



10 HEROES MAKING RUNNERS SAFER

AS TOLD TO CINDY KUZMA

THE ORGANIZERS

Ali Barzyk, Rachel Colonna, Jordyn Kerr, and Gabriella Torres realized they shared the same anxiety about running after sundown. So, with team members Karie Murray, Madison Herzog and Tiffany Williams, they organized a nighttime run event to raise awareness and called it Despite the Dark. Now it's a monthly affair.

Despite the Dark started as an intern project at the advertising agency in Chicago where I worked in the summer of 2018. Our group of women was tasked with identifying an issue we experienced and addressing that topic in a way that brought people together.

In my group, we all had different stories of running at night, fearful. So we literally ran with that idea.

Our project culminated in a night running event at the 606, a popular

path in Chicago. About 40 people came out. We made signs—caution tape scenes, to remind people of how uncomfortable women feel.

Now we have a monthly run in Chicago after dark. We start with an introduction so if you come alone, you can meet others. Then we'll discuss a recent situation or news story and how it affects safety, and some solutions.

We encourage attendees to stick with another person on the run. After the run they can exchange contact info. Sometimes we incorporate self-defense sessions.

We've had some outreach from other cities. We coordinated runs with groups in Sacramento and on the University of Florida campus. We're open to other partnerships, but we're focused on building our community here in Chicago.

—Ali Barzyk

From left: Tiffany Williams, Ali Barzyk, and Rachel Colonna lead Despite the Dark in Chicago.



THE TRAIL TECHIE

When Ron Schneidermann became COO/CMO of outdoor recreation platform AllTrails in 2015, he wanted to make new safety features a priority. So the company created a feature called Lifeline, which allows preselected contacts to track you in real time.

I realized that runner safety should be a priority for AllTrails when I noticed that my wife, Jenny, wouldn't go trail running by herself. The idea of going out alone on remote trails was frightening. We'd have these conversations: Where are you going? What time will you be back and when should I worry?

It struck a chord how frequently this exchange must be happening all over the country. So we launched a feature called Lifeline in 2018. You can set up to five safety contacts. You load in your app what time you expect to be back. If you have a data signal, your safety contacts can follow where you are in real time. If you don't have a data signal and you're late coming back, your contacts get notified.

Of course, technology isn't the only solution. As men, we take for granted how freely we hit the trail. There needs to be a mindfulness that not everyone has that experience. Sometimes a woman might see a man running on the trail and it can be a scary thing—be aware of that and approach carefully.

I have a daughter who's 10. She's grown up on the trail and she's excited about progressing on mountain biking and getting into trail running. She's young and optimistic and there's no hint of fear in her mind. I want to do everything in my power to keep it that way. —Ron Schneidermann

THE SURVIVOR

Two years ago, an attacker was hiding in a public restroom when Kelly Herron stopped on her running route in Seattle. She fought back and trapped her assailant in the bathroom until police arrived. The event changed the trajectory of her life. She's now an activist and the founder of Not Today, a business that educates about self-defense and sells T-shirts displaying the lines of her GPS recording from her assault, with the words "Not today motherf@#!er," which she had shouted at her attacker.

Since my attack, I've helped show other women that we don't have to take abuse and harassment. We can fight back, and we can continue to do the things we love without being afraid.

Earlier this year, Jordan Giaratano from Fighting Chance Seattle—where I'd learned self-defense just weeks before the attack—and I led a few women's empowerment and self-defense classes together.

I met so many other survivors. I try to be a resource for them because you feel so alone. I share what's helped me—for instance, a trauma therapy called EMDR, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. Therapists use it to help you reprocess the memory. It brought me back to life.

I love when men attend my talks and ask what they can do to be allies. I tell them to look out for women. If you run under a bridge and see a creepy guy and you see a woman running toward that bridge, give her a heads-up to go another way. The smallest thing can help prevent a dangerous situation.

I don't want to live in a world where women can only run on a treadmill. I want us to be as free as men are to run at night or early in the morning and to feel safe. My message is: Prepare for the worst-case scenario, train your mind and your body, and then do what makes you happy. —Kelly Herron

← Ron Schneidermann helped add safety features to the AllTrails app.

→ Kelly Herron fended off an attacker while running in Seattle.





THE FUNDRAISERS

After Caroline Tocci's cousin, Vanessa Marcotte, was killed by a random attacker while running, she and Vanessa's best friend Ashley McNiff were moved to create an organization to honor her legacy. The Vanessa T. Marcotte Foundation focuses on self-defense as well as fixing the root cause of violence against women.

Vanessa was my cousin, my best friend, and she was everything—kind, thoughtful, smart, and ambitious. A half marathon was her next goal—but she didn't get to do it. On August 7, 2016, she was killed while running near her family's home in Princeton, Massachusetts.

When she died, Vanessa's family and friends got together. We knew that if this happened to any of us, she would have done anything to prevent it from happening to someone else. Murder is rare, but assault isn't.

We don't know why this happened to Vanessa, but we do know there is a culture of objectification in our society. So in January 2017, we created a foundation to honor her legacy, with the mission to empower women to feel safe.

Since then, we've raised \$400,000 through a 5K held on Vanessa's birthday weekend and fundraising teams in races.

