



2016 Virgin Money London Marathon Runners' Stories

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For more information or to interview any of the runners please contact media@londonmarathonevents.co.uk.

We have many more inspiring stories from runners up and down the country so please do contact us if you would like further information.

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Orin

58, Bromley

LEWIS

Orin is running in honour of his son Daniel De-Gale who captured the hearts of the nation when he appeared on national news, aged six, as the first black individual in the UK to receive a life-saving stem cell bone marrow transplant from an unrelated donor in 1999.

Daniel beat his fight against leukaemia but sadly passed away on October 8 2008 from multiple organ failure.

His legacy is the African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT) which was founded 20 years ago, by his parents Orin and Beverley De-Gale OBE.

Orin says: "Daniel is the inspiration behind why the ACLT was founded 20 years ago this year. The Virgin Money London Marathon is the ultimate challenge, one that I deemed worthy of celebrating the charity's 20th anniversary and honouring the life of my son."

Orin says training is going well and Beverley has joined him for some of the shorter runs. She, along with friends and family, will also be there to cheer for Orin on Race Day.

He says: "I know #TeamACLT will be one of the more vocal and visible groups on the day and we may even have some of our celebrity friends lending their support in the run up to the race.

"I'm sure this will be an emotional time for me and Daniel's mother, my life partner Beverley. Most of all, I'm looking forward to crossing the Finish Line, knowing I did it for Daniel. I'm sure that I will feel him with me on the day."

Running for ACLT (African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust)

Fundraising page: <http://.uk.virginmoneygiving.com/OrinLewis>

Rob

34, Northampton

CRUSSELL

Rob is running his first London Marathon in memory of his baby son Theo who died last August, at just a day old.

After a problem-free pregnancy, Rob's wife Kate went to hospital at 39 weeks because she was feeling ill. A midwife examined her and found she was suffering from severe pre-eclampsia and her blood pressure was dangerously high.

Their son, Theo Arthur Crussell, was born at 1.08am on 6 August via emergency caesarean. Unfortunately he suffered massive brain damage and while doctors managed to resuscitate him, he tragically passed away the following day. Kate was lucky to have survived.

Rob says: "Life changed in a way we never thought possible and things are pretty tough at the moment. As soon as we got home after a week in hospital, I decided I wanted to do something in memory of our son."

Rob and his three best friends will be running together to raise funds for Action on Pre-Eclampsia. Training is going well and they will do a half marathon as a warm up before Race Day.

Rob says: "It will be a very emotional day, but a great way to remember Theo. The charity has lost all its funding so really depends on fundraisers. I hope we can help other families going through what we have been through and raise awareness of this awful condition."

Running for Action on Pre-Eclampsia

Sarah

31, Tolworth

GOODALL

Sarah is running the London Marathon for her Nan and Gramps who passed away last year.

In 2014 her grandparents were forced to move into separate residential care homes, the first time they had lived apart in over 50 years after Sarah's Nan was diagnosed with vascular dementia. After caring for her husband, who had been diagnosed with diabetes aged eight, she could no longer provide the support he needed.

Her grandfather contracted a chest infection and passed away at his care home in July 2015, just weeks before his 85th birthday.

In September her Nan became unwell, which impacted on her dementia, and she died the following month.

Sarah says: "Never would I have guessed that I would lose both my grandparents in such a short space of time. Dealing with grief of loved ones has been so difficult." Sarah learned she had secured a London Marathon place in early October and was able to share the news with her Nan the last time she saw her.

She says: "I have never run before - but the London Marathon was on my bucket list, and finally getting a place filled me with pure excitement. I was inspired to apply by my dad who has run the race 11 times.

"Gaining a place came just at the right time for me, I have been able to put all my sadness into training. I really can't wait to participate. I'm not precious about the time I finish in, I just want to finish and raise some money for two wonderful charities. Knowing that I'm running in memory of two very special people will keep me going."

Running for Alzheimer's Society and Diabetes UK

Heather

29, West Lothian

DUFF

Heather ran the Mini London Marathon when she was just 12 and promised herself she'd go back one day to do the full course.

Seventeen years later, after beating her own battle with cancer, she's been inspired to do just that to raise money for Cancer Research UK.

Heather was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cervical cancer in April 2014, so rare that she was only the 19th reported case.

She says: "At the time I was playing National League hockey and had recently completed my first marathon. Working in Sport Development I lived an exemplary active lifestyle. At 27 I thought I was immune to cancer, but I was wrong. I learned first-hand that cancer literally can affect anyone."

