

YRP aims to get students running for their mental health



By Jake Courtepatte

The amount of mental pressure placed on a teenage girl's shoulders can often be overwhelming: the search for a job path, their physical appearance, and their social anxieties.

With the increasing amount of information coming to light linking physical wellness and mental wellness, the York Regional Police (YRP) are looking to lighten that burden by getting students' feet moving.

The YRP officially kicked off the 'Run For It?' program at their Aurora headquarters last Tuesday, a six-week initiative aimed at reaching 150 female students across the region with the help of over a dozen volunteer female police officers.

It may seem like a lofty goal, but now in its second year, the program has seen an increase from three participating schools in 2015 to eighteen in 2016.

'Physical exercise not only helps your body image and respiratory health, but it also has an amazing effect on your mental and emotional sides,' said the YRP's Carolyn Bishop at the kickoff. 'We're trying to bring that to these young women, to provide them some resiliency, and a space for comradery to work on themselves within a group.'

The students will get the opportunity to meet with the YRP's female volunteers twice a week to talk about mental health, healthy eating, stress, and finally, to run.

Though a mental health program thinly veiled by a physical aspect, there is still an end goal: participation in, and completion of, Unionville's five-kilometre Shoppers Drug Mart Run for Women on May 7. Programs have been laid out to allow for proper training techniques to learn to run properly.

'When the officers run with these girls, they will not only be working with them to reach their running goals, but if they want to share something with them, they are there to listen. Part of being a police officer is to be able to help with mental issues.'

Bev Erdenberger, representing Aurora's Running Room location, which is heavily involved in the program, said many girls struggle with five-kilometres at the beginning of the program. The end result, however, is worth the effort.

'It's a mental health program with a running component to it. The two go hand-in-hand. The feeling these students will get when they cross that finish line in May is something intangible.'

All proceeds of the event in May go to assisting mental health programs at Markham-Stouffville Hospital.