With these funds, we partner with two organizations. Girls Inc. teaches self-defense and media literacy—educating girls about the stereotypes in our society and how they can fight against them. Tutoring Plus has a boys' program—a space to talk about how limiting the definition of being a man is in our society. We can teach self-defense all we want, but it's not going to solve the issue unless we raise boys differently and get men involved.

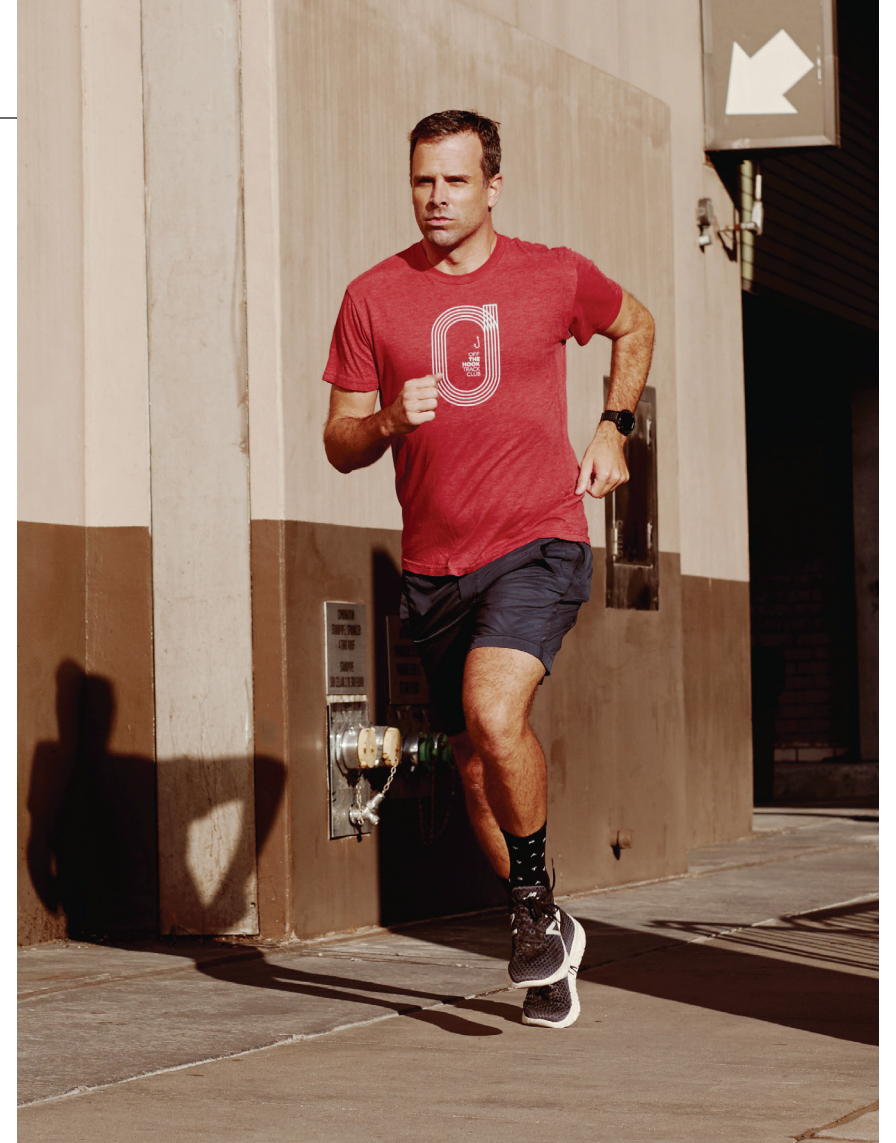
We don't want people to stop running. I don't think Vanessa would want that either. —Caroline Tocci with Ashley McNiff



John Honerkamp helped launch Runner Safety Awareness Week in New York City.



From left: Caroline Tocci and Ashley McNiff started the Vanessa T. Marcotte Foundation in honor of their cousin and friend who was murdered while running.



THE CONNECTOR

Coach, consultant, and race promoter John Honerkamp co-created The Run Collective in 2016 as a way to unite coaches, running clubs, and individual runners in New York City. This year, the organization held its first-ever Runner Safety Awareness Week, a four-day event that included seminars, panels, and self-defense classes.

When I started the group, runner safety wasn't really on my mind. It was more about connecting and celebrating all the work people are doing in the city to promote running. What got safety on my radar was the Mollie Tibbetts case, which got a lot of attention in 2018. I was like, wait a second, this happened a year and a half ago to three other women in nine days [Alexandra Nicolette Brueger, Vanessa Marcotte, and Karina Vetrano] but had already faded from memory.

I realized the Run Collective had a platform to do something. So we hosted a Runner Safety Awareness Week in January 2019. I brought in Todd Williams, an Olympian who got into jiu-jitsu after retiring from running. I learned a lot. For instance, Todd said that when someone grabs you, you don't do a tug-of-war, you turn your wrist and break their grip. I've been running for 36 years, and no one had ever taught me that.

The panelists were very diverse. We had a representative from the Mayor's Office who works on domestic violence. We had the Center for Anti-Violence Education; they do a lot of work with the LGBTQ community.

We're planning the second Runner Safety Awareness Week next January. We need to keep talking about it. Unfortunately safety gets traction when bad things happen to shed light on it. We walk on eggshells, but then two weeks go by and we go back to our normal routine. We need to do better. We need everyone safer. —John Honerkamp