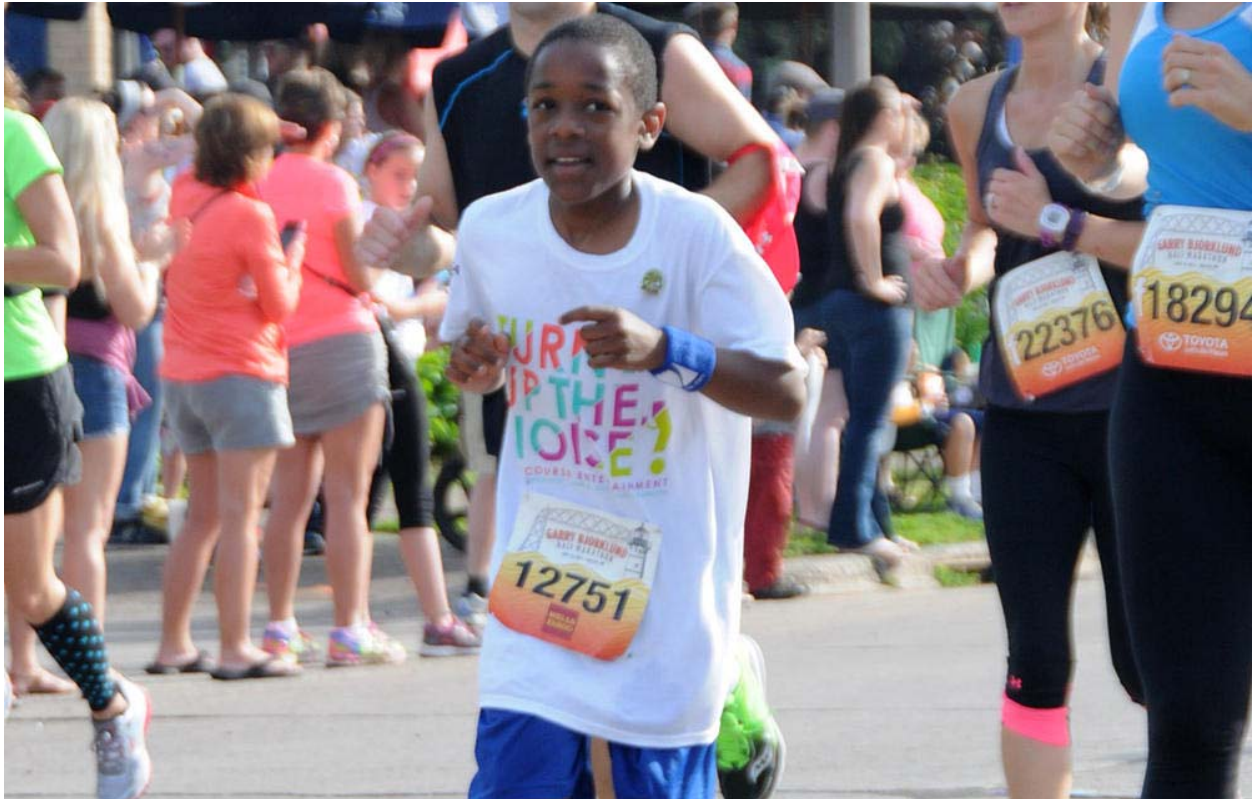


# One Race's Youngest Runner Dreams of Finding Adoptive Family

**In June, Marcellus Coleman was the youngest to run the Garry Bjorklund Half Marathon.**

By [Alison Wade](#) Thursday, August 11, 2016, 3:41 pm



Marcellus Coleman, 12, accomplished one goal by completing June's Garry Bjorklund Half Marathon in Duluth, Minnesota, in 2:16:28. At 12 years and one day, he was the race's youngest competitor, yet he managed to finish just outside the top half of the field.

Now he hopes to accomplish another goal by finding an adoptive family, preferably, he says, one with a dog.

Marcellus, whose story was originally [featured by WDIO TV](#), lives at one of Northwood Children's Services' residential facilities in Duluth. He came to Northwood from Minneapolis when he was 8 years old, escaping what he described to *WDIO TV* as an unsafe situation at home.

He began organized running two years ago when Dan Hurley, a therapist at Northwood, introduced him to the sport. Hurley says it's made a big difference in Marcellus' life and the lives of the other children he works with as well.

Marcellus agrees.

“Before I used to get upset a lot and be aggressive, now I don’t,” he told *Runner’s World* by phone.

All Northwood counselors are encouraged to bring their passions to work, and for Hurley, a licensed marriage and family therapist, that passion was running. Inspired by the work of Harvard Medical School professor [John Ratey, M.D.](#), Hurley began by selectively using the sport to get through to some of the children he worked with, and he had such success that last summer he created a therapy program for his entire group of 9- to 13-year-old boys.

Many of the children at Northwood have dealt with severe trauma and abuse and have diagnoses of anxiety and depression. According to Hurley, this has left many of them with a constant fight or flight mentality, where minor things can trigger big reactions.

“They look calm on the outside, but the inner workings of their brain and their biochemistry is permanently set at 55, so they can go from 55 to 60 just like that, but it just looks like they’re [going from 0 to 60],” Hurley told *Runner’s World*. “You can imagine the strain, the physical toll that takes on their bodies and their minds, but to them, they don’t know any different, that’s just life.”

Hurley operated on the theory that if he could bring each child’s baseline state closer to 0 than 55, he could improve many aspects of their lives, including their ability to make good decisions.

When Hurley began his therapy program, his group of 11 boys were collectively having roughly 30 to 35 instances of documented aggression per month. When they began running for 30 minutes two times a week, that number immediately dropped to 10 to 11 instances per month. After three months, additional counselors put the group through additional “cross-training” days—what Hurley describes as more of a full-body workout. At that point, the collective instances of aggression for the whole team dropped to two to five per month, including a couple months with no incidents.

Exercise was so effective with the initial group of 11 boys that Hurley is now working on expanding the running program to other groups at Northwood. His sessions involve 20 to 30 minutes of group discussion followed by 20 to 30 minutes of running.

And those who do well in training get the opportunity to race. Only a small group ran June’s Garry Bjorklund Half Marathon. (Most of the races are closer to 5K.)

Marcellus’ prerace media attention meant that on race day, he received many personalized cheers as he made his way through the course. He stands out not only because he’s clearly younger than most of his competitors, but also because he runs in Vibrams. The discovery of a more barefoot running style shortly after he took up the sport instantly made his running better.

“Now the running is really easy, but back then it was really hard,” he said.

Hurley said one of the most impressive things about Marcellus’ half marathon was that it barely seemed to take anything out of him. He marveled at the fact that Marcellus spent the remainder of that day voluntarily doing manual labor, followed by a canoe trip.

Marcellus said he can imagine running a marathon someday, and he imagines that he’ll probably continue running, even when he’s no longer living at Northwood. And in an ideal world, maybe he’ll have a canine running companion—and a new family of his own.