

HEHD 8040 Assessment and Evaluation of Run Hard Running Teams

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Assessment and Evaluation Plan

Introduction

Run Hard Running Team (Run Hard) is a program that is implemented by Crossover Athletics, a non-profit youth-serving organization based out of Lexington, South Carolina. Being an avid runner, Jesse Harmon developed Run Hard as a means to use running and endurance principles to teach life skills to students in grades two through eight. The program has a spring and fall season and meets afterschool two days a week to train students to complete a 5K race at the end of the season. Students are taken through an eight-week curriculum that pairs a weekly running skill with a life skill. Students experience the effort that is required to complete an endurance task while also being taught the effort that is required to build and maintain positive character. Run Hard focuses on nine core areas of character development by completing weekly objectives. The nine core areas are positive peer pressure, perseverance, wise choices, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, honesty, respect, and honor. At the end of the eight-week season, runners compete in the Run Hard 5K with an optional adult running buddy. The race is officially timed and awards are given to top participants.

In 2015, Run Hard served over 2,000 students in six states. Additionally, Run Hard partners with over fifty elementary schools and three homeschool groups. The program cost is \$85 per student with some scholarships available based on family income. Volunteer runners in the community teach weekly afterschool sessions. New curriculum is created each season so that runners do not repeat the curriculum if they complete all fourteen seasons of the program. In addition to awards for placing in the 5K, runners are also given badges for each season they successfully complete.

Description of the Problem

Run Hard Running Teams are built on the concept of helping students to improve, not only as endurance athletes, but also in the nine character development areas. While Run Hard has built a curriculum around these nine core values, they do not seem to be well defined. Additionally, there is no evaluation mechanism to determine if students improve either in the amount of physical activity, or in the nine core areas because of the Run Hard program. While parents and students typically enjoy the program and attendance continues to increase, Run Hard needs to identify if their core mission of physical improvement and character development is being accomplished.

Stakeholders

Listed are the relevant stakeholders that will be influenced by the evaluation and the role that these stakeholders will play in the process. As I am a board member of Crossover Athletics, the parent organization of the Run Hard program, I will also include my relationship to the stakeholders.

- Crossover Board Members
 - Crossover Board Members that lead the Run Hard staff are dedicated to the success of the program and gain satisfaction from its successful implementation in the lives of the participants. They receive no monetary incentive and will not participate in the evaluation process beyond approving its implementation. I serve on this board.
- Run Hard Staff
 - The Run Hard staff has a monetary incentive for the program to be successful and to have more children participate and have positive experiences. These stakeholders will assist in making sure that the volunteer staff implements the

necessary system to collect the data for the evaluation. These staff members receive programmatic and administrative direction from me on a regular basis and look to me for leadership.

- Run Hard Volunteers
 - Volunteers interact with parents and students about the success of the program on a regular basis. They would directly benefit from the perceived success, or lack thereof, of the program. These stakeholders will be asked to administer student surveys, implement the program, and evaluate the students using a survey. I typically have no programmatic interaction with these volunteers.
- Students/Participants
 - Participant stakeholders will be asked to participate in the program and complete evaluation surveys that measure the potential change based on the nine core values and amount of physical activity. I do not have any programmatic interaction with the participants, but I do attend the race and interact with them on a social level.
- Parents
 - Parents receive the potential benefit of healthier children and improved character skills. They also will be asked to complete a survey to measure their perceived change in character related to the nine core values and the amount of physical activity of the children. I only have social interaction with parents.
- School Staff and Administrators
 - These stakeholders hear the positive and negative reactions of parents and students in the Run Hard program. They have an incentive for the program to be

successful so that they do not incur additional administrative duties and lose relational capital with parents and participants. They will not play a role in the evaluation of the program.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation of the Run Hard Running Team is to determine if the current program structure is an effective means of combining life skills and athletic instruction to positively develop character and increase physical activity among elementary and middle school students. The evaluation conducted will be an outcome/impact evaluation. The goal of any social program is to bring about change and affect a social condition (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 2004). This evaluation will seek to determine if the program produces measurable change related to physical activity and the nine core values.

In an effort to determine if the program expectations are being met, a summative evaluation will be conducted. A summary evaluation is intended to make a summary judgment on the program's performance (Rossi et al., 2004).

