

# Healthy Hudson Valley

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*Healthy Body & Mind*

## Getting in shape for the winter months



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finding the right exercises as we age,  
the importance of flu shots  
and overcoming our fears of this election**

# How Girls on the Run changed my life

National kids' exercise movement gets an energetic local chapter

By Katy Weber

**I** WAS EXCITED THE SUMMER BEFORE MY DAUGHTER entered third grade to know that she was finally old enough to join the Girls on the Run (GOTR) program. I'd first heard about it by word of mouth, but really got interested after profiling Kim Quimby, director of the Hudson Valley chapter, for an issue of *Hudson Valley Parent* magazine.

I told her how I planned to register my daughter for the GOTR program already running in New Paltz. "You know," I told her, "I live in Rosendale, and I bet I could find enough other interested girls in my area that you could start a Rondout Valley team this fall."

"That's a great idea," she said. "You should definitely start one!"

That wasn't the answer I had been anticipating, but given the fact that Girls on the Run is almost entirely volunteer-run, I wasn't surprised.

So last August I started scrambling to put together a team of my own. And sure enough, once other parents learned more about this program for girls in grades three through five, I rallied together three other coaches, two junior coaches and 18 girls who registered for our first fall season.

Girls on the Run began in 1996, when Molly Barker, a four-time Hawaii Ironman triathlete, brought together 13 girls in Charlotte, NC. Using her counseling background and her own experi-



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATY WEBER

Coach Katy Weber hugs Girls on the Run participant Addyson Auchmoedy, during a practice session at Marletown Elementary last fall. The program is for girls in grades 3 through 5.



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Left, coach Katy Weber hugs her daughter, Anna, after crossing the finish line; Coach Carrie Wykoff and her daughter, Maitreya Motel, cross the finish line at the Hudson Valley Girls on the Run final 5K in Cornwall on Hudson last fall.



ence in what she called "the girl box," Barker developed a program that combined training for a non-competitive 5K event with confidence-build-

ing lessons that enhance the physical and mental health of girls eight to twelve years old.

The program caught the attention of *Runners*



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Coaches and girls on the Rondout Valley Girls on the Run team perform some warm up stretches during a practice session at Marbletown Elementary last fall.

*World* magazine in 1996, and now has grown to more than 225 program sites throughout North America. Themes of the ten-week program include positive self-talk, cultivating an attitude of gratitude, finding true friendships, healthy habits, gossip, peer pressure and other topics geared directly to that age group. Interwoven throughout, the girls train for a 5K, which is used to inspire and motivate the girls, encourage lifelong health and fitness, and build confidence through accom-

plishing a goal.

As we coached the program for the first time, we found how receptive the girls were to the research-based curriculum. They eagerly participated in

the discussions and in the physically-demanding training sessions. I wished I had something like this when I was an eight-year-old.

As the weeks progressed, I found I was applying a lot of the GOTR principles to my own life. When we discussed the power of visualization and using our inner star power when times got tough, I found the program was making a difference in my own life. I was not just as a coach of girls but as a grown woman in need of positive self-talk and empowerment. I realized, too, that the junior coaches (high-school students who volunteer their after-school time and are adored by the younger girls) were applying the same principles to their own lives. We came together for the sake of these younger girls, but in the end we were all benefiting from this program!

**A**S THE DAY OF THE FINAL 5K APPROACHED, we became a team. The girls encouraged each other and found a strength in themselves they never knew they had. Not a single one of them had ever completed a 5K race before, and now each and every one of them was about to cross that finish line. Most of them run. Many of them walked. We don't care how long it takes them. The emphasis is on completing the goal. I can't possibly describe the feeling of seeing their eyes light up when they first spot that finish line.

After that first season, we went on to complete the spring 2016 session. Now we've started the fall 2016 session. Our Rondout Valley team has grown

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to five coaches, three junior coaches and 22 girls. Coaching for this program has been rewarding experience for me, and not just in the way I had expected. I took a long look at my own healthy habits and my own self-image. In an effort to provide an empowering environment for my own daughter, I realized that many grown women like myself are still struggling with the same issues we

were discussing with the girls. In January of this year, I started Worth It with Katy. In addition to blogging about my own struggles with yo-yo dieting and binge eating on [worthitwithkaty.com](http://worthitwithkaty.com), I encourage others to ditch the "diet" food forever, and instead to nourish their bodies and find their happy, healthy weight. As a busy mom of two, I regularly post easy, simple,

and kid-approved recipes on a budget, and I use my experience as a Weight Watchers leader to promote weight loss through a healthy lifestyle. I also enrolled in the Institute for Integrative Nutrition to become a certified health coach. I currently offer monthly group support classes, and I coach clients one-on-one to reach their own health and weight-loss goals. Thanks to the impetus of Girls on the Run, I've now dedicated my life not only to coaching young girls like my daughter as they enter the daunting



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maze of adolescence, but to coaching grown women who, like me, are still in constant need of body-positive messages and desire peace with food and their bodies once and for all.

Katy Weber lives in Rosendale with her husband and two kids. You can find her at [www.worthit-withkaty.com](http://www.worthit-withkaty.com).

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