MEMBER

SPOTLIGHTS

Stories, miles and memories from the PWR community

Member Spotlight: Tara Howarth

What started as a post-lockdown Couch to 5K soon became so much more. From honouring her dad to finding her running family, navigating a stroke and chasing new PBs, Tara Howarth has discovered that the real reward isn't always the finish line — it's the people beside you along the way.

How did you get into running?

It was just after lockdown and my dad was very ill. There were a lot of lifestyle factors that made his life harder. It made me think I needed to do something before it was too late, so I set out to do Couch to 5K. I thought that if I could do that, I could run Race for Life for Cancer Research.
I completed Couch to 5K, but without any goal I wasn't really doing much. Kev persuaded me to go to Beginners, and running with friends kept me going. I found parkrun and then went on to do the 10K Race for Life in memory of my dad, as 5K didn't seem like much of a challenge anymore because I was doing that every week anyway. Rachel Inman ran with me, and together we raised over £400.

What does the club mean to you?

For me, it's more about the friendships I've made and the support we give each other than the actual running. There's my friend Caroline, who I met at Beginners; the KFL girls; Selena, who made a list of people who would run with me while I was recovering or take me to hospital appointments after my stroke; everyone in Groups 1 and 2; and, of course, everyone who goes to One Inn the Wood every Tuesday.

That's what I love about the club, it's inclusive. There's a pace for everyone, and there's always someone to pick you up and cheer you on.

Kev has always been my biggest supporter. From making me join Beginners, cheering me on at my first 10K with a huge banner, waiting in the cold at the end of parkrun when he'd finished ages before me, and taking so many photos, he's always there encouraging me.

I love running most when…

It's finished and I'm in the pub. 😂

Photos of you at the KFL crossing the line hand in hand with your crew are some of the most iconic PWR memories in my mind. Tell us what these moments mean to you?

I loved those races. I hated the wind, rain, mud and hills, but I loved running with my friends. It was always about doing it together. At one race, a marshal on a bike kept asking us who was going to beat who. I just don't think he understood when we told him we were going to finish together!

What has been the toughest obstacle in your running journey?

Probably my stroke. It's been just over a year now. I was in the stroke unit for a week and lost all my speech. I've made a good recovery thanks to Kev getting me the help I needed so quickly, but I still have to manage my fatigue, and my balance.

I was so sad to miss parkrun on that first Saturday morning that I went and walked around the garden on the stroke unit at 9am, wishing I was with my friends. I was back at Norman Park just nine days after my stroke and walked it with Selena, coming in last with the tail walker. I worked hard, improving my time week after week, and finally got a parkrun PB eight months later in December. I got PBs in the KFL races I did too...
Just as I'd got back into it, I'll be taking another break because I'm having an operation to close the hole in my heart.

What's your proudest running achievement?

Getting a PB in the first KFL race after my stroke. I had to run on my own because the rest of the team weren't available, so it was tough. But Karri and Christina met me at the bottom end of the course after finishing their own race and ran with me to the finish, so I had company. That really gave me the boost I needed.

What keeps you coming back to running when life gets busy?

My brain is often too full of stuff. Running is the one thing that makes it quiet. That, and my friends, are what keep me running.

How do you balance work and running?

Work can be stressful. I teach older teenagers with severe autism and challenging behaviour. If it's been a tough day, I don't feel like running, but I've learnt those are the days I benefit from it the most. I always take my running kit to

work and put it on before I come home. Then I'm ready to run, so I can't pull out.

What song would pep you up at the final mile?

I don't listen to music when I run. Usually I'm chatting to whoever I'm running with. Liz always says I'd run faster if I didn't talk so much, but I tell her it's not my mouth that's tired, it's my legs.

Favourite running shoe?

I wear Saucony Guides. I tried Brooks briefly but quickly went back to Saucony. Unlike Kev, who has endless pairs for different races, I just have one pair for general running and one pair of trail shoes. My main criteria are cushioned and very stable. I'm quite clumsy and often trip or turn my ankles when I'm running.

Favourite post-run treat?

I always want crisps after running, preferably with a nice cold Diet Coke.

What would you miss about running if you couldn't do it anymore?

Spending that time with my friends, and the headspace it gives me.

Who is your running hero and why?

Albert Yee at Bromley parkrun. I'm never going to finish first or break any records, but I wonder if I can still be doing parkrun every week when I'm 93. That's a goal I could aim for.

Do you have any running goals?

I had surgery to close the hole in my heart at the end of July, so I'll need to recover from that first. Then I'd like to get a 10K PB, so I'll be looking to do that sometime in the next year.

How has your relationship with running changed over time?

I can be quite competitive with myself. I fluctuate between wanting to run faster and do better, and just being happy to run without any pressure. I was planning to work hard over the school holidays to improve my time, but that's on hold again. I've learnt that's OK. I've learnt that I can recover from illness and injury when I'm ready.

What has running taught you that you'll carry into everyday life?

I'm quite a determined person. If I decide I'm going to do something, I'll do it. That's true for me in running, and elsewhere in life.

Wishing Tara all the best for her recovery and looking forward to running alongside her again when she is back in action

Let Presh Howell know if you want to nominate someone with a great story.