

BITCH IN: GIRLS GOTTA RUN

It's a dreary evening in November, but Kaffa Crossing, an Ethiopian restaurant in Philadelphia, is bright, warm, and packed with people. Some are sitting at tables, mopping up spicy berbere with injera bread. Others are perched around a woven mat on the floor, where a carved clay coffee pot and tiny cups are arranged.



The traditional coffee ceremony has been laid out in honor of the photography exhibit opening here tonight. The pictures, all scenes of Ethiopia, were contributed by several artists, including Bonnie MacAllister, a teacher who recently traveled to the

country on a Fulbright-Hays scholarship.

MacAllister went to Ethiopia to help write the American public-school curriculum on Ethiopian culture and history. But while there she hoped to meet some of the young women sponsored by the Girls Gotta Run Foundation (GGRF), an organization that supports teenage girls who are training to become runners. Along with other artists from around the country, MacAllister supports GGRF by donating between 50 and 100 percent of the sales of her work.

GGRF was born in 2006, when Patricia Ortman was at home in Washington, D.C., reading an article in the *Washington Post* that described the lives of teenage girls in Ethiopia who enter into early marriage, multiple pregnancies, and manual labor, sometimes starting as young as 12. Ethiopian women, in fact, are more likely to die in childbirth than to reach sixth grade.

But as the article reported, many young women there long to run competitively. Runners are rock stars in Ethiopia: The country has produced some of the world's best distance runners, and seven of its top 10 earning athletes are women. The would-be runners interviewed by the *Post* ran early in the morning, before starting their chores—and often did so barefoot because their parents couldn't afford sneakers.

"Something about that just made me think, 'Well, it's just a pair of shoes,'" recalls Ortman, a retired women's studies professor. "There should be a way to get these girls some shoes. It didn't seem like an overwhelming thing."

So she reached out to her colleagues on a women's-studies mailing list, asking for help. Those efforts led to the organization's first fundraiser, an exhibit and sale of shoe-themed art, at the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum in Capitol Hill. To Ortman, the location felt auspicious:

Alice Paul started the National Women's Party there, and today it is the symbolic home of women's rights.

Since then Ortman, who is also a painter, has organized several more exhibits/fundraisers. And unsurprisingly, her work in Ethiopia has turned out to be bigger and more complicated than simply buying pairs of sneakers. Today she and her board of directors, all volunteers, work to provide funding to runners on three teams—Team Tesfa, the Simien Girl Runners, and Team Naftech—as well as five girls in the Running Across Borders program. The girls, who range in age from 15 to 19, receive training, running clothes, and food. Some of them live at home with their families, and others, like the girls of Team Tesfa in Addis Ababa, live together in a dormitory. All of them are encouraged to get as much education as they can.

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"We want the girls to agree to go to school, or go back and finish," Ortman said. "A lot of the girls who are trying to become runners are not going to be good enough to do this professionally, or they'll get injured. Finding a way to run is a way to stay in school." This is the GGRF's mission in a nutshell—not to farm future Olympic gold medalists, but to offer young Ethiopian women a fuller life.

—Katie Haeghele

PATRICIA WANTS YOU TO KNOW ABOUT...

1. THE TESFA FOUNDATION

tesfa.org

With support from local agencies, and in conjunction with sister schools in the United States and United Kingdom, Tesfa provides preschool and kindergarten-age children in Ethiopia with access to education. In 2009, six schools founded with Tesfa support in Ethiopian cities, towns, and villages have served nearly 1,000 children.

2. RUNNING ACROSS BORDERS

runningacrossborders.org

Running Across Borders, a partner of Girls Gotta Run, works to expand the economic opportunities available to East African boys and girls through long-distance running by providing them with training and competitive opportunities, education, and employment. RAB-run training camps provide jobs in sports administration, sports tourism, and sports and health-science research and teaching.

3. JIMMA BANANA ART

jimma-banana-art.com

Jimma is a city of about 130,000 in southwest Ethiopia that has a high unemployment rate and a young population, making competition for the few jobs fierce. Jimma Banana Art provides work for young women making cards, small posters, and other paper-based art from the leaves, bark, and flowers of the banana tree, which grows in abundance in the region.

4. AMHARIC KIDS

amharickids.com

The idea for this online shop originated when a Scottish-American couple, who adopted their daughter from Ethiopia, found toys and books related to her native country difficult to find. They started Amharic Kids to make products from and about Ethiopia more accessible to English-speaking people by publishing their own books and sourcing cds, calendars, cards, and jewelry.

5. JUST LOVE COFFEE ROASTERS

justlovecoffee.com/GirlsGottaRunFoundation

Rob Webb, a coffee roaster in Nashville, Tennessee, buys coffee from Ethiopian farmers at a sustainable price and uses proceeds from its sales to fund an orphanage there. Other charitable organizations can set up online shopfronts to sell Just Love coffee; Girls Gotta Run Foundation gets \$5 from every bag it sells.