There may be multiple consequences based on the findings of the evaluation. First, we may find that the program is performing as expected. This outcome could be used as a marketing tool to increase participation and allow Run Hard to impact more students in more schools. It could also be used as a staff recruitment tool. If the findings suggest that the program is not meeting expectations, volunteer coaches and staff may become frustrated and think that they are wasting their time by participating in the program. The board would be forced to decide what steps should be taken to rectify the problem. No matter the outcome, we may want to assess the program in a formative manner to see how we can improve, which could lead to better

curriculum, more training, and improved program implementation. All of these outcomes could potentially raise program expenses, which would have an organizational impact.

Guiding Questions

Included below is a set of guiding questions that the evaluation intends to address, based on the intended outcome of the program.

1. How do youth measure in the following core areas: positive peer pressure, perseverance, wise choices, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, honesty, respect, and honor before and after participating in the Run Hard Running Team?
2. Are Run Hard Running Teams an effective means for teaching character development?
3. Are age and gender factors in how youth measure in the following core areas: positive peer pressure, perseverance, wise choices, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, honesty, respect, and honor before and after participating in the Run Hard Running Team?

Literature Review

A large amount of interest exists surrounding the issue of character development in sports-based programming. The following section will frame the nature of the current research on this topic. Character development has been defined as the “general approach to the dilemmas and responsibilities of social life, a responsiveness to the world that is supported by emotional reactions to the distress of others, the acquisition of prosocial skills, knowledge of social conventions and construction of personal values” (Killen & Hart, 1995). The purpose of character development in this evaluation is to measure the change in character traits or outcomes that effect character development related to the above definition.

While researchers acknowledge numerous claims that physical activity and athletic programming promote positive youth development (Wright & Li, 2009), many of these claims

are anecdotal and lacking a basis in research. These claims typically fall into three categories, “personal character development, reforming at-risk populations, and fostering social capital leading to future occupational success and civic engagement” (Coalter, 2007). It is claimed that participation in sports has a positive impact on youth because it creates motor and sport-specific skills convertible into physical capital, improves health, fitness, and an overall sense of physical well-being, increases self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive body image, and builds character in the form of discipline, teamwork, and responsibility (Coakley, 2011). While it may be difficult to determine if the assumptions regarding sports-based youth development are based in fact, there is a growing body of research surrounding the relationship of athletic programs and character development.

In 2008, researchers studied to determine if involvement on a high school soccer team could impact life skill development (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008). While the study showed that the youth were impacted, the impact was mostly related to the style of the coach who was intentional about involving the team in decision-making processes and modeled relationship building. The researchers noted that students tended to create their own opportunities for development, rather than the development being part of a structured curriculum or design. This tends to support more general claims that just spending time with a dedicated youth development professional has character development benefits. However, this claim is difficult to measure and not easily reproducible.

Another study examined the impact of an urban sports program whose goal was character development and life skill development in youth (Bean, Whitley, & Gould, 2014). The researchers were interested in what ways participants perceived that they were influenced by their program involvement, in relation to life lessons they had learned. In this study, 13 females

and 10 males were assessed, using a qualitative interview guide. Results showed that participants indicated that they were able to transfer the lessons they had learned in the athletic program to areas such as school or relationships.

In the UK, government agencies have begun to increase funding for sports-based programming, with the assumption that these programs can offer some social benefits. These agencies are seeking to re-engage disaffected youth to minimize their anti-social effects on society and change their life-path. Recognizing this trend, researchers sought to identify key issues that should be addressed when developing sports-based programming to re-engage these youth (Sandford, Armour, & Warmington, 2006). The team felt there should be a means of evaluation due to the amount of funding for these programs and the expectation that the organizations reach desired outcomes. The key issues that were identified are:

1. Re-evaluate current practices
2. Recognize the significance of social relationships
3. The need to create a sense of community
4. Employ a multi-agency approach
5. Build a sound structure to ensure sustainability
6. Incorporate credible monitoring and evaluation

This research identifies many relevant themes that pertain to sports-based youth development. Most notably, there is a significant plea for evaluation and sustainability, which are lacking components in many youth development programs.

In 2016, researchers conducted a group-randomized study of physical education programs. One of their goals was to verify if incorporating a life skills program into a physical education program would show a gain in life skills and executive function. The study compared

ninety students, ages 14-15 years, that participated in either a traditional physical education program or one that included a life skills component. Students were evaluated before and after intervention on life skills such as communication, problem solving, decision-making, and self-regulation. The team determined that including life skills training in a sports education context did produce a positive increase in life skills among participants (Pesce et al., 2016).