Heather is now in remission, but she believes without the work of Cancer Research UK she wouldn't be here today. She explains: "I owe them my life which is why I am delighted to be running the London Marathon as part of the Cancer Research UK team."

Heather has been training through all weathers including snow, ice, wind and rain, but she says knowing she's running for Cancer Research UK keeps her motivated. "I am looking forward to the atmosphere of 37,000 runners from all backgrounds, with their individual reasons, working to achieve the same goal," she explains.

"I always described cancer as being the marathon I didn't sign up for so it will be great to complete one that I did!"

Running for Cancer Research UK

Stuart

44, Kirkby in Ashfield, Notts

EGGLESBROUGH

Stuart is part of a team running to raise funds for Cancer Research UK through Slimming World's charity SMILES after beating his own health battles.

After being overweight his whole life, Stuart was regularly warned by doctors about the health risks associated with weighing 37 stone.

He joined Slimming World in September 2012 after a car crash forced him to face up to his size. Although it wasn't a serious accident, he thought about what would have happened if it had been. Would the paramedics have been able to get him out of the car to treat him?

Stuart went on to lose 22st and 9lbs through the Body Magic programme, gradually getting more active, walking with colleagues in his lunch hour to doing short jogs, then runs, as his confidence built.

Stuart was named Slimming World's national Greatest Loser 2014, awarded to the slimmer who has successfully lost the most weight in that year.

He's gone from being unable to walk short distances without losing his breath, to regularly running, swimming and cycling. He's already completed a 10K race, three sprint triathlons and a half marathon and now feels ready to take on his first full marathon in London.

He says: "I no longer have to pretend I'm happy, because I am absolutely happy."

Running for Cancer Research UK

Ceyhun

46, Sidcup, Kent

UZUN

Ceyhun is running the Virgin Money London Marathon in memory of his “inspirational” daughter Tanyel who lost her battle with cancer in January this year. Ceyhun says: “Tanyel is our only child. She was full of life, full of energy, the most polite and inspirational girl you could ever meet. She was a caring, loving girl, who lived a full and happy life.”

Tanyel was first diagnosed with Ewing Sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, just days after her 18th birthday and was in treatment for two-and-a-half years under the Royal Marsden Teenage Cancer Care Unit in Sutton. Throughout she remained positive, determined to beat the disease. Ceyhun says: “Tanyel never complained about anything, she just wanted to be a normal teenager.”

She met her fiancé Ozcan Mustafa and they got engaged in July 2015, celebrating with a party for family and friends at the Warren Met Police Sports Centre.

Less than a year later the family returned there to celebrate her life. After six months in remission Tanyel’s cancer returned and, despite intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment, she lost her fight.

Ceyhun ran the London Marathon in April 2015, raising over £2,500 for Clic Sargent. His daughter was there at the Finish Line where Ceyhun handed her his medal. He says: “I’ll never forget that smile on her face.”

He’s running again this year for Clic Sargent to ‘give back’ to the Royal Marsden and help other children and their families. “Unfortunately Tanyel won’t be there to support her daddy, but I know she’ll be there in spirit to give me the energy I need to help others. It’s what she would have wanted.

“I’m so lucky and proud to have had such a beautiful, inspirational daughter for 20 years. I will run like the wind for her on the day and will be thinking about her from start to finish.”

Running for Clic Sargent

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/SomeoneSpecial/Tanyel>

Jessica

34, Essex

TAYLOR

Jessica is running to raise money for COSMIC, the charity that supported her and her husband when their sons, Joe and Henry, contracted viral meningitis aged six weeks old. While Joe began responding to antibiotics, Henry continued to decline and doctors were forced to intubate him. Jessica says: “They hooked him to a breathing machine as his heart wasn’t pumping blood around his body quickly enough, he was having seizures and his adrenal glands stopped working.”

Doctors struggled to stabilise him and the decision was made to take him to a special paediatric intensive care unit at St Mary’s Hospital in Paddington. Jessica joined him there while her husband Dan stayed with baby Joe.

The next 12 hours were critical for Henry and, sadly, by morning he showed no signs of improvement. Dan travelled to St Mary’s to be with Jessica and Henry, leaving Joe at their local hospital in Basildon.

Jessica says: “It was the most horrendous situation, two sick babies in different hospitals.” Family and friends rallied around to be by Joe’s side while Jessica and Dan stayed at St Mary’s Hospital where they were supported by staff. Jessica says: “They were in regular contact with Joe’s doctors who were conducting tests on him and passing the results back because Henry was too sick to have any tests carried out on him.”

