

# Girls get back on track

BY TINA ROGERS

Most pre-teen and adolescent girls know about the "girl box" — a place where only girls of a certain size, with a certain beauty and popularity, are found. This is where girls who want to fit in need to mold their bodies and personalities to fit the requirements of the box. This artificial molding is behind an epidemic of low self-esteem.

Girls on the Run (GOTR) York Region and GTA is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating girls to prepare them for a lifetime of self-respect and healthy living by using a program curriculum designed to promote good choices. The lessons, designed specifically to address self-esteem issue, used warm-ups and workouts that encourage emotional, social, mental, physical and character development.

GOTR is actively helping girls in Maple. Students from Discovery Public School have already completed the program, which culminates in a strictly non-competitive five-kilometre walk/run event, a feat which many local girls would never have visualized themselves achieving before they started the nine-week program.

The goals are clear. The program is designed to help any girl in Grades 3 to 8 build a stronger sense of identity, learn the advantages of peer group support, learn to stand up for herself in a healthy manner, have an improved body image, understand her place in her community; and ultimately complete a walk/run event.

There are only two GOTR Councils in Canada, both in Ontario (Simcoe County and York Region/GTA), and 110 in the United States. Over 15,000 girls completed the program in 2004. Results have shown that girls in Girls on the Run (Grades 3 to 5) and Girls on Track (Grades 6 to 8) have higher self-esteem, improved eating attitudes, improved body image, and a positive peer group as well as a positive role model.

The program sessions are 75 minutes in length and run each spring (April-June) and fall (September-November). They are offered as an after-school program, twice a week, located on school property. The program is run by two curriculum and CPR/First-Aid-trained coaches, and the group size is from eight to 20 girls. Remarkably, GOTR York Region and GTA's data shows there is a zero drop-out rate, and half of all participants re-enrol. The girls would surely agree they have a lot of fun in the program.



PHOTOS BY TINA ROGERS

Becky Wieschkowski, Clarissa Morabito, and Riley Wieschkowski are confident, happy and eager to participate.

Complete information on the Girls on the Run program is available at [www.girlsotherun.ca](http://www.girlsotherun.ca)