

HOLLY MCQUEEN/THE REGISTER

Cindy Elsbernd, left, and Ellie Davenport, 16, of Des Moines' west side pass Greenwood Park while running with the See-Us Run Des Moines pilot program at Roosevelt High School. They were running with others in the program. Students and mentors have spent six months training for Sunday's Des Moines Marathon. Elsbernd is the program director.

Roosevelt's Kidstrong students train for marathon

Teens in the See Us Run Des Moines program are psyched up for Sunday's race.

By JANET KLOCKENGA
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See them run.

Several Roosevelt High School students have been training for six months to run in the 26.2-mile Des Moines Marathon on Sunday with a group called See Us Run Des Moines. Eight students plan to run the full marathon and five will run the half-marathon.

Cindy Elsbernd of the city's west side is founder of the organization Iowa Kidstrong and director of its See Us Run Des Moines program, a pilot program she started last spring with Roosevelt students.

"They're really putting in the miles and they're ready for Sunday," Elsbernd said. "There's been

See them run

Cindy Elsbernd of the nonprofit organization Iowa Kidstrong Inc. has coordinated a group of Roosevelt High School students who have been training all summer for the Des Moines Marathon on Sunday. To learn more about Iowa's Kidstrong See Us Run Des Moines, go to www.iowakidstrong.com.

a lot of excitement about the marathon."

Elsbernd decided to try a pilot See Us Run program at Roosevelt because it's near her home, and because staff and administrators there were open to the idea. She hopes to soon expand the program to other area high schools.

The program, she said, is modeled after Students Run L.A., a similar program for at-risk students in Los Angeles.

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RUNNERS

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The idea behind the program is to bring together kids who face challenges and could benefit from working toward a goal like running a marathon. Elsbernd said some students in the program have autism, ADHD or similar disorders, some are new immigrants and some simply face the typical challenges of teens anywhere.

The youths have been training for the marathon for six months. They run as early as 6 a.m. on Saturdays, and each kid works out with an adult mentor, some of whom are parents or Roosevelt staff.

"It builds confidence, a sense of mentorship bonding, goal-setting and commitment," Elsbernd said. "(Kids) learn that when you take on something so monumental as running a marathon, if you do it incrementally, anything's possible.

"When you train for a marathon, you take it in baby steps, and they can apply that type of thing to anything they do."

Elsbernd, 39, is a certified personal trainer, but she took up running just about 10 years ago. Kidstrong is a nonprofit organization, and the first program she started was Kid Striders, an elementary-school-aged fitness program, in 2005. The See Us Run students are coached by Korrie Hoskins.

Celeste Love, 17, a Roosevelt senior, joined because a friend urged her to do so. She's planning to participate in the half-marathon.

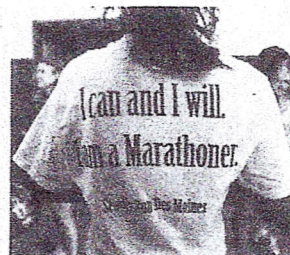
"I'm not a runner, but (finishing the marathon) is a great accomplishment," she said. "I think it gives me more responsibility. I've been doing really good. I'm ready and I'm really excited."

Before a practice run earlier this week at school,



HOLLY MCQUEEN/REGISTER PHOTOS

Runners in the See Us Run Des Moines pilot program at Roosevelt High School head out for a three-mile run on Monday. They have spent six months training for the Des Moines Marathon.



Miasem Abidulrazaq, 16, of Des Moines' west side shows off her T-shirt. She is part of the See Us Run Des Moines pilot program at Roosevelt High School.

Elsbernd told the group assembled: "You've done a lot of great things. You are going to do something very amazing on Sunday."

Keeghan Corcoran, 14, a freshman, said she joined the group because "it sounded cool."

It's also a way for her to spend time with her mother, Cindi Douglass, who runs with the group as an adult mentor.

"We're nervous and jittery, but we can't wait to say we did this," said Douglass. She has three younger children, so she wanted to find a way to spend extra time with her oldest.

Rachael Hammes, 14, a freshman, joined partly because her dad is a runner. She said she enjoys talking with her mentor while she runs.

"It takes your mind off wanting to stop," she explained. "It keeps you going. People call us crazy for wanting to run a 26-mile marathon."

Emily Burroughs, a social worker at the school, got talked into becoming a mentor, even though she's not a runner. She originally offered to walk along with the group as they ran. But eventually she ran 13 miles. She recently suffered a stress fracture in one ankle, but she's determined to run in the race.

"It's been amazing to see some of these kids grow," she said. "These are not kids who would typically hang out together. It's been such an amazing journey."

Burroughs enjoys the honesty of the kids as they talk while they run. And she believes the project has been therapeutic for them.

"I get to hear about everything under the sun. They really do open up to you."