By day four Henry started to show signs of improvement and after a week he was taken off a ventilator. Finally, he was discharged back to Basildon where staff monitored him, helped him learn to take milk from a bottle again and taught Jessica and Dan about the medication he’d need for the coming months.

Jessica says: “After 10 days we all went home, so incredibly thankful to have our family back together again.”

Henry has been monitored for two years. He was weaned off medication within four months and given the all clear at his final clinical check in January 2015.

Running for Cosmic (Children of St Mary’s Intensive Care)

Garth

44, Norwich

RAVENHILL

Garth is running the London Marathon for The Cure Parkinson's Trust, after being diagnosed with the disease seven years ago.

The effects of his medication wear off over time, so Garth regularly has to change pills or take stronger ones, which results in him having to cope with different side-effects of medication, along with the symptoms of Parkinson's.

He says: "The progression of the disease is slow but sure, resulting in me becoming stiffer as time moves on - never mind the other symptoms!"

The Cure Parkinson's Trust, co-founded by Tom Isaacs who was himself diagnosed with the disease, aims to find a cure, funding research worldwide.

Garth says: "Research can be expensive, whether it's with medication, surgery or using existing drugs. The charity has fantastic links with pharmaceutical firms and other charities all over the world. They have a great ethos in bringing people with Parkinson's disease together to find a cure."

Garth is also running to raise awareness of the disease. He says: "I want to show people that you can achieve great goals - and mine is the London Marathon. I've never really run before and to do this would be a personal victory against this disease."

"Race Day will be so exciting, mixing with fellow runners, looking at all the other charities that are being represented, as well as the professional runners. I can't wait."

"My goal is to finish in under six hours but it will depend how my disease acts on the day. But no matter what, I will finish. I promise."

Running for Cure Parkinson's Trust

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/garthravenhill>

Maxine

44, Essex

NAPAL

Maxine is running the London Marathon for her 'gorgeous' son Rukai, who was born with Down's Syndrome.

She says: "Rukai is a boisterous, energetic, engaging and very typical little boy whose smile could light up Wembley. I wish everyone on earth could spend 10 minutes with him, because the world would be better off for it."

She's also running to raise money for Down's Syndrome Association, the charity that has supported her son since birth.

She explains: "When Rukai was born, we were met with pity instead of congratulations, whispers instead of smiles. We met with a paediatrician who frowned as she told us, 'You know why I'm here'".

Two days later Rukai's diagnosis was confirmed and Maxine and her husband were given worst-case scenarios about their son's needs.

Maxine says: "Four years on, few of those 'necessities' have materialised. What Rukai really needs is love, education, friendship and a happy life, just like any other kid. The rest is periphery."

The Down's Syndrome Association has developed a programme called 'Tell it Right, Start it Right'. Maxine explains: "It aims to help midwives and medical professionals understand the nuances of delivering diagnosis in a supportive, realistic, positive way, not with outdated facts, labelling and an over-abundance of pity.

"We now know the reality of raising a child with Down's Syndrome and it's nothing like the doom and gloom we were led to believe." Maxine is braving the early training runs, long miles, pain and recovery for her son. She says: "I'm doing it for my son and for what his life can and will be, given the right support. I may get passed by a banana, a phone box, a leprechaun and a pair of testicles but as I live and breathe, I'm going to cross that Finish Line."

Running for the Down's Syndrome Association

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/MaxineNapal26.2>

David

37, Norwich

TAYLOR

David's son Jude was born on 2 April 2014 with a rare heart condition called Hypoplastic left heart. At just five days old, Jude underwent open heart surgery, the first of three planned operations he would have to go through.

The operation was going well but at the last stage, while his chest was being closed, Jude crashed and had to be placed onto an ecmo, a heart by-pass machine. David says: "We would have lost Jude that day if it was not for having the ecmo machine and the amazing skills of the surgeons that saved him."

Jude remained on ecmo for a week. The day he was due to come off the machine was a day his parents were dreading. David says: "We'd asked how many babies had successfully come off ecmo and were told just three with Hypoplastic."

However, to his doctors' amazement Jude beat the machine. David says: "He was such a fighter, but sadly his heart was just too tired. On 28 April 2014, Jude passed away in my wife's arms.

"GOSH ensured his passing was pain free and peaceful. We miss Jude every second of every day. His courage and bravery are an inspiration."

As a tribute to their son, David and his wife opened 'A Brighter Future Fund' in October 2014, raising money for GOSH in Jude's name. David says: "It was the perfect way for us to give something back. We want Jude's fund to help other children like him."

