LONG-RUN RESULTS

The center’s research web stretches across the country, but its work has been vital to local, community-based organizations such as Starfinder Foundation for youth soccer, Back on My Feet, and Students Run Philly Style, an urban youth mentorship program that uses running to show children they can achieve the seemingly unachievable—everything from lowering their body mass indexes to succeeding in the classroom and running a marathon.

“The idea behind Students Run Philly Style is that after students achieve a seemingly unattainable goal once, the pattern can continue indefinitely,” said director and founder Heather McDanel. Students Run Philly Style has 50 teams training for various road races, including an optional marathon. Since 2004, the organization has worked with more than 2,000 students, and thanks to the SIRC partnership, the group knows just how strong an impact it is having.

“I understood at the gut level the power of what we were trying to do,” McDanel said, but before the SIRC partnership she could only explain the life-changing power through anecdotes.

One student became a Gates Millennium Scholar because she wrote her application essay about running mile 23 of a marathon. Another earned a full ride to Drexel University because the university was impressed by the dedication he showed in running a full marathon.

After joining forces with SIRC, McDanel and Students Run Philly Style have concrete evidence of just how powerful the organization can be. SIRC’s research focused on areas such as academic outcomes and how central running is to the students—an indicator of whether exercising will be a long-term behavior.

“One of the hardest pieces to ever show is this academic impact, and by working with SIRC, we were able to show that our students moved from Cs and Ds to As and Bs,” McDanel said. “I knew it was happening, but we weren’t ever able to show it.”

Aubrey Kent, School of Tourism chair and founding director of SIRC, said the work SIRC does for nonprofits is needs-based.

“If we weren’t doing it, it wouldn’t be getting done,” he said.

Students Run Philly Style has been able to report these findings to its board members, stakeholders and donors.

“We’ve had a really positive experience, being able to work through the pieces of the program evaluation that I was interested in and having the knowledge and expertise of the people at SIRC who have the methods to do that,” McDanel said.

McDanel started working with SIRC after she met Jordan at a running event. A natural partnership evolved.

“I think the reason I respect him is he really has a handle on the role of the academic partners and the role of the community partners,” she said.

“It wasn’t just an academic question being asked. This was about the kids we were working with. This was about the families we were working with, and he always got that. I always really enjoyed working with him because of that.”

For Jordan, understanding each organization or event is central to the partnerships.

“I think it helps Temple be a partner in the community and not just an ivory tower where education and research take place,” he said.

Jordan said he finds it interesting to see the work of different community groups put in action and hopes SIRC is contributing to Temple’s mission to impact the community.

In some cases the research center fills a void for small organizations like Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis & Education or Zhang Sah Martial Arts that may not have the staff to dedicate to in-depth research. But working with small organizations can pose a challenge.

“They are very interested in working with us, but they’ve had to cut things, and sometimes research is seen as a luxury, so we’ve had to be creative in terms of our ability to work with them,” Jordan said.

A recent report by the Sport Industry Research Center (SIRC) for Students Run Philly Style analyzed key program components and the profile of participants. This report—using data from 533 participants between April 25 and May 5, 2012—in the first of four in an overall program assessment that seeks to track various outcomes of students over a single programmatic year.

COMMITMENT

95% of returning runners have been in the program at least three years.

84.6% agree or strongly agree that they are committed to the program.

70% of returning runners have been in the program at least four years.

ACADEMICS

3.59 Average GPA of program participants

81% had been absent from school no more than three days in the previous quarter.

74% had never threatened others in the past three months.

PASSION

91% strongly value the benefits of running.

57% run three or more times a week with the program.