

GIH INSIDE *stories*

"Replication" Local Style: A Philadelphia Story

Adapting a program model that works in one place requires knowing which elements can be modified, which cannot, and how to line up home support.



Jose Ortega c/o thespot.com

"L.A. never has bad weather; we do," says Scott Baier, a running leader for Students Run Philly Style, a two-year-old program based on the stunningly successful, nearly two-decades-old Students Run L.A. Weather matters when you're training inner city middle- and high-school kids to run a marathon, something that less than 1 percent of the U.S. population has ever even tried. So does marathon timing—L.A.'s citywide run is in spring, allowing students enough time to prepare from

the start of the school year; Philly's is in November, requiring creative scheduling solutions. As well, L.A.'s terrain is flatter, more jogger-friendly than Philadelphia's.

What is Students Run L.A. (SRLA) and how did the idea on which it's based make its way 3,000 miles east in the first place? SRLA is a school-centered program that helps at-risk youth develop confidence and discipline by training after school for that city's marathon. Key to the

program's success are the teachers who serve as team running leaders. Often non-runners themselves, they train and race alongside students rather than blow a whistle from the sidelines. Since the program began in 1989, more than 30,000 students have participated. Currently about 165 schools and more than 400 teachers and 3,000 kids a year are involved. Some 98 percent of students who start the L.A. Marathon complete it, 95 percent of seniors who run it graduate from high school,

and of these, 90 percent go to college. Trickle-down effects, based on anecdotal evidence, include obesity reduction and improved nutrition that sometimes have extended to runners' families, about 70 percent of whom are Hispanic. Although the program's original concept was simply to give students from some of Los Angeles's unsafe neighborhoods an opportunity to set a goal and achieve it, the health benefits that accrue to participants dovetail nicely with national efforts to curb childhood obesity by getting kids moving.

In 2003 Susan Sherman, president and CEO of Philadelphia's Independence Foundation, observed the SRLA program in action during a site visit at Grantmakers In Health's (GIH) annual meeting. What she saw excited her. She brought the idea back to Philly—not to the school district, but to the National Nursing Centers Consortium (NNCC), a longstanding Independence Foundation grantee. The NNCC is an association of nurse-managed community health centers with 190 member centers nationwide and ten in Philadelphia. The running program fit well with the organization's public health mission. Located in medically underserved neighborhoods, Philly's NNCC member centers provide primary care, conduct health promotion, disease prevention, and after-school programs. With Sherman's encouragement, and the Independence Foundation as the local funding partner, the NNCC applied to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) Local Initiative Funding Partners (LIFP) program for a grant to adapt the SRLA model to Philadelphia. The four-year grant, awarded in July 2004, totals \$495,000, and is partially matched by \$200,000 from the Independence Foundation and a string of small grants from other local sources.

Not Like Baking A Cake

"I knew from visiting the L.A. site that we would be an adaptation, not a

replication," recalls Sherman, speaking on a panel at GIH's 2007 annual meeting in Miami. Marsha Charney, SRLA executive director, agrees that the program she's been with since day one can't be replicated in a "cookie-cutter way." In fact, the LIFP program funded Philly's running project to find out what was different about doing it out of the school district and on the East Coast, says Pauline Seitz, LIFP director. Students Run LA was not new to RWJF. The funder had been supporting SRLA since 1998—first via an LIFP grant to expand the high school program to middle schoolers, then in 2003 through a second grant to support SRLA's creation of a tool kit that other cities could use to spread the program, and in 2005 to help SRLA

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develop a business plan to market the tool kits. All involved argue that a horizontal model spread is not an all-or-nothing thing—local adaptations are always needed. "We didn't want to enforce a model but to advance a concept," says Seitz.

That concept was then put into the hands of an NNCC staffer who was tailor-made to get the program, and Philly's youth, up and running. Heather McDanel, a 37-year-old mother and seven-time marathon runner with a public health degree, was working part-time at home on other NNCC projects when her employers realized she had the perfect credentials for the program director's job. She was passionate about working with local city youth, ardent about running, and familiar with Philly's at-risk communities. By the end of July 2004, McDanel was back in the office as the full-time head of what would be called Students Run Philly Style (SRPS).