David and his wife aim is to raise £17,000 to buy a new portable X-ray machine for Flamingo Ward, the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit where he was treated.

'Team Jude' currently has 28 members, all taking on fundraising challenges to, so far, raise £21,132.94. David's personal challenges have involved a five mile run and a sponsored swim in the North Sea and he now takes on his first London Marathon.

He explains: "Fundraising has given me a focus and it feels great that it keeps Jude's memory alive.

"Nothing will mend our broken hearts, but by giving, spreading the word and raising as much as we can for this amazing hospital, we will help other children and families like us in his memory."

Running for Great Ormond Street Hospital

Ben

33, Bristol

SMITH

Ben is taking part in the London Marathon as part of an epic World Record-breaking challenge to run 401 marathons in 401 days across 309 locations in the UK.

His 401 Challenge aims to raise £250,000 for two charities that are very close to his heart, Stonewall and Kidscape.

With his father working in the armed forces, Ben was sent to boarding school when he was just 10, which left him feeling “alone and very insecure” and made him an easy target for school bullies.

Over the next eight years he became more reclusive and unsure of himself. He says: “The daily physical and emotional abuse broke me, and unfortunately at the age of 18 I tried to take my own life after suffering a nervous breakdown.”

After school he went to university, but the bullying had left its mark and he suffered depression and, again, tried to take his own life. He says: “I felt alone and unable to talk to anyone about it.”

Ben’s turning point came at the age of 31 when he finally came out as gay. He says: “The bullying I had faced at school stripped me of my ability to accept who I was, but this was no more.”

After taking up running three years ago, Ben slowly built up his mileage and got a sense of accomplishment he’d never felt before. He came up with the idea for the 401 challenge two years ago and has since run 30 marathons in preparation.

Since the beginning of his 401 days of running, on 1 September last year, Ben has inspired others to join him on his marathons.

He says: “The 401 Challenge is about showing people that no matter what you go through growing up, there can always be a positive outcome if you want there to be.”

Running for Kidscape and Stonewall

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/the401challenge>

Gavin

43, Leicester

HOWKINS

Gavin is running the London Marathon for The Laura Centre, which offers bereavement counselling and helped him cope following the death of his 17-year-old son in August 2013.

Callum died while swimming with dolphins in Mauritius, two days after performing best man duties at his Dad's wedding.

The support Gavin has received since from The Laura Centre has inspired him to run his first marathon. He says: "They have been helping me deal with my loss and they've been fantastic. Training is hard, due to work, but I am so determined to do this because of The Laura Centre and what it means to me.

"I'm running in memory of my son, and to raise money for a charity that probably doesn't get as much publicity as I think it should."

Gavin's wife and step-daughter will be with him on Race Day, along with other family members. He says: "I think the crowd and atmosphere will pull everyone round and I'm sure it will be a very emotional day."

Running for The Laura Centre

Nick

30, London

ASHWELL

Nicky Ashwell is running the London Marathon in a bid to raise awareness around the stigma and barriers disabled people face. Born without a right hand, Nicky was fitted with the world's most lifelike bionic hand last year, which allows her to carry out everyday tasks with two hands for the very first time.

She said: "I want to raise awareness of the problems people with disabilities can face, not in coping with their disability, but with infrastructure restrictions and society's prejudices.

"I'm running for Leonard Cheshire Disability because of their work to campaign for change in these areas."

Nicky, who will be running her seventh marathon, adds: "I would ideally like any funds I raise to be spent encouraging and supporting young disabled people to achieve their goals, especially in the fields of business and sport."

Leonard Cheshire Disability is the UK's leading charity supporting disabled people, helping them fulfil their potential and live the lives they choose.

Running for Leonard Cheshire Disability

Becky

39, Birmingham

DOYLE

Becky will be running the London Marathon for the first time for the charity Liam's Smiles, which supports Meningitis Now.

Becky and her husband Colin, an ex-Birmingham City F.C. goalkeeper, set up the charity Liam's Smiles in 2014 to raise awareness of meningitis after their son Liam was diagnosed with bacterial meningitis in July 2010, aged seven weeks.

Born four weeks premature, Liam has suffered from fits and seizures all his life. He was diagnosed with epilepsy in July 2012, viral meningitis in December that year, ataxia (meaning he suffers from a constant body tremor) shortly afterwards and, most seriously, pneumococcal septicaemia, a deadly form of meningitis, in May 2014. Liam has battled bravely throughout his short life and always with a smile. Becky says: "I've been training now for about 18 months. I'm running on a broken heart so there's a lot of determination. I don't want another mother, father, grandparent to feel the way that I did that day I walked into the hospital holding my son, dying in my arms."

