

# Go Girls! program addresses needs of young ladies

By Melanie Hennessey  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It's Tuesday afternoon at St. Peter School and a small group of girls have gathered in the gym. Some laugh and jump rope, while one sits off to the side quietly talking to a mentor about a problem she's having.

It's this mix of fun and seriousness that's typical of the Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds program — an initiative that supports local young ladies aged 12 to 14 with the emotional, social and cultural issues they face and promotes healthy, active living.

The seven-session program is led by female college and university mentors. It has been offered by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton at St. Peter and W.I. Dick schools in Milton since January and was showcased Tuesday to let residents know about the good it's doing.

"I think it helps a lot for girls our age," said Kaisie, one of the Go Girls! participants. "You get to ask questions (of the mentors) and get answers. It also feels good doing active things."

Fellow Go Girls! member Erin shared similar sentiments. "For me, it's about opening up your heart about anything you want to talk about, like self esteem and friends," she said. "It's just really a lot of fun."

The program ends up being equally rewarding for the mentors, like local resident Betty Petrov.

Like the girls, she said she really enjoys the physical activity Go Girls! brings.

"It's good they're learning it's all about having fun and not so much about competition," she said.

The 26-year-old said she also likes the open and honest talks she has with the girls.

"They can ask me whatever they want, and I'm glad to answer questions I didn't have anyone to ask (when I was their age)," Petrov said.

A typical session in the Go Girls! program involves a mix of discussing topics on the girls' minds, physical activity and a healthy snack.

According to local Go Girls! co-ordinator Kate Lockwood, the program truly does work in addressing the



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**GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN:** From left, Sammi, Erin, Alysia, Kaisie, Katie and Michelle are Go Girls! participants.

needs of young ladies.

"It's an opportunity to intervene and set them on a more positive road," she said.

She explained Go Girls! offers different kinds of coping strategies to help the girls deal with issues as they arise, such as worries about weight or pressure to get involved with drugs.

Lockwood described the program as the "total package," since it provides physical activity, mentorship and the support of a peer group.

"Young women need as much encouragement and support as they can get," she remarked.

St. Peter School principal Elizabeth Gurowka said she thinks the program is important for the girls when it comes to things like self-awareness and how they interact with others.

She also spoke about the success of the program at her school.

"I think the proof is in the pudding," she said. "They keep coming back week after week."

Funding for the Go Girls! program in Milton is provided by Cogeco.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at [mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com](mailto:mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com).

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