



# WellSpring

Sharing physical activity knowledge

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## GO! Run

### Closing the gender gap in girls' participation in sport and physical activity

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#### Introduction

GO! Run is a free, fun, and flexible Girls Only (GO) running program, developed to increase girls' participation in physical activity. Giving girls the opportunity to be active, without the influence and presence of boys, can help to enrich their experience in participating. GO opportunities also allow girls to focus on age-appropriate skill development, while building confidence and self-esteem in a fun and inclusive environment.

GO! Run is designed to work alongside the Youth Run Club, a longstanding initiative of Ever Active Schools and the Alberta Medical Association (AMA). The AMA Youth Run Club has more than 500 participating school communities and more than 25,000 students. The program supports schools of all grades to get students moving through a fun, school-based club focused on participation and positive social outcomes.

Through additional funding support from Canadian Tire Jumpstart, GO! Run started in Fall 2017 with 18 schools and the creation of a GO! Run handbook to support run club coaches as they started the clubs. With support from our AMA Youth Run Club coordinators, running clubs grew from 18 at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year to 32 by the end of the 2017-18 school year. In the 2018-19 school year, we have seen continued growth with up to 45 clubs. The majority of our clubs take place in Edmonton or Calgary with the rest being scattered throughout the province in rural communities.

#### Promoting gender equality

According to the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), "Gender equality is the process of allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex...and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females."<sup>1</sup> Offering opportunities like GO! Run directs supports to girls where they are most needed. It ensures that all children and youth can participate in

#### S U M M A R Y

There are many challenges girls can face when trying to participate in sport and physical activity that have contributed to a decline in their participation. GO! Run is a free, running program for girls only, developed to increase girls' participation in physical activity opportunities by breaking down some of the many barriers.

This WellSpring provides an overview of the program's success across Alberta and how schools can start their own program.

activities of their choosing. GO! Run Clubs are built by each school to fit the culture and needs of the school and group of girls. Focusing the program on girls helps to address imbalances that are present in physical activity offerings in school settings.

## Engaging more girls in physical activity

Approximately 2.5% of girls between the ages of 12 and 17 years have been found to achieve the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity.<sup>2</sup> This statistic is staggering and brings to the forefront the need for programming such as GO! Run to start increasing the number of girls engaging in physical activity.

GO! Run is currently targeting students aged 8 to 12 years. This is because we know that “age 10 is the key! If a girl doesn’t participate by age 10, there is only a 10% chance she’ll be physically active at age 25.”<sup>3</sup>

GO programming increases opportunities for girls to meet Canada’s Physical Activity Guidelines and can counter the trend of inequality in adulthood. GO! Run is one strategy to close the gap so girls can access the important physical, social, and emotional benefits of participation.



*If a girl doesn't participate by age 10, there is only a 10% chance she'll be physically active at age 25.*

## Making physical activity fun for girls

“Only 1 out of 10 high school girls enroll in optional physical education classes.”<sup>3</sup> Girls need to find enjoyment in physical activities so that they are less likely to opt out of opportunities when given the chance. GO programming can address issues specific to girls and emphasize aspects of participation that are most important to them. Giving girls the space to be active may be enough to enrich the experience of participating in physical activity, especially for girls who perceive themselves as less active or who are not confident in their abilities.

## Findings

We collected feedback from our participants to see what they thought about GO! Run. Reasons why our participants benefited from an all-girls club include:

*“Then the boys don’t think they’re better than us and for girls to feel good about themselves.”*  
(GO! Run Participant)

*“If there were boys, it would be too much pressure, and it really is fun with all girls.”*  
(GO! Run Participant)

The girls also reported that the club made them feel good, strong, happy, healthy, and awesome. Participants increased their confidence through the club, which transferred to other activities and sports that they participated in. As expressed by one of the girls,

*"I especially think that helps me in other areas, such as other sports like soccer and skiing, and helps me become more social and meet new friends of all ages."*  
(Ayanna, GO! Run Participant)

For some participants, the initial draw was that their friends were involved with the club. However, through the club, they made new connections and relationships.

*"I joined the running club because I thought maybe if all my friends are going to be in running club, then it must be fun, and it was! I like to be in the running club with my friends, and I like to make new friends too."*  
(Michelle, Grade 1, GO! Run Participant)

One of the GO! Run coaches spoke about the impact of the program for her students and other staff members at her school.

*"The girls tell us how they feel like they belong and feel like it is their very own special thing they can do...To top it off, this has now trickled down to our female staff members as well. We have 5-6 additional staff members coming to our class too and some starting to commit to running on a regular basis."*  
(Maria, GO! Run Coach)



*"If there were boys, it would be too much pressure, and it really is fun with all girls."*  
(GO! Run Participant)

## Starting a run club in your school

Coaches receive a handbook with considerations for creating and implementing a successful GO! Run Club. These considerations can be applied to any physical activity situation to encourage increased female participation and success.

- Emphasize participation and acceptance before skill and effort.
- Don't fear having competition, rather create an environment where different levels of competition are welcomed and appreciated.
- Develop drills that are progressive and allow enough time to give specific feedback to participants.
- Monitor your participants to ensure everyone is experiencing equal opportunities.
- Create unity and an inclusive identity within your team to prevent cliques.

- Encourage the girls to plan and make decisions; allow them to have input into the design of the program.
- Reinforce the social, emotional, and physical benefits of moving and actively dissociate these from appearance.
- Teach the basics; invest some time into developing physical literacy and fundamental movement skills.
- Engage females as positive role models in your club because female coaches legitimize sport as a safe, female-appropriate cultural activity.
- Always emphasize fun!

## Conclusion

GO! Run continues to grow alongside the AMA Youth Run Club and empowers females across Alberta to participate in physical activity and continue participating beyond the club. It is our hope that this program can lead to sustained change and impact on female physical activity participation rates.

Want to start up a GO! Run Club in your school community? Visit [www.amayouthrunclub.com/go-run/](http://www.amayouthrunclub.com/go-run/) to learn more and do your part in closing the gender gap in girls' participation in sport and physical activity.

## References

1. Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity. *What is gender equity?* Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity. <https://www.caaws.ca/gender-equity-101/what-is-gender-equity/>. Published 2013. Accessed April 11, 2019.
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Hayley Degaut** is a Provincial Project Coordinator with Ever Active Schools and has been coordinating the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) Youth Run Club for the past six years.

Her work focuses on planning events for educators across Alberta and implementing the AMA Youth Run Club to get Alberta children and youth moving.