Becky will run alongside a team of runners all raising money for Liam's Smiles, including The Apprentice semi-finalist Gary Poulton and current Birmingham City FC manager Gary Rowett.

Running for Liam's Smiles

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/LiamsSmilesLovesBrum1>

David

38, Dartford

COOKE

David is looking to break records at this year's London Marathon, by running the course wearing upper body chainmail, gloves and a hood.

It's not his first marathon and, over the years, he's built a reputation for doing things a little differently. His most recent challenge was completing three marathons in three weeks.

He says: "I did Sussex, Brighton then London and, after completing all three, I said I'd never run another marathon again, yet here I am facing a new challenge."

He's been training with an extra 20kgs on his back, the equivalent weight to his chainmail suit. He's also been working on his upper body strength to prepare him for the weight of the chains.

David will be running the London Marathon to help fund a second, much-needed Air Ambulance for London.

He explains: "The London Air Ambulance service is an essential part of London's emergency service and, since 1989, has attended over 30,000 missions within the M25.

"Using a helicopter by day, and rapid response cars by night, a senior doctor and paramedic team can be there in minutes, providing life-saving medical interventions."

David is most looking forward to seeing his friends and family along the route cheering him on.

He says: "It's always a buzz, and of course crossing that Finish Line, hopefully holding my hands up above my head with someone telling me congratulations, *you are a Guinness World Record holder.*"

Running for the London Air Ambulance

Steven

34, Swansea

BUNTING

Vicar Steven is running the London Marathon in memory of Erin Mulligan, a baby girl from his mother and toddler group at St Thomas in Swansea, who tragically died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome at just eight months. Steven knew Erin's parents well, as he was preparing them for their wedding last summer. He says, "After Erin died I supported the family as best I could and organised some fundraising in the community to help pay for Erin's funeral and to support the family financially.

"The Lullaby Trust helped me understand how best to specifically help parents who have lost children through cot death and they inspired me to want to help them with fundraising.

"They support families who have lost children; support families as they have future children; offers days out to families who have lost children and invest a huge amount in research to try to reduce the number of children who sadly die each year."

Steven has chosen the London Marathon as his fundraising challenge because it's hard. He says: "I've never, ever run before. I had to start by doing the NHS Couch to 5k programme because I literally couldn't run to the corner shop."

Steven's training is going well, he's managed nine miles and joined a gym for the first time in his life. He will have lots of support on the day from family, friends and fiancé Rachel Simpson, also a vicar.

He says: "I'm most looking forward to finishing the race. It's all I can think about at the moment."

Running for The Lullaby Trust

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/Vicars>

Natasha

32, Caerphilly

GREENWAY

On 10 July 2015 pregnant Natasha was admitted to hospital to be induced, looking forward to taking their new arrival home to meet her older brother and sister.

Natasha says: "I didn't know then that it was going to be the worst few days of our lives instead of the best.

"During my last few contractions, it is believed that something catastrophic happened to the placenta, which led to a lack of oxygen reaching our baby."

Baby Pennie was in cardiac arrest when she was born and the medical team worked on her for 17 minutes before her heart was beating. Natasha says: "We were told that she was very sick and they would monitor her brain activity to see if she made any effort to breathe on her own."

Natasha and her husband spent the next 24 hours by her baby's side in the special care baby unit where she was on life support. The next day doctors gave the couple the worst news of their lives, there was nothing more they could do for Pennie and it would be in her best interests to turn off life support.

Natasha says: "I just could not believe this was happening. How was I going to tell my other two children that I was not able to bring Pennie home?"

During her last few hours, Pennie was baptised and family members came to meet her before the life support machine was switched off.

Natasha says: "I held my little girl close while she passed away. Then I bathed her and dressed her in the clothes we planned to take her home in, except she wasn't going home, I was saying goodbye."

Natasha is running to raise money for The Lullaby Trust, which supports families through baby loss. She says: "I am so determined to run this marathon because the pain of running it will be nothing compared to the pain and heartbreak I had that day and still do have. The Lullaby Trust helps families through that pain and heartbreak."

Running for The Lullaby Trust

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/Penniesforheaven>

Lyn

52, London

SOLARI

Lyn was diagnosed with Stage 4 Endometrial Cancer in January 2014. She's running the London Marathon for Macmillan Cancer Support because she knows first-hand, what a lifeline the charity is to people in need.