"Replication is about reproducing results, not programs," says Geri Summerville, senior vice president for program development, management, and replication at Public/Private Ventures in Philadelphia. If you haven't identified the components that led to the model's results, you are not going to have the same level of success moving the model elsewhere. What are the core components without which results cannot be replicated? Where is the flexibility in the model that allows you to transplant it from one location to another? These are the key questions to ask before replicating anything.

McDanel knew the core ingredients to program success, in L.A.'s experience: passionate leaders to make the program happen, kids' consistent access to

committed mentor-running leaders who trained with them, youths willing to enter the program, school administration support, acceptance by marathon and other race coordinators, and business sponsorship. The SRLA did not roll out its tool kit until fall 2004, but over the summer McDanel and staff had immediately begun corresponding by phone and e-mail with SRLA's coordinators, and a month into the grant she and two staff flew to Los Angeles to learn about the model firsthand. At the same time that McDanel was seeking advice from the L.A. program, she and colleagues were starting to put together their own logic model, trying to figure out, "How are we going to do it here, what will it look like, what are the pieces that we need to put in place?"

The NNCC staff knew from their community work that any program's success rests on a complex infrastruc-

ture that must be built up over time. They knew that adapting a program model from across the country, even one as seemingly simple as SRLA, is not a linear process—not like baking a cake, in the words of Susan Sherman. They knew that even when you have a straightforward concept, you can't predict the availability of local ingredients until you start shopping around for them. They knew that they had the wherewithal, at least in theory, to put into place the core elements that contributed to L.A.'s success. They also knew that SRPS would be altering the tenor of one key element by basing the running teams in neighborhoods rather than solely in schools. Would doing so erode the model in some crucial way, thereby compromising the results? Philly's story is still unfolding, but so far it looks like the alteration might contribute to the program's success in the Philadelphia context. Which is not to say that SRPS does not need the schools, because it does.

Varying A Key Element

L.A.'s model sprouted from schools. A high school social studies teacher running the Los Angeles Marathon in 1986 came up with the idea and, by 1990, two other teachers had transformed the concept into a school districtwide program. Basing the program in the schools works, says Marsha Charney, because of the daily access that kids have to their teacher/running leaders. "These are not necessarily athletic coaches. These are math teachers, English teachers, science teachers. They help provide a different attitude on the part of students when it comes to what or who a teacher is."

From inception, the Students Run Philly Style staff were not school-based, but used the NNCC's neighborhood connections to spread the word about the program and recruit youth and running leaders. Philadelphia is a city of strong neighborhoods whose residents often don't venture far from

home. A prominent Baptist church, nursing centers, after-school programs, and city recreation centers were all part of the marketing picture. Program staff found it especially effective to involve parents as running leaders and race volunteers—parents who, says McDanel, work a lot and have complicated lives, but "when you ask them to come, they come in full force" and then get their friends and neighbors to join in. Although the city's schools are known to be troubled, NNCC staff wanted them to be part of the implementation plan, says McDanel, because teachers are there and "it's a natural." The program had a partnership with the school district's office of physical education. NNCC staff pounded a lot of school pavement the first year, meeting with principals, teachers, and

visibility but aren't enough. Marathoner McDanel also put time into explaining the program to the local running community so that when joggers saw SRPS kids training on Kelly Drive and at the races they would cheer for them. Some competitive runners initially withheld support for the program out of safety concerns. McDanel explained that thousands of kids in L.A. had been running races for years without injury, and that, like some of those kids, Philly's young runners were more at risk of being victims of violence on their way home from school than they were of getting injured from running.

The case had to be made locally, nonetheless. "You can tell people, 'look, it worked in L.A. for 18 years,' but you have to show it works here," says SRPS youth coordinator Amalia Petherbridge.

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after-school programs. But these meetings had not sparked school interest in the program, nor, therefore, had they produced school-level running teams. So staff counted instead on the steam they were gathering outside the schools.

