

# Girls Gotta Run Foundation, Inc. (GGRF) Annual Report 2009

## **Background**

The Girls Gotta Run Foundation, Inc. is an all volunteer charitable organization created to raise money to support impoverished Ethiopian girls who are training to become professional runners. Training to be athletes allows them to stay in school, avoid early marriage and childbirth, and gain personal independence.

GGRF was inspired by the December 2005 Washington Post article by Emily Wax called "Facing Servitude, Ethiopian Girls Run for a Better Life." Wax reported, "In Ethiopia, getting an education is a true marathon. Girls' enrollment is among the lowest in the world and women and girls are more likely to die in childbirth than reach sixth grade..." She also noted that Ethiopia has the highest rate of vaginal fistulas<sup>1</sup> in the world and one of the largest caseloads of AIDS, forcing many girls to quit school to care for sick or widowed relatives.

Today, because "seven of the 10 top-earning athletes in Ethiopia are women," some girls and their parents have begun to see careers as professional runners as viable options in a country where "girls as young as 12 can be sold as brides by parents desperate for dowry payments." Many who train in order to stay in school and keep their options open, can, with the help of caring others, overcome many of the obstacles in their way. GGRF was founded to assist them.

## **Our Mission**

The mission of GGRF is to provide funds for the purchase of athletic shoes, training uniforms, food ("calorie money") and other training-related expenses, such as transportation, as well as to subsidize coaches' salaries.

## **Our Teams**

GGRF works with local partners in Ethiopia. At present, GGRF provides support for girls and young women on three teams: Team Tesfa, the Simien Girl Runners, and Team Naftech. We also provide support for the first five female athletes in the Running Across Borders program.

1. We continued to provide support for and promote Team Tesfa, the core team of which has stabilized at 20 girls and young women (from an original four), providing funds for shoes, clothes, food, and coaching subsidies.

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<sup>1</sup> A vaginal fistula is a tearing of the vagina during childbirth that requires painful, usually unavailable, reconstructive surgery.

2. We continued to provide support for and promote the Simien Girl Runners, a team of 10 girls in Debark, in the Simien Mountains, providing funds for athletic shoes, athletic training clothes, extra food and coach subsidies.
3. We provided support for the creation of a new team, Team Naftech, which consists of 7 young women, providing funds for shoes, clothes, transportation, and coach subsidies.
4. We provided support for the first five female athletes in the Running Across Borders program, a program for East African runners which was established in 2008.

## **Financial Resources**

GGRF solicits funds from private donations, local groups and the international community both in the U.S. and Ethiopia. In 2009, despite the ongoing difficult economic climate, we raised almost \$15,000.00.

## **Fundraising Activities**

1. We worked with our attorneys to craft an agreement between GGRF and Abrakadoodle, an international art education franchise program for children, for Abrakadoodle to raise funds for GGRF, bringing the agreement close to completion.
2. We worked with DC Road Runners to promote and run the 51<sup>th</sup> Annual Larry Noel Race in Greenbelt, Md., as a fundraiser for GGRF.
3. We mounted a major art exhibit and fundraising reception at the Friendship Heights Village Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, bringing together 60 plus artists, 10 vendors, two performing artists and one children's performance group to raise money for GGRF. The event was attended by approximately 200 people.
4. One GGRF Board member and three GGRF volunteers raised funds for GGRF through marathon races.
5. We established a working relationship with the DC Girls on the Run organization and supported four of the Washington International School teams in fundraising activities for GGRF.
6. We assisted and coordinated with supporters who engaged in additional fundraising efforts. These included an art exhibit and fundraising reception by the Philadelphia Women's Caucus for the Arts in Philadelphia in October; donated sales by Barefoot Books of Reston, Virginia; and Girls on the Run fundraising run in Annapolis, Md.
7. We identified several foundations that should be interested in our mission and worked with a GGRF grants writing volunteer on a concept paper to be used as the basis for pursuing grants from them.

## **Public Relations/Outreach**

1. The Executive Director wrote recommendations for Bonnie MacAllister to receive a Fulbright grant to travel and learn in Ethiopia for several weeks during the summer and for Kayla Nolan to receive a grant from her college to research the relationships between running and women's empowerment in Ethiopia during the summer, and we facilitated visits for both of them with teams we support.

2. The Executive Director arranged for a January/February visit by photojournalist Sarah Murray to take photos of two of the teams in training, which resulted in two great photo spreads for our website, one of Team Tesfa and one of Team Naftech, and additional film footage which is being made into at least one video of Team Naftech and may result in another of Team Tesfa in due course.
3. The Executive Director arranged for a summer visit by GGRF volunteer Gaby Grebski to two of the teams we support (Running Across Borders and the Simien Girl Runners) to meet with the girls and investigate the possibilities of setting up pen pal programs between running teams in the DC area and the teams we support in Ethiopia.
4. We received some great publicity, including a radio broadcast in Denmark, an article in Helm magazine, several articles in the D.C. Examiner, an article in Tadias, also carried by Good News Ethiopia, and an article in the Sidwell Friends School Alumnae Magazine.
5. We made invited presentations about the work of GGRF at the organizational meeting of the Capital Area Runners club and at the Clearinghouse for Women's Issues' April Meeting.
6. We were selected to be one of the 10 featured organizations in Amharic Kids annual Ethiopian calendar.
7. We set up more reliable group communication systems with our donors and supporters through Mad Mimi, an email system, and through Facebook.
8. We continued to market art and products through our online gallery and store as well as to receive donations through a paypal account.

## **Board Development**

In 2009, we restructured the organization to better reflect our operational procedures, amended the Articles of Incorporation to increase the number of Board members possible, and codified Board member expectations and responsibilities. Three Board members retired; three Board members were added. At present we have 5 members on the Board.

## **Overall Accomplishments**

Overall, GGRF had a busy year. We recruited new Board members, held several events/fundraising activities, solicited more funds, added partners and strengthened the relationships with existing partners, developed communication materials/video, and expanded our outreach and PR.

Through financial grants, services and in-kind contributions, we provided material goods and services for 42 runners. We have learned through our partners that running has a positive impact on the lives of the girls. They stay in school. They have higher self-esteem, are more committed and disciplined, and experience themselves as more empowered.

## Summary

Studies show that educating girls benefits both families and the greater community by contributing to increased economic productivity, lower infant mortality and morbidity, and longer life expectancy for both men and women. By providing money to support Ethiopian girls who are training to be runners, Girls Gotta Run gives them the chance to stay in school, enhance their future opportunities, and improve not only their lives, but also their families and community.