



# PWCF SPOTLIGHT

## MY DUBLIN CITY MARATHON EXPERIENCE

*By Jillian McNulty, Co Longford*

I'm 36 years old and if anyone told me this time last year that I would train for and complete a marathon within a year I would have laughed at them!

At that time I was in and out of hospital every 4-6 weeks and staying for an average of 6 weeks at a time. I was just over surgery for reflux and had been on a liquid diet as a result for 8 months, losing 14kg in the process. I was doing very little exercise, maybe a 20 minute walk a few times a week and that was even an effort. Then I was told earlier this year that my PFT's weren't going to get any better – they had been at the same level for roughly 2 years. The 20% I had lost wasn't coming back and so there were tears, loads of tears.

There and then I decided I wasn't going to accept it, I had to at least try to gain something back; I wasn't just going to give in and let it happen without a fight. A few days later I saw a TV advert for the Spartan Challenge where 26 people would be trained to take part in the Dublin City Marathon. There was a voting process in which I came second in the country. Then there was an interview with 52 finalists out of roughly 6,700 people that had entered. When I first entered the competition online in February I started walking more and more each day, and was comfortably walking 10km a day – then I got the phonecall to say I was chosen as Longford's Spartan.

I ended up in hospital for a month straight away but Denise my physiotherapist (who I am convinced got me on the road to actually running!) had followed my progress in the competition and we decided to start running. OH MY GOD, what a shock I was in for! At first I felt like I was dying, my legs hurt and I was coughing so much it was nearly unbearable. The first few days of training I left the gym looking like a right mess and dreaded walking back to my room because I looked so bad! But after two and a half weeks I started to notice a major improvement – I was running comfortably, there was no huffing and puffing, no coughing and spluttering – I had turned a corner. Suddenly I started looking forward to my daily runs in the hospital gym! In the last week I was doing so well, running flat out for over 30 minutes and I wasn't even out of breath.



Jillian, Longford Spartan, and Karl.

When I got home I continued running and even though I still needed to be admitted to hospital my stays were only for a month and I didn't feel sick, I was still running throughout my exacerbations. As part of the Spartan Challenge I was entered into the Dublin Race Series in which I completed a 5 mile, a 10km, a 10 mile and the half marathon in the Phoenix Park. I even took part in the Fingal 10km while I was an in-patient. Training in the last 6 weeks was very, very tough; I had once weekly long runs which started at 12 miles and went right up to 20 miles. I found these particularly tiring as the longer miles took 3-4 hours each day.

A month before the marathon I woke up and was stuffed with a cold, had tonsillitis and chronic sinusitis. When I was told that I needed to be admitted I was still hopeful as there were 4 weeks left until the big day. My trainer came in to the

hospital and met with my consultant who dropped the bombshell that he was very concerned as I hadn't been this sick in a long time. If I got the go ahead I had to walk instead of run so that I wouldn't put too much stress on my body; he wasn't sure that my body would cope with 26 miles as I had only been training for 5 months. I was in tears, I wanted to run, I had trained to run but if that's what it took for him to allow me to go ahead then that's what I had to do.

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It stayed this way for another two weeks and I remained persistent that I was doing this no matter what as I felt fine. My consultant suggested I do a supervised 16 mile run with my physiotherapist and if I could do this with no problems then he would give the go ahead to do the marathon.

Only 10 days before the marathon we set out on a 16 mile route in four laps of 4 miles with one physiotherapist per each slot of 4 miles. I did great, I blitzed it and finally they were more confident that my body was able to cope. However, 4 days later my PFT's took a massive nosedive and again the doubts and worries arose. It was 6 days until the marathon when my consultant came to see me and asked if I still really wanted to do this; I told him that I really did and tried to hold back my tears. His face said it all and I'll admit I lost a little bit of hope that day; he said he'd give me until Friday to concentrate on clearance and exercise and we'd see what happened. Thankfully on Friday (3 days before the marathon) they done PFT's again and they had jumped back up to the level they had been over 2 years before so I got the go ahead! The days before the marathon were absolutely mental with newspaper and radio interviews. Some of the newspapers reported that I was the first or second person with CF to do a marathon, which wasn't true as I knew of other people with CF who had done a marathon before me so that was frustrating.

Many PWCF have contacted me asking me how I did it, knowing that I wasn't exactly hell bent on exercise until this year. Others had practically given up but after seeing my progress over the 5 months, decided to give CF a good kick in the backside and get out there and try not to let it win. I will never not exercise again, running has made such a difference to my life, my PFT's have dramatically improved and I feel so good after running – it's like my lungs open up and all the air gets into them. It's something I will continue to do.

As well as creating positive awareness for CF I also raised nearly €900, which brings to a total of €5,300 that I have raised for CF in the last year alone. In June 2013 I will cycle 255km from Ballina to Dublin to raise funds for CF and St Vincent's Hospital, and already I have loads of support from people! Right now I am resting up after the marathon as it has taken a lot out of me, so easy does it for the next few weeks and then it's onto training for my cycle in June.

I would urge anyone who isn't exercising to get out there and start, you can do anything you set your mind to, but be careful don't over do it. I don't know if I will ever take part in another full marathon because it is very demanding and very tiring on the body, but I intend to continue to run 5km, 10km and even half marathons. I never thought I would be capable of even thinking



Jillian and her well earned Dublin City Marathon medal.