Lyn discovered she had cancer after routine surgery to remove a polyp. After surgery to remove cancerous cells, she needed further treatment, six weeks of radiotherapy, then a three week break before an 18-week course of chemo.

Throughout she continued to work, and she was also keen to keep up running. She says: "I was in the army for 13 years so have always looked after myself and felt it important to keep fit. I really love getting out and pounding the pavements regularly. It is a way of having some 'me time' that is away from work and all the other responsibilities of life. I always feel exhilarated and full of energy after a run."

Lyn's diagnosis came just after her 50th birthday and she was forced to pull out of a Tough Mudder obstacle race she had been planning to join.

She decided, there and then, to run the London Marathon once her treatment was complete. She chose to fundraise for Macmillan Cancer Support because they were a trusted source of information throughout her treatment. Lyn says: "My family also used the Macmillan information booklets to help explain to my then four-year-old granddaughter what was happening - especially when there were visible signs of my illness like losing my hair.

"I also found the Macmillan online community hugely helpful. Although I had a fantastic support network around me, sometimes you just want to chat to people who have been through the same thing as you."

Running for Macmillan Cancer Support

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/lynsolarimarathon>

Nicholas

22, London

FINILL

Nicholas will be following in the family footsteps when he takes part in his first London Marathon. "I come from a family of five and the other four have already completed the 26.2 mile struggle so I couldn't duck the challenge any longer. My siblings ran the London Marathon aged 18 and 22 so I was worried about being written out of my parent's will."

His father, now in his late 50s, has completed every London Marathon, one of the exclusive group known as the 'Ever Presents'. Nicholas says: "Given my lack of fitness and my father's age-defying marathon times, I am aware that I have to swallow my pride and just do it, even if it means losing to my ageing father while I'm in the prime of my life."

Resigned to not bettering his dad's personal best of under three hours, Nicholas is setting his sights on beating his older brother's time of just over four hours. "If I can't beat my father, who is knocking on the door of retirement, I have to salvage a bit of pride by beating the other male in my family."

With a London Marathon veteran Dad, Nicholas has had plenty of advice and guidance and is now looking forward to getting to the Start Line. He says: "My training mileage is starting to increase and I'm beginning to see the satisfaction that running can bring, even if it's not what it looks like to passers-by as they watch me struggle and grimace."

Nicholas will be running for Orchard Vale Trust, a charity which improves the quality of life for people with learning disabilities and their families. "It's one of the smaller charities represented at the London Marathon but there's no doubt in my mind that putting in the work will be worth it in the (26.2) mile long run."

Running for Orchard Vale Trust

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/NickFinill>

Lizzy

33, London

POLLOTT

Lizzy is running her fifth London Marathon to raise funds for Ovacome, in memory of her Mum who lost her life to ovarian cancer 15 years ago.

She says: "Before my brilliant Mum died, we'd both have laughed a lot if I'd one day said I'd be running my fifth marathon, but here I am again, doing it in her memory and raising funds for Ovacome."

Although she was an avid player of sports, Lizzy didn't start running until her late 20s, inspired by a supplement in the Times newspaper. She immediately decided her first challenge would be the London Marathon.

"I think you feel one of two ways once you finish the London Marathon: never again or I need to do that again now. Mine was the latter. I was hooked.

"As a kid my Dad had run it many times so I wanted to know what it felt like and do it in a meaningful way which I know would have made my Mum proud. This year is the 15th anniversary of Mum's death so to be running again feels quite fitting."

Lizzy's training is going well and she is now a member of London's Run Dem Crew. She says: "I love it. We take over mile 21 every year with a massive party to celebrate the 20+ runners we have in the race. There's confetti, cannons, giant heads, banners and music. I can't wait for Race Day. It's going to be emotional."

Lizzy is running for Ovacome

Roger BACKHOUSE

55, Surrey

Roger Backhouse and Team Blind as a Bat are taking on the London Marathon to raise funds for RP Fighting Blindness.

Roger suffers retinitis pigmentosa himself, a genetic disease that causes deterioration of sight and often leads to blindness. As a Trustee and long-term supporter of the charity he ran the London Marathon in 2010 for the charity, along with his brother Oliver, who is an eye surgeon.

This time he'll be one of a 24-strong team, including visually impaired runners who will be accompanied by their guides, and Lord Sebastian Coe's children Madeline and Harry.

They are hoping to raise £175,000 to support Professor Robin Ali at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology, who is a world-respected medical researcher and leading expert in the field of gene and stem cell therapy.

