a traumatic experience, placing them at higher risk for negative outcomes.*** Protective factors, such as social and emotional skills and competencies, help children and youth manage stressful and traumatic experiences in their life. However, close to half of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience that could have negative and lasting effects on their health and wellbeing, including depression, drug use, and poor physical health.

Read [An Ideal Opportunity: The Role of Afterschool in Social and Emotional Learning](#) to learn more.



## Program characteristics

GOTR's vision is to create "a world where every girl knows and activates her limitless potential and is free to boldly pursue her dreams." Through an intentional curriculum that integrates learning life skills and physical activity, the program model addresses statistics that girls' self-confidence drops by age 9 and physical activity levels at age 10 sharply decline.

GOTR employs a model called "The 5 Cs + 1," where competence, confidence, caring, character, and contribution comprise the general framework from which the curriculum is developed. Trained coaches lead small teams through the research-based curriculum, which includes dynamic discussion, experiential activities, and running games. Over the course of the ten-week program, girls develop essential skills to help them navigate their worlds and establish a lifetime appreciation for physical and emotional health. The program culminates with the girls positively impacting their communities through a service project and being physically and emotionally prepared to complete a celebratory 5k event.

With councils in all 50 states, maintaining program quality is a primary focus of GOTR. Working with council leaders across the country, GOTR Headquarters developed a National Coach Training. The National Coach Training incorporates a blended model with both online and in-person elements and is facilitated locally by council leaders who have attended a train-the-trainer workshop. The National Coach Training offers coaches the foundational knowledge they will need to lead their team effectively and help girls grow across the 5 Cs +1. GOTR Headquarters also provides local councils with coach support and site evaluation tools to aid in their local assessment of program quality. In addition, GOTR is partnering with the National Center on Health Physical Activity and Disability to ensure the program is accessible and inclusive to girls with disabilities. They are currently piloting adaptations to the curriculum that include a Curriculum Inclusion Guide and coach training content with 14 councils nationwide.

## Program history

In 1996 in Charlotte, N.C., GOTR started out at a private school with 13 girls and one coach who used running as a vehicle to build her students' confidence and life skills. A little more than two decades later, GOTR has served 1.5 million girls through 200 councils located in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia.

## Recommendations

*for prioritizing staff training and development:*

- ▶ The training of your staff and front-line workers is an essential component of quality programming. Create a standardized training so that all volunteers are prepared in the same way.
- ▶ In addition to training volunteers on how to implement the program, teach strategies to build relationships with students and between students. For a safe inclusive environment, allow volunteers time to reflect on their own experience and biases, and look at the power of intentional language. Draw attention to the importance of a growth mindset in developing students' confidence and competence.



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