Very little research addresses how age or gender may be correlated with the success of character development in sports-based programs. However, some research has addressed the effects of age and gender on life skills development in non sports-based programs. For instance, in 2015, researchers examined the effects of age, gender, and 4-H involvement on life skills development for youth (Haas, Mincemoyer, & Perkins, 2015). Through regression analysis, researchers determined that age and gender influenced life skills development in the 4-H program. Females showed a higher level of life skills competency before program involvement and were also more likely to show change in this area during the program.

Gaps in Knowledge

1. While some studies report positive outcomes, some of the sample sizes are fairly small. It would be beneficial to know if these outcomes are consistent with studies of larger groups.
2. Many youth development programs that attempt to teach character development skills are located in urban areas where there is an assumed lack of positive youth development among the population. It would be interesting to determine if youth in rural areas would respond similarly to youth in urban areas in relation to increases in character development in a sports-based program.

3. Some programs that have been studied to investigate a connection between character development and sports programs are not intentionally teaching character development as part of a curriculum. While some of these programs show an impact on character development, researching programs that include character development in a set curriculum could add insight to this body of research.
4. More research is needed to determine if factors such as age and gender effect character development in a sports-based program that is designed to teach character development as part of the curriculum. Research has shown that age and gender effect life skill development in other program types, but there is little research regarding these effects in sports-based programming.

Focus Area and Variables

This evaluation will focus on whether teaching character development in a sports context is beneficial to youth. Also, the evaluation will address whether age and gender impacts character development in a sports-based program. Finally, the evaluation will compare the outcomes of urban youth in sports-based character development programs and rural youth in similar programs.

Population

This evaluation will use, for its population, students in grades 2-8, both male and female, who participate in the Run Hard Running Teams in the greater Columbia, SC area. These students attend forty schools in 9 school districts of varying socioeconomic status. The Run Hard Running Team program will provide access to the students, coaches, and administrators to assist in the evaluation. There are 840 participants and the organization has the resources

to survey 100 participants. Using systematic sampling, a skip factor of 8 ($840/100=8.4$) is established, resulting in a sample size of 105 ($840/8=105$).

Data Gathering Techniques

The Run Hard Running Teams meet after school twice weekly for 8 weeks and once more for a 5K road race on the first Saturday after completing the 8-week program. To gather the data for program evaluation, Run Hard will add an additional afterschool session that will take place during the first usual practice day after the 5K race is completed. The data will be a post-test only survey to be completed by all participants of the Run Hard Running Teams program.

Parental consent will be obtained during program registration. The standard waiver used by Run Hard Running Teams will not be modified, however, an additional area of consent will be added so that parents can choose whether or not their child participates in the survey.

Approximately 90% of parents register their children online, while the remaining 10% use paper forms. Both methods of registration will be modified to include the additional consent section.

Evaluation Resources

A Run Hard board member will direct the evaluation. The Run Hard volunteer coach at each individual school will administer the survey. Desks are available for use at all of the locations. The area director will be responsible for gathering and distributing supplies for each of the schools. These supplies will be distributed to the coaches at the mandatory coaches meeting at the beginning of the season. Supplies will include surveys, written instructions, a list of students whose parents have consented to participate, pencils, a folder, and two binder clips. Run Hard will provide administrative support to compile the survey results, as directed by the evaluator. Results will be distributed electronically.

Training

Volunteer coaches will be trained on how to administer the survey at the mandatory coaches meeting. Coaches will be given written instructions on how to administer the survey along with text that they can read to the students as they distribute the survey.

Evaluation Instrument Reliability and Validity

The main instrument used for evaluation will be the *Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development*, developed by the Colorado Trust. The outcomes in this toolkit were “based on a synthesis of research on surveys used to measure assets and positive youth development in the United States; a review of the positive youth development literature; the logic models from 35 ASI grantees; and surveys and focus groups with youth-serving programs” (The Colorado Trust, 2004). These surveys were then tested in four after school programs that serve a diverse population of youth, ages 8 through 15 years. The survey questions measure 45 youth outcomes that comprise 8 outcome sets. Those sets are academic success, arts and recreation, community involvement, cultural competency, life skills, positive life choices, positive core values, and sense of self. It has been determined that these outcomes correlate well with the outcomes being evaluated for the Run Hard Running Teams.

Each outcome domain in the toolkit was evaluated using a reliability analysis to determine the internal consistency of the outcomes. Internal consistency is how well the different questions measure the same concept. The outcome domains used in the toolkit all have an alpha coefficient of .74 or greater, while .70 is typically required before a scale is widely used. Individual alpha coefficients for each outcome domain can be found in Appendix A.