In 2010 Roger and his brother raised money for the start of Professor Ali's pioneering five-year gene therapy research project which aims to develop a treatment for RP. Now they're back running to help him fund its final year.

The money raised by Team Blind as a Bat will contribute to building a programme of clinical trials, the next stage of finding an effective treatment.

Running for RP Fighting Blindness

Steven OLTAY

Steven is running the London Marathon for The Running Charity, after they helped him put his life back on track when he first joined them two years ago. At that point in his life he was malnourished, weighing just seven stone, sleeping rough and was substance dependent.

He says: "At The Running Charity I found a place where I was supported, pushed and given the tools to address the problems I faced. It's been a long journey for me but I am now housed, a healthy 12 and a half stone, no longer using any drugs and I'm now a qualified personal trainer."

The Running Charity work with young homeless people, providing them with a programme to help them get back on their feet by giving them a focus, a social group and achievable personal goals. Running provides the framework.

After transforming his life, Steven is repaying the help and dedication of the charity by raising money for them and hopes to help others less fortunate than himself. He says: "I was given the chance to turn my life around through running and fitness and without the help of The Running Charity I would not be where I am now. It's a charity with ambitions to help as many people as possible and I can't wait to help them more."

Running for The Running Charity

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/StevenOltay>

Chris

40, Hull

CHARLES

Chris is running the London Marathon for SEED Eating Disorder Support Service, the charity his parents co-founded after their daughter Gemma almost lost her life.

The former Emmerdale actress was just 10 when she developed an eating disorder and went to critical level on four occasions.

With local support services lacking, Chris and Gemma's parents, Marge and Dennis, established SEED.

Chris says: "They've worked tirelessly to make a difference to the lives of anyone affected by this devastating illness, volunteering their time to help and support thousands of people worldwide."

Chris always wanted to run the London Marathon and did so for the first time in 2011 for SEED. He says: "Running the London Marathon again this year is my contribution to raising funds for the charity and I feel very privileged to be doing so."

On the day, Chris's wife Louise and children Jack, 10, and Louis, six, will be in the crowd to cheer him on, along with his parents and his sister Gemma.

Chris says: "My last marathon was fantastic and I'm again looking forward to the atmosphere and the inspirational spirit that is created on the day."

Running for SEED Eating Disorder Support Service

Grace

22, Surrey

HAVARD

A car accident in April 2014 left Grace in an induced coma for a month. She broke 28 bones, punctured her lung, split her liver in half, had a fifth of her bowel removed and skin grafts on her thighs and arms and spent a further three months in St George's Hospital.

Grace says: "I went into rehab at Queen Mary's Hospital in December 2014 in my wheelchair and ran 5K within 11 days. Now I want to pay back the hospital that saved my life against all odds and got me back to fitness."

Grace says she chose to run the London Marathon as she wanted to do something 'major' to raise as much money, and awareness, for St George's Hospital Charity as possible. This will be her first marathon and she's been training hard, gradually increasing each run by 10 per cent every fortnight.

She'll be supported on the day by family, friends and some of the hospital staff that helped her as she battled back to health.

She says: "I can't wait to cross the Finish Line and see everyone I love watching, knowing I have done something for an amazing cause which is so close to my heart."

Running for St George's Hospital Charity

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/GraceHavardLondonMarathon>

Rachel

42, Southampton

KELLY

Rachel is running the London Marathon for a charity very close to her heart. When she discovered at her 20-week ultrasound scan that her identical twin boys both had club feet, the information and support she received from STEPS helped enormously.

She explains: "I was overwhelmed with anxiety and the huge range of information on the internet did nothing to alleviate my stress.

"The work STEPS does to support parents in my situation is invaluable in reassuring them that this diagnosis isn't the end of the world and that, with the correct treatment, your children should have pain-free, functioning feet and be just as active as any other child."

Rachel said that reading stories from other parents through the STEPS online community provided reassurance and both practical and emotional support as her sons went through treatment.

Rachel's boys, Cameron and Lewis, are now eight and active runners, cyclists and gymnasts. Rachel has gone on to act as a 'Buddy' for STEPS, supporting new parents. She says: "It's wonderful to be able to offer support to others experiencing the same distress that I experienced all those years ago.

"We've been extremely lucky with my boys' treatment and I want to celebrate this by supporting such a great cause." Rachel chose the London Marathon as her fundraising event because she remembers her Dad taking part over 30 years ago. She says: "I remember being really excited and proud of him and want my children to have a similar experience. London is also my favourite city!"

