Angels in Wanstead

Laraine Fallows

In the 25th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Laraine Fallows

On the right-hand side till at Starbucks, where you can't possibly miss it, is a sign which, next to a photo of a woman and her son, asks you to support Laraine Fallows by sponsoring her marathon run in aid of Rethink (a sophisticated charity that not only helps over 60,000 people directly every year but, by changing attitudes and policies, helps millions more). It says she works at Smile in London dental practice just around the corner so I went off to find her (and of course, being me, I went the wrong way around the block).

Clearly popular with colleagues and patients alike, this dental nurse started running when she was 46 years old because she wanted to do the Race For Life to commemorate her mother and father, both of whom had died of cancer. Developing her fitness from her first run (which she says lasted about 38 seconds) to the 5K run took just five months and she has clearly not looked back.

That was when she discovered how much she loves running, but just running for fitness was not enough. Now she always has to aim for something so finds a charity to support for whatever she does. One friend lost her daughter to multiple sclerosis at just 21 years of age, so she raised money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Her husband Ricky had a stroke, so she ran for the Stroke Association. Laraine has also run for Cancer Research, the St Francis Hospice, Breast Cancer Care and this time is raising money for Rethink.

Laraine clearly makes friends easily, Francisco and his team at Starbucks think the world of her and have not just put up the fundraising sign but have also let her put a collection tin there (supplementing the money in it with their own tips, which I'll tell you more about soon) and treat her as extended family. Because of this it's hardly surprising that she met and made a good friend while running. She says the friend often gets her into trouble, calling to say: "Shall we do the Brighton Marathon" or "Shall we do a triathlon next?" You need a bicycle to do a triathlon, and when Laraine went on Facebook asking if she could borrow somebody's bike to train and compete with, one lady gave her a bike she said she wasn't using. Because she refused to take money for it, Laraine promised to raise money for a charity of her choice and she chose Rethink. Her mother, who since passed away at a very young age, had lived with schizophrenia, so Laraine and her son James are running the marathon in her memory.

Laraine, who runs in to Wanstead every day from Stratford, told me how generous the people of Wanstead have been. This isn't just about donating and raising money, but businesses including Majestic Wines, Daisy Flowers, The Orange Tree, Azura, The Larder and Lillies of Wanstead have donated raffle prizes and the Starbucks staff (the people, not the business) have been wonderful too.

I asked Laraine's husband Ricky if he had any funny stories to relate for the article. He supports her wholeheartedly but insisted that this is a serious matter: "It's about pain and discipline and occasionally injuries, but being positive about things too." That's me told, so I'll leave you with how Laraine described herself and her son as they last left James' osteopath: "I'm 5'3" and James is 6'3", so as he watched us running away James' osteopath laughed to see my many little short steps and his big long steps together." It's a contrast that clearly works.

I took this photo of Laraine and Ricky on their wedding anniversary and I would like to wish them many more happy healthy ones to come.

For more information and to sponsor Laraine and James, visit **wavidi.com/fallows**

Starbucks is located at 56A to 58 High Street, Wanstead and Smile in London is located at 19 Cambridge Park, Wanstead.

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