
A wheelie good day out for disabled participants in the PIM marathon

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A child in a wheelchair, in a marathon race sounds tough, but thanks to Scott Keel more and more handicapped children can enjoy the feeling of passing the finish line in the PIM marathon. Scott and a group of medical students will be pushing strollers in the marathon and half marathon and there is still time to join in the training.

How did you get the idea to run a marathon with children in wheelchairs?

After my second year at medical school I had major surgery and I needed to take one year off to rehab my knee. I went home to Virginia (USA) and started to work in a mental health facility with mentally handicapped children. While I was there I realized that there is a gigantic need for healthcare for these children. Doctors often just prescribe medication and push them away, while parents are looking for information.

A [video](#) changed my outlook toward what I wanted to do. It is about a disabled boy who expressed his wish to participate in a charity race. I realized that if you give a little bit of opportunity to those kind of children, their lives can change dramatically.



Scott Keel

What happened after your return to the Czech Republic?

When I came back, I realized that you never see people in wheelchairs included in activities, they are somehow still outside of society. Living in Prague, I want, not just to be a student, I want to be an active citizen in a city that I will call home for the next three years. So I found [Psáry](#) and started to meet the children and developed a working partnership with them.

Later I came up with the idea that I would do something like the father and son did in the video, which had never really been done in the Czech Republic before. It took a long time, but then finally the PIM gave us permission to push wheelchairs. It is the first time they allowed wheelchairs in the race. I was excited, but we only had one month to raise the money – 1500 Euros for the two strollers and fees for entry to the race etc, If you do charity you have to have some kind of inner passion in your heart, this kind of stress you ignore. The race last year was fantastic. Pepe, one of the participating children, wore his medal after the race for two weeks every night to bed, he really enjoyed it.

Another participants father came to me after the race and told me that it was the first time anyone had helped him.



PIM marathon 2010

What are your plans for this year?

After last year's success we are now an official charity sponsor and partner of the PIM. We are not a charity which raises money, we are a charity which actually participates. This year I am really excited as we have got a couple of new partnerships – parent project , clown doctors and " Fofrem na maraton ".

After the race, because we will involve not just the children but also their families, we will organize a picnic for the family. Even a few family members will run in our special relay team. The new relay is a way to include more people. We want people and society to see that they are also able to participate like us, they just might need our legs. That more you are able to get them in the population's eye, the more taboos starts to fall, because anything you don't see every day will always be strange. When you start seeing them, the strangeness will go away. It is like a smile that catches on, when one person smiles at you, then you smile back.

How is your training progressing as the marathon draws near?

Running is always more of a mental thing than physical, so we are running in groups. This year we will be a group of about 35 runners, from which 85 percent are from the Third Faculty of Medicine. We don't train until the very end with children, they are pretty much used to being in the chairs. We run as a group once a week on the weekends and we have now five girls in our group.

We run the marathon in teams, so if you get tired, you switch with others. They then look on, they stay involved, we give them high fives, make sure they are comfortable, but it is not a race for us, we are there not to compete for time. We just keep running, keep pushing and as you get closer to the finish line, you get the energy and you don't know where it comes from. In the big races you really feel something special.



PIM marathon 2010

Did you get any support from your faculty?

The Third Faculty helped us last year financially and I promised that if it will be successful I will not have to ask for money this year. The faculty bought a stroller with nice big wheels and they have contracted it to Psáry. I have designed this in the way that when I have graduated and end up, I don't know where, the school and the students can hopefully continue with the partnership I have built. So it will last for a long time. This year we will be in the real marathon, pushing up to eight kids and thirteen in the half marathon.

What are your plans for the future?

After medicine I want to be more involved with the special needs population and I want to change the way doctors look at this population. I want to organize a symposium for doctors and specialists from the Down Syndrome Society to speak to doctors and try to educate the doctors and students about this population. At the faculty you learn how to treat paediatric cases, you don't really learn how to treat people with special needs.

Running With Those That Can't o.s. is a charity based in Prague, Czech Republic with the belief that philanthropy is the gateway to becoming better students, better citizens and for many of its members, better doctors. Organized by medical students of the Third Faculty of Medicine, Charles University and other local universities, they set out to break the social taboo about the special needs population in the Czech Republic and helping them live a happy, healthy and more fulfilled lives. Our goal is to improve the quality of life for all citizens! This year there will be about 40 full distance runners and 24 relay runners.



Scott Keel after the marathon

Mission statement:

Help us in our mission to integrate individuals with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities into all aspects of daily life. One way to accomplish this goal is to actively help these individuals to participate in sporting events through

the use of adaptive strollers and a running team of typical peers. It is our hope that this team approach will greatly increase awareness of the challenges this population faces on a daily basis, while also increasing disability awareness, acceptance and inclusion into society.

P.K.