The program added to that steam, in McDanel's view, by building relationships with key supporting actors. Getting technical assistance and moral support from people involved with the original model is crucial—McDanel and others attended the L.A. program's two-day teacher-leader training conferences, and L.A. staff came to SRPS's initial kick-off event. But any project has to build its own local support system. So McDanel went at it. Helped by communications training arranged by RWJF, staff came up with a pithy program statement and the SRPS motto, "Go Farther!" They developed media contacts, having found that kids are the best way to broadcast program

"Saying 18 kids in Philly ran it last year is more effective than saying that 2,500 kids ran it in L.A." Time has brought around most of Philly's running-world skeptics, as they have seen SRPS kids at the races. "These are kids who when you cheer for them, they literally light up," says McDanel. Her quest to get runners' blessing got a boost when the program hired as training advisor longtime, well-known running coach Dave Thomas from North Philadelphia, one of SRPS's target communities. And the program gained credibility among runners through its ties to Philadelphia Runner, a local retail store staffed and patronized by accomplished runners. The store had been supplying (and fitting SRPS kids with) running shoes and other gear at wholesale cost since the program began. Another key piece: McDanel cultivated relations with the city's race directors, who agreed to accommodate the program in various

ways on race days.

Still, staff did not line up all these pieces at once, and the momentum that their work created did not kick in immediately. At inception, program participant numbers were low. (Greater numbers of kids contribute to team spirit on running day and make for a more visible program.) It was easier than expected to secure sufficient numbers of committed running leaders from the neighborhoods, the local Baptist church, and eventually from the running community, but finding and keeping kids was more challenging. Programs of this kind are expected to start small, then grow along with visibility. SRPS's first crop of kids, 20 in all, had begun training in March 2005 and participated in Philly's November 2005 marathon day—two in the full marathon and the rest in the relay or 8K. In year two, when participation rose, but still not to desired levels, NNCC staff stepped up recruitment efforts, turning once again to the schools as a way to complement neighborhood-based participation. Although SRPS enjoyed the school system's general backing, that support had not translated into specific school-level interest, nor had program staff felt compelled to secure more robust school participation up to that point. Now, however, they did. McDanel decided to make a presentation about the program to a school reform commission meeting in November 2006.

Getting Schools On Board

"We had been trying to get on the reform commission chairman's radar screen," recalls McDanel, referring to her renewed efforts to recruit school teams. He had been supportive, but the program did not seem to be high on his agenda. As staff were giving their presentation, commission chairman Paul Vallas interrupted. "I've heard a lot about you; I think what you do is great," McDanel recounts his saying. "Talk to so-and-so from the school

district at the back of the room before you leave." It just so happened that the mayor was at this gathering, as was a school reform commission member who knew of the program because she belonged to the church whose members had been serving as program running leaders. The 7,000-member Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church is a key community partner for SRPS. The summer before this meeting, church members had held a community walk-run/fundraiser stretching from their original sanctuary to a newly completed building. Participants wore white t-shirts that said Students Run Philly Style: Having taken pride in SRPS, the church had designated the program as its beneficiary of the donations that members made in honor of the occasion—\$38,000 in all. Thirty-five SRPS kids were there, as was the mayor, who had spoken to them.

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By the time McDanel got back to her office, the people that she had a relationship with at the physical education office had already shot her emails expressing renewed interest in helping. McDanel feels that the catalyst was Vallas's and others' public endorsement of the program at the commission gathering. "We got very lucky that all the right people were there," McDanel says about the event that triggered the turnaround in school interest. As well, she feels the timing was right. The powers that be probably would not have paid attention to SRPS during its first year, she believes, "because we did not have a story to tell" then.

After that she was able to get on more agendas at school meetings. And she gained more traction by hiring Fred Rosenfeld, a 37-year teacher and coach

in Philly schools, as a program consultant. His familiarity with the schools has been a real asset. He knows people in the room, says McDanel. "When we go to [school] meetings now," says McDanel, "he and I go together."

