

GIRLS ON TRACK PROGRAM DEBUTING

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As a lifelong runner, Jill Fenderson considers physical activity important, and she's committed to passing along her fitness philosophy to her daughter, Jadalyn. "It's important to get kids moving." Fenderson says, being active helps combat body image problems and reduce obesity. That's why Fenderson has encouraged Jadalyn, 10, to participate in Girls on the Run at John F. Kennedy Elementary School. However, this will be Jadalyn's final season in the program slated for girls in third through fifth grades, and Fenderson was looking for something to fill the void in spring and fall as Jadalyn moves through school. Other moms also wished for a program to help guide their daughters through the perils of adolescence.

In answer to those concerns, Girls on Track, a spin-off program for girls in grades six through eight, is being offered for the first time this fall. The pilot program, partially funded by the Sioux Empire United Way and run by the YWCA, is being offered at four area middle schools beginning Sept. 6, says Stacy Stahl, YWCA girls and youth rec program director who oversees Girls on the Run and Girls on Track.

Girls on Track will be a 10-week after-school program at Patrick Henry Middle School, Brandon Middle School, Harrisburg Middle School and St. Michael's Catholic School. Fifteen girls will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis at each of the sites. The cost of the program is a sliding scale fee, up to \$100, based on each child's family income, and scholarships are available, Stahl says.

The noncompetitive program is designed to empower girls, helping them set and achieve goals. "It teaches self-confidence, how to avoid peer pressure and live a healthy lifestyle," Stahl says. Girls have fun, connect with mentors and, at the same time, get physical fitness. Girls will meet with a volunteer coach after school twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for an hour and 15 minutes. "It starts with a discussion," Stahl says. Topics can include Internet safety, healthy eating, stress and time management, the importance of balance in life, the importance of physical fitness, positive attention, team building, good friendships vs. toxic friendships, gossiping and bullying issues and being role models. Then the girls will exercise. The program is open to anyone - experience is not necessary, and girls need not be runners. After 10 weeks, Girls on Track will end with a community 5K fun run at Yankton Trail Park.

For Fenderson, the Girls on the Run program was a way to connect with her child. "I wanted to share in the experience with my daughter, so I decided to coach," she says. "I was amazed by the whole curriculum. It's not just running. It's about every part of life, how to live and be respectful and respect others." Since her daughter has participated, Fenderson has noticed a change in how Jadalyn gets along with others. She now solves disagreements with other girls using what she learned at Girls on the Run. "I recognized all the techniques from the program," Fenderson says.

Heidi McCormick, Girls on Track coordinator, got involved because she, too, believed in Girls On the Run. It was a way to influence girls and satisfy her craving for "girl time." "Any mother of boys knows what I'm talking about," jokes McCormick, mom of three sons. "It's a time to be around girls and make an impact on them." McCormick and Fenderson lament the lack of such programs when they were in

school. Participating is a way to make a difference, they say. "I remember being in this 'girl box,' wanting to conform to what everyone wants you to be. This may change how you feel about yourself, to realize you're good the way you are. You don't have to be what society says you have to be," McCormick says.

COACHES NEEDED

Volunteer coaches are still needed to help out with Girls on Track, which will be held twice a week for 10 weeks in fall and spring. Coach candidates must be 18 years or older and want to mentor girls in self-esteem and a healthy lifestyle. The season starts Sept. 6 and ends Nov. 15, with a 5K community fun run at Yankton Trail Park. Volunteers need not commit to each session; they may volunteer once a week. Five coaches are needed per site. To volunteer to coach or to receive more information, call the Girls on Track Coordinator at 336-3660 or email info@ywca-sf.org or go to <http://gotrsiouxfalls.org> <http://www.ywca-sf.org>

GIRLS ON THE RUN

Girls on the Run will run Sept. 6 through Nov. 15 at 17 locations throughout the area including Sioux Falls, Brandon, Harrisburg, Dell Rapids, Huron and Vermillion. More than 2,000 elementary school girls have participated in the YWCA Sioux Falls' Girls on the Run program since it began here in 2005. Sessions are after school for 75 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 10 weeks. Tuition is based on a sliding scale up to \$100. To download a registration form, visit www.gotrsiouxfalls.org or call 336-3660 ext. 208 to register.

Girls on the Run & Girls on Track
Signature programs of the YWCA
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