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Bridgeview girl power

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November 11, 2007

BY Jason Freeman Correspondent

Kelly O'Brien knows all about how hard growing up can be.

That's why O'Brien, executive director for Girls on the Run Chicago, is glad to give girls in grades three to five a way to positively cope with the pressures of adolescence.

"We use running to teach the kids life-skills lessons and to build self-esteem," she said. "The girls meet after school with their coaches and run, but while they're running, they're doing activities that teach them about issues like gossip, bullying, body image in the media, healthy eating, standing up for themselves and community service."

Hundreds of girls and their families joined Girls on the Run and the Fireworks for Kids Foundation, the charity of the Chicago Fire soccer team, Saturday morning during the Fall WonderGirl 5K Fun Run, a 3.1-mile race around the parking lot and field at Toyota Park in Bridgeview to raise money for both organizations.

"It's really something special that the girls have that's just theirs," O'Brien said. "It's just a way for them to get together and have fun making friends but also learn about how to handle things."

After the race, participants could stay to enjoy events such as face painting, tiara decorating, a photo booth and a visit from Chicago Fire mascot Sparky.

Rich Lamarre, of Wheaton, came with his wife, Susanne, sister-in-law Donna Heinemeyer and daughter Lindsey, 13, to watch his daughter Lauren, 9, run in the race.

"This really enforces good ethics for the girls who participate," he said. "I think this is something that Lauren is going to want to do every year."

Lamarre said it was good to see a girl-centered event for a change.

"I think this is really important because so often, so many of the sports like soccer, football and baseball are focused towards boys," he said, "The girls kind of get left behind with home (economics), so this is neat for them. To come to something that's this well-organized is big because it really makes them feel that they're part of something. And they are."

Mike Daniels, of Chicago, ran with his daughter Tyra, 9.

"This is good because it's healthy, and it gives them experience with other kids," he said.

Kristin Norris, of Libertyville, who ran with her daughter Maddie, 8, was a fan of the run.

"I'm a runner, and she wants to be a runner as well, so we're doing this together," Kristin Norris said. "I think it's great that they're encouraging girls to stay active and healthy, and running is a great way to stay healthy. It's easy to do - you just put on a pair of shoes and just run outside your door."

On the Web

For more information on Girls on the Run Chicago, visit www.gotrchicago.org.

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