The pay-off has been large. At SRPS's 2007 kick-off event on a Saturday in early March, four months after the school reform commission meeting, 275 kids forming 22 teams showed up. About half the teams are school-based and half are neighborhood-based. Even if only an estimated 175 young runners remain by marathon time—attrition is expected—the numbers will be almost six times higher than the previous year's. Pulling the schools into the program was "pretty important," says McDanel, though time to develop more community relationships and produce more neighborhood running teams also fueled the surge. She likes

the neighborhood-school mix. Aiming for sustainable program participation, staff do not want to put all their eggs in any one basket.

Facing Local Challenges

SRPS's school contacts were initially weaker than its community network. How staff overcame that weakness illustrates the combination of local strategy and community ducks that need to be lined up behind any program—transplanted model or not—to propel it forward. Philly's running program coordinators have also had to make other adjustments to accommodate differences between the L.A. and Philly environments—marathon timing being one.

Because of cold weather and the fact that Philly's marathon is the

Sunday before Thanksgiving, not in the spring, SRPS traditionally has started training kids in March. They run the ten-mile Blue Cross Broad Street Run and other shorter races, and continue some training through the summer until the big day in November. But McDanel is planning to transition the



training schedule to the school-year calendar by recruiting a new batch of kids in September 2007. It's hard to maintain teenagers' interest through the summer, and she has found that the repeater kids, not the first-year runners, are more likely to run the marathon. Lengthening the training period to 18 months, from September of one year to November the next, will allow kids more time to prepare. Since youth respond better to short-term incentives, however, the program has set interim goals. Fall training will lead to the half-marathon or 8 K held on marathon day in November; spring training will culminate in the May Broad Street Run. Those who opt to run the full marathon will do long-distance training over the summer.

Other local hurdles for the Philly

program: selling a program that staff had no experience doing before, for one, and selling it to a population unaccustomed to long distance running. SRPS target areas are 99 percent African American. "Running off a track, running sprints, and other sports like football and basketball are familiar in those communities," says McDanel. "The idea of running long distances was not part of the culture," so educating them about it took time.

Then there's the question of financial support. Both the L.A. and Philly program directors note that passion rather than gobs of money are needed to start a program of this kind. Steady funds are required, however, to keep it up. A dearth of sizeable, locally based corporations has posed challenges for NNCC staff seeking to raise funds to meet the LIFP grant's year-four match requirements. SRPS so far has benefited from other local foundation support and a patchwork of small grants from local banks and companies. Alex Lehr, NNCC's grant development manager, would love to secure corporate sponsorship, but knows that will take time. And public funding is unlikely for now, he says, because of competing demands on the city's budget and the fact that the city is in an election year. Down the road, if SRPS can show health effects on a large sample size, he hopes to attract some level of city, state, or even federal support.

Going Farther

While grappling with the need to find more funding, SRPS is encountering some unexpected benefits from the local milieu, the program's current small scale, and from being under the NNCC umbrella. Unlike L.A., Philadelphia has only three or four optimal running places. The program often uses those areas to train running teams together. This has proved to be a powerful motivator for kids who prefer running in numbers and who love meeting peers from outside their

own neighborhoods, something they don't usually get to do. "I'm not sure we could do that if we had 2,500 kids," says McDanel. The NNCC's nursing link has also come in handy: SRPS kids can go to any of the NNCC's four participating nurse centers to get, for free, the physical required to participate in the program. The Philly program has also drawn on another important asset—its universities. The DVD that documents SRPS's 2006 season and is used for marketing was produced by a Temple University community collaborative. Temple physical therapy students volunteer their services for SRPS runners on race day, and Temple faculty are conducting program data analysis.

Having witnessed L.A.'s success in reducing obesity, a goal that was not part of L.A.'s original program concept, and because of the NNCC's public health bent, SRPS staff were spurred to build a health component into their program from the start, says Laura Line, NNCC's deputy executive director. To gauge effects on health, the program measures participants' pre- and post-program weight, height, body mass index, flexibility, and cardiovascular fitness. In the future, staff also hope to look at the program as a possible violence-reduction tool. A program like this, speculated an HIV/AIDS funder at GIH's 2007 annual meeting, could also potentially have positive effects on a range of adolescent behavior.

