RUN COLIN, RUN!

Besides wanting to help students go study abroad, Asia Exchange also wants to give back to the community. Here is a little story from a cause Asia Exchange recently endorsed.

Our and our student's contact person at Prince of Songkla University (Thailand), the Colin Gallagher, chose to take part in the Phuket charity marathon that took place on June 7th 2015.

As an avid sportsman, Colin was no stranger to running. Having watched the London marathon for many years, he always admired the runners to the point that running a marathon made it to his bucket list. He was especially motivated by the good causes the runners raised money for, as one of the reasons he had moved to Thailand for was to dedicate some of his time to working with children's charities.

Thus he decided to do it. He would run the marathon and raise money for a local foundation: the *Phuket Loves You* club.

Colin Gallagher, teacher and Asia Exchange's and its students' contact person at Prince of Songkla University in Thaïland.

"I have worked with *Phuket Loves You* (PLU) before and I have seen the amazing work that these guys do. They are all volunteers and expats who dedicate their time, who work at PLU to help fund community based HIV projects in Phuket.

One of these projects is the *Life Home Project Foundation*. They provide a safe environment for children who are infected or affected by HIV. This can range from providing education to supplying much needed medicine. I was drawn to helping kids who are infected and affected by HIV in particular, due to the stigma that still surrounds this disease. In a lot of cases their families don't want them, so they are literally dropped off at places like the *Life Home Project*.

I want these kids to be given the same opportunities as my students at PSU. We are all equal, regardless of who or what we have. We should all be treated the same and with the same respect. If I can raise a little money to help these kids, I'm happy with that."

Colin set up a donations drive a few weeks before the event. Not wont to disappoint his supporters and really wanting to push himself to finish, Colin decided he would only accept the donations pledged if he crossed the finish line. We at Asia Exchange however decided each and every kilometre counts, and chose to donate a set amount for every km Colin would run.

The morning of the run roughly 4 000 runners had gathered for the event at Laguna in Phuket. Feeling nervous about his first marathon as he had never ran 42km in one go, Colin had little time to calm his nerves as the start of the run sounded at 4.30 AM: they were off (The marathon started early in order to avoid the blazing sun of the day; running in the morning hours provides coolness and ideal running conditions).

As twilight slowly grew into dawn and the sun started to rise around 6.30 AM, Colin had already managed to make it through the first 20km. Unfortunately the combination of hilly terrain and the realisation that only half the run had been done hit our runner, which marked the beginning of the truly hard part. Nevertheless, playing music through his iPhone, Colin found the strength to continue.

"I just focused on the finishing line and all the money that I was raising for the charity." Slowing his pace a little to conserve his energy, our man pushed on. "The last 10km felt like 100km. My feet were aching, I could feel blisters and pain in my legs and my hips were really starting to hurt. But I kept on going."

5 hours, 41 minutes and 43 seconds later, Colin had finished his run at 9.45 AM. With the help of some of his students and charity volunteers come to cheer on him, he had found the strength to finish the run. The man didn't even get the chance to catch his breath after running before he was interviewed by the local Phuket News, who had followed his valiant efforts in seeking sponsorships for a charity and wished to know more about his cause!

"It felt fantastic to cross the finishing line knowing that I had raised a lot of money. But I couldn't have achieved this without the kindness of people like Asia Exchange, who kindly donated almost 18,000 THB in total. I am so grateful. I also received sponsorship and lots of messages from past ISPP students, which meant the world to me."

Exhausted after his run, and despite being excited about his accomplishment Colin went straight to sleep after the event. "Looking after yourself after a marathon is just as important as preparation prior to a marathon." Wise words from a man who had just accomplished an amazing feat!

"I am so happy that I could be part of this great event and raise money for such a great cause, helping kids with HIV. My pain from running the marathon will disappear within a day or two but their pain will last a lifetime. I am pleased I could help, but as I said before, I couldn't have done this without the kind generosity from people who share the will for helping others. Thank you everyone!"

The man of the hour in his victory pose!

Asia exchange is proud to have contributed to such a good cause, and wishes all the best to Colin, to the kids and the volunteers of *Life Home Project Foundation*.

Rudi Brummer

Contact Colin:
colingallagher2010@gmail.com

If you wish to know more about the foundation Colin supported, you may visit their website at www.lifehomeproject.org. To find out more about Asia Exchange's charity, please visit our website at www.asiaexchange.org and navigate to the Charity tab.