Running for STEPS

Sunil

41, London

DUGGAL

Sunil is running for his daughter Marigold who was born with 3q11 trisomy mosaicism, a rare chromosome disorder. So rare, in fact, that doctors and consultants have no data to be able to provide a prognosis for his little girl. Sunil says: "She is the most beautiful, serene, happy little girl who has dealt with all of her challenges in a much better way than her parents!"

The family were referred to the charity Unique, which has been a lifeline, providing them with support and information, even managing to introduce them to two other families with daughters who have chromosome disorders very similar to Marigold's.

The family have been through constant trips to hospital, tests, sickness and administration of medication, sleepless nights, emergency hospital admissions and physio.

Sunil says: "Marigold has been happily developing slowly and in her own way. She, and her older brother, are the lights in our lives, but living with our own challenges has needed some extra support and Unique has been invaluable.

"There is a gap between advanced genetic testing and the care and support offered to those who are given unique diagnoses and Unique does all it can to bridge that gap."

Sunil is running the London Marathon to raise funds for the charity that has offered his family so much support.

He says: "I have run the London Marathon before, but it is nevertheless a daunting goal. However the inspiration of running for my daughter will make every step of the way full of meaning."

Running for Unique

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/SunilDuggal>

Mike

24, Westcliff-on-Sea

BROMFIELD

Mike is running the London Marathon to raise money for the YMCA in memory of his friend and colleague Tom 'Moose' Moulton.

Tom, who had suffered epilepsy since he was 11, died in July 2015, aged 29. Mike says: "He never let epilepsy get in the way of him living his life. He was larger than life, a big personality with an even bigger heart."

Mike worked with Moose at Southend YMCA, a youth charity for disadvantaged and homeless children and young people. They became friends and, eventually, housemates.

Mike and three friends, known as 'Moosey's Mad Marathon Men', will be running to raise money for Southend YMCA, YMCA England and Epilepsy Research.

They've previously raised over £16,000 in Tom's name, with events including homelessness sleep-outs and fun-runs.

They are hoping that their London Marathon will take that total to £25,000.

Mike's teammates include Tom's school friend Dan Bush, 29, his former housemate David Cheung, 28, another ex-colleague of Tom's, Andy Williamson, 27. They will be joined by Dan's brother Michael.

Mike says: "I'm not a runner by any stretch, the London Marathon will be a huge undertaking for me. I often watched the London Marathon as a child on TV wanting to complete it one day. Now, more than ever, I feel I have the reason and motivation to achieve this.

"Race Day will be quite an emotional one for the team, but we want this to be one part of telling the important story of our friend and the causes he and his family supported. Raising awareness of his work and the charities' work are incredibly important to us."

Running for the YMCA England, Southend YMCA and Epilepsy Research

Becky

24, Westcliff-on-Sea

WREND

Beckie Wrend and Jonathan Hall will be running the Virgin Money London Marathon to raise money for the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity (MAAC) who helped save the life of cousin and friend Leah Washington when she was involved in the crash on the 'Smiler' rollercoaster at Alton Towers in June 2015.

The accident, widely publicised in the UK last summer, resulted in Leah having her left leg amputated above the knee, whilst boyfriend Joe also suffered serious injuries to his hands and knees. MAAC worked to free Leah and Joe from the wreckage of the accident for four hours, in which time Leah lost more than a litre of blood from her leg and stopped breathing twice. She was eventually airlifted to hospital where she was treated for her injuries.

Beckie says: "Without them, Leah might not be alive today. Not only did we want to fundraise to say thanks and attempt to repay them for what they did for our family, we wanted to raise awareness of the work that the charity does.

"The charity, and many other air ambulance services across our country, receive no government or lottery funding; they rely entirely on donations from the public to raise the vital funds they need to operate. Without fundraising like this the charity would risk closure and would not be able to provide the life-saving treatment they did for Leah, Joe and the other unfortunate passengers last June."

Leah and Joe have both gone on to make remarkable recoveries and it is seeing her cousin rebuilding her life that has inspired Beckie to take on the iconic London Marathon course for the first time.

"This is my first London Marathon and Jon's second. It takes some serious motivation to keep training and people have said that it's inspirational what we are doing but seeing Leah recover is what inspires me to keep going. The fact that we're running for something so special to us will make it emotional but with that in mind, we'll be determined to finish."

Running for Midlands Air Ambulance Charity

Fundraising page: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/WashyWarriorsRunVLM2016>