



Press Release

Immediate Release

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Cygnet Colleagues Raise £2,000 for Samaritans

Cygnet colleagues have raised more than £2,000 for the Samaritans by taking on the Great North Run after being inspired by the story of a Newcastle resident who almost ended his life in 2023.

Four colleagues from across the organisation decided to take on the fundraising challenge for the charity to show their support to Gav Larkin who was introduced to Cygnet when he shared his story as part of the company's safeguarding training to thousands of mental health staff across the UK.

After an abusive childhood and what he describes as a destructive family life, Gav suffered from severe depression and drug addiction and later was a victim of domestic abuse.

He said: "In April 2023 things got too much and I almost ended my life. Thankfully I reached out for help.

"Samaritans are there for those that may feel like they have no one or nowhere to turn. Donations help so much and you could help train and support volunteers, ensuring people are not left to struggle alone.

"I want people who are going through similar to know there is help out there and you can get out of it."

Phil Winterbottom, Head of Safeguarding at Cygnet, heard about Gav's story online and how he had managed to turn things around by getting himself into better physical shape, which improved his mental health. Gav then wanted to help others by sharing his experiences.

Phil invited Gavin to share his personal story to Cygnet staff as part of their safeguarding training.

Gav asked Phil to run with him, but others at Cygnet - Gordon Bailey (Procurement Director), Penny Robinson (Conifers Service Manager) and Aliyaa Al-Toma (Regional Quality Manager) - were so inspired by his story that they decided to take on the Great North Run at the same time in aid of the charity which had supported Gav during his lowest points.

Phil explained: "Gav is one of the strongest people I know. He is inspiring in what he's been through and how he has broken the cycle. Knowing what he's been through and his incredible journey, I couldn't say no!

"We said beforehand that we would do it at his pace and the only thing that mattered was being by his side as we crossed that finish line. Walking, crawling, carrying, it didn't matter how we did it. It was all about his journey."

In an unsettling moment for Gav, he had a panic attack on the start line after seeing the perpetrator of his childhood abuse was also taking part in the half marathon event. Determined to carry on and demonstrate how far he had come in his journey, Gav was dealt further setbacks a short way into the run.

Phil added: "We set off jogging over the start line and after 250metres we needed to slow to a walk for Gav. I reminded him that our time doesn't matter, it was all about crossing that finish line together.

"I tried to keep us moving but my mile two it was clear that Gav was in a lot of pain and he was really limping. We stopped a number of times when the emotions became overwhelming and it became clear it was all too much.

"We went to a St John's Ambulance for some assistance at mile three, who confirmed he had damaged his foot and advised him not to continue. Gav told me to finish the race and I told him I was doing it for him.

"At this point, the sweep vehicles are going past and I'm literally at the back of 60,000 people. No music and alone with nothing but the sounds of my breath and the sight of straggler supporters on the side-lines packing up their chairs and going home.

"Fast forwards to 10 miles later and I'm crossing the line having overtaken around 17,000 people, soaked and exhausted."

Gav, determined to complete part of the race against medical advice, was dropped off at the last mile by the sweeper bus.

Phil added: "I ran back to meet him much to the confusion of the crowd by the finish line who reminded me I was running the wrong way.

"We did the last 600m together, arm-in-arm so I could be with him as promised as he limped over the line.

"I know crossing the finish line meant so much to him, even if the day didn't go quite as he imagined it."

Describing her experience of the run, Aliyaa added: "Gav must have gone through all the emotions during the race but we all want to say a huge well done to him.

"We were all absolutely soaked before we had even started, trainers squelching with water, fingers numb with the cold but it actually warmed up during the run and I thoroughly enjoyed the crowd giving out sweets and ice pops all the way along.

"Our bodies are shattered, but we did it for Gav."

To donate to Gav's cause go to <https://www.justgiving.com/page/gavlarkin>