Will SRPS reap results as impressive as those of its L.A. cousin? Despite the fact that the program model has been shown to work in California, Philly has to produce its own outcomes before a verdict can be reached. Programs take time to build, let alone produce measurable results. It will take five years (Philly's now in its third) to make SRPS "a very specific and effective program in Philadelphia," predicts Susan Sherman. She believes that a funder entering this kind of project and hoping to

build something from scratch has to be prepared to put ten years worth of support behind it. McDanel is aware that the L.A. project did not take off overnight. Meanwhile, she feels that, with a few years under its belt, the program has already made a difference in kids' lives. Staff know this from the feedback they get from kids, parents, and running leaders. One young runner quit smoking, another dramatically improved her attitude toward school, another lost 35 pounds. The nutrition education built into the program may be influencing kids, but importantly, they are learning firsthand that they run better when they eat a healthy breakfast rather than a bag of potato chips, when they ignore the free ribs being given out at a race's sidelines. The formal evaluation built into the LIFP grant is expected to show in year two what program staff have already witnessed—jumps in self-esteem, grades, school attendance, and graduation rates.

Ultimately it is the stories about how the program is transforming individual youths' lives that are going to move potential sponsors, says McDanel. L.A.'s moving program video, part of the SRLA tool kit, lets kids tell their own stories. It was, after all, an individual student who convinced Philly running leader Scott Baier to join the program to begin with. Baier

teaches health and nutrition and writes curricula at a high school in West Philly. "I hate running," says the thin, sandy-haired, thirty-four-year-old who majored in English and history. "But I tell my students it's got a lot of benefits and I can commiserate with them." He was skeptical about the program when his school principal sent NNCC staff his way to ask him to form a school running team. He'd been in public education for six years, and had seen many initiatives start and fail. Baier only agreed to join the program because a student approached him. "I really want to do this," he says she told him. "So I said if you promise to stick with it, I'll do it." They both completed the marathon—she, at sixteen, in fine shape by the end, he hobbling on hurt ankles. In the second year other kids asked to run with him, including several whom Baier did not expect to be able to keep up with the rigorous training regimen due to overweight or volatile home lives. They proved him wrong, which for many kids is the point—to show the world and themselves that they can defy the odds against them.

Philadelphia is not the only city interested in the SRLA model. As of early 2007, SRLA had sent 83 tool kits to cities in 26 states, the District of Columbia, and Canada. Augusta,

Maine, and Poughkeepsie, New York, are receiving active technical assistance (TA) from SRLA staff. Start up is likely in Phoenix and Louisville. Colorado Springs and Des Moines are eager but moving slowly, says Marsha Charney, and Seattle has established a program without TA from her office. The Health Foundation of South Florida is interested in supporting a program in the Miami area, but is watching the progress of an unfunded pilot begun by two high schools before it will commit funding. (For the SRLA-produced tool kit, contact Kristine Breese, ksbreese@aol.com. For more about SRLA, see www.srla.org, and for more about SRPS, see www.nncc.us/programs/programs_runphilly.html.)

People in other locales who pick up the idea will likely find themselves, like NNCC staff, adjusting the model to work for their city. What Philadelphia's experience shows is that key ingredients cannot be tampered with—for instance, any program will need school involvement to be able to recruit a critical mass of participants. But there is wiggle room in the channels through which running teams are formed and where the program is organizationally based. The SRLA model in Washington, D.C., for example, is connecting to area high schools through George Washington University (GWU). The university's interest was sparked by one individual—a staff member in the GWU student activities center who happened to read about SRLA in *Runner's World* magazine. University officials are helping to build links to the D.C. government, and GWU students and staff will serve as program marathon running leaders.

As for weather conditions suitable for marathon training, those can't be changed from city to city, but young people seem to be able to adjust. On a Tuesday in early March, one of Philly's coldest days of the year, according to Scott Baier, fifty-five kids showed up for after-school practice.



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