The survey will be quantitative with fixed-response options and will not exceed two pages. The surveys to be administered were developed to be age appropriate for students from fourth to ninth grade with little help from an adult administrator. Run Hard participants in fourth

through eighth grade will read the survey individually and answer questions on their own with the opportunity to ask questions to the coach for clarification. However, since Run Hard Running Teams begin in second grade, surveys will be administered differently for second and third grade students. These students will use an answer sheet to fill in responses, but the questions will be read aloud by the coach. Questions will be encouraged to be asked aloud, so that the rest of the group can benefit from the responses.

Cultural bias in survey questions was considered during the survey development. Attempts were made to limit cultural bias and questions were tested on students of differing ethnicities to help decrease this bias. The Run Hard Running Teams that will be evaluated in Lexington, SC are predominately white, middle class children. A sample of life skills survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

A simple linear regression analysis, used to examine the impact of one independent variable on an outcome, will be performed to determine if there is a relationship between age and the change in outcome of specific character development. Also a t-test, used to determine statistical differences between two groups, will be performed to evaluate the relationship between gender (male/female) and character development outcomes. These tests will be important in determining if the program has the intended effect on all ages and genders that participate in the program or if modifications need to be made based on those factors.

Limitations and Barriers to Successful Completion

Age. As mentioned above, one barrier to completion could be the age of the participants. However, modifying the way the test is administered should be helpful in minimizing this issue.

Post-Test Only. A post-test only design was chosen based on the Flowchart for Selecting Post-only or Pre-post Evaluation Design, which can be found in Appendix C. The main factor for

choosing post-test only was the age and literacy of the participants. Using a post-test only survey is considered to be a weaker method of evaluation because it allows for a greater chance to introduce bias and to promote more positive responses from the participants. However, since the participants will be providing responses for the first time, they will not be influenced by an earlier assessment, which should make their responses more credible. Additionally, as the evaluation tool states, “post-only allows respondents to use their internal gauge to assess change rather than requiring that change be calculated by simple math” (The Colorado Trust, 2004).

3-Point Scale. Generally, a five- or seven-point scale is preferred over a three-point scale, due to the fact that higher point scales offer greater differentiation in response. Having greater differentiation in response would allow for the discovery of more variation. However, measuring change using a pre-post format requires more response scale points to be sensitive enough to measure change, making its use more difficult with participants of younger ages or lower literacy levels who are better served by 3-point scales.

Survey Completion. Another barrier to successful completion is encouraging the participants to attend the final meeting after they have completed the 5K. As an incentive for participants to attend, the final school-specific overall awards will be given out on the day of the survey. This should encourage attendance because participants are typically very excited for the awards and will not want to miss the opportunity to receive one.

Parental Consent. Finally, obtaining parental consent may be a barrier for successful completion. Evaluators will need to focus on explaining the benefit of participation during the consent process and encourage the parents to assist in helping Run Hard improve.

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Appendix A

Reliability of Toolkit Domains

Domain Scale/Domain	Number of Items	Alpha Coefficient
Program quality		
Attractive and meaningful activities	6	.78
Supportive positive adult relationships	9	.91
Safe and trusting environment	6	.84
Academic success		
Grade improvement	4	.87
Skill improvement	4	.74
School engagement, involvement	8	.88
Arts and recreation		
Arts and crafts	3	.81
Music, dance and theatre	3	.87
Sports and recreation	3	.81
Community involvement	5	.88
Cultural competency		
Respect, comfort, knowledge of other cultures (advanced)	5	.89
Respect, comfort, and knowledge of other cultures (basic)	3	.83
Knowledge, interest, sense of belonging, pride in one's culture	5	.92
Life skills		
Friendship and communication	5	.86
Decisionmaking, planning and leadership	6	.85
Positive life choices		
Restraint from delinquent behavior	7	.92
Positive core values	6	.88
Sense of self	6	.88

Appendix B

Sample of Life Skills Survey Questions

Life Skills

Because I participated in Run Hard Running Teams...		YES	KIND OF	NOT REALLY
a.	I get along better with other people my age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.	I am better at making friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.	I am better at listening to other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.	I make better decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.	I am better at solving problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.	I am more of a leader	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C

Flowchart for Selecting Post-only or Pre-post Evaluation Design

The flow chart below is designed to guide staff in determining whether a post-only or a pre-post method would work best for their after-school program and participants. It provides one framework for determining evaluation design, however, programs may choose to adjust the order to fit their needs.

