

Irish Nurse to Undertake 750km Charity Cycle in Support of Friend with Kidney Failure (<https://www.activelink.ie/node/110490>)



Irish Nurse to Undertake 750km Charity Cycle from Paris to Nice to Raise Awareness in Support of Friend with Kidney Failure

A community nurse who overcame breast cancer is set to undertake a self-funded, 750 km charity cycle over six days from Paris to Nice on September 6th. Westmeath native Ber Downey, from Mullingar, who has made Clonakilty in County Cork her home, will undertake this remarkable journey aiming to raise awareness about kidney disease and the importance of living kidney donation with all funds raised going to the Irish Kidney Association. Her motivation is to support her close friend, Fiona O'Donnell, who has returned to dialysis since January this year after her first kidney transplant, received seven years ago from another close friend, Grainne O'Keeffe, unfortunately, failed. The fundraiser link for Ber's epic cycle is:- www.idonate.ie/fundraiser/BerDowney (<http://www.idonate.ie/fundraiser/BerDowney>)

The inspiring trio, all living in Clonakilty, formed a close bond through their shared passion for sport and wellness, having met at their local West Cork Triathlon Club over ten years ago. Ber works as a community mental health nurse, Fiona is a performance nutritionist and Grainne works in finance. Throughout their challenges, including health and balancing work with their roles as mothers of three children each, they have remained steadfast in their commitment to each other.

Ber shared, *"This isn't just about the miles on the road and my love of cycling. For me, it's about raising awareness for a cause that's incredibly close to my heart: organ donation, especially living kidney donation. As a close friend of mine, Fiona needs a kidney transplant for the second time."*

Fiona underwent a successful living donor kidney transplant in November 2017, thanks to their close friend Grainne. Just seven months after the transplant operation, Ber joined with Fiona and Grainne as the trio conquered a triathlon in Schull together, demonstrating the profound impact that organ donation can have on a person's life.

Ber added, *"Witnessing Fiona's journey, from dialysis treatment to the triumph of completing a triathlon with Grainne, was truly inspiring. It transformed Fiona and gave her six years of good health while raising her young family."*

However, Fiona's return to dialysis in January 2024 has reignited the urgency of raising awareness for organ donation. She now spends three days a week in Cork University Hospital receiving life-sustaining hemodialysis treatment. *"This serves as a constant reminder of the ongoing need for more donors and support for those affected by kidney disease,"* Ber explained. Ber's personal battle with breast cancer four years ago has also added a new layer of meaning to this challenge. *"While this victory fills me with gratitude, it also means I cannot undergo testing for living donation. Witnessing the transformational effect, it had on my friend Fiona drives me even more to promote organ donation and living donor kidney donation,"* she said. Over the past few months, Ber has dedicated herself to an intensive training regime, building up to cycling 400 kilometres a week. *"I credit the support of my friends, but especially my husband Brian, without whom I would not have been able to dedicate so much time outside my work hours and family life,"* she remarked.

Living kidney donor **Grainne** said, *"I feel very blessed that I was able to give the gift of a kidney transplant to my close friend. Being a donor has never impacted my health adversely. I would love to see more living donors."*

The Paris2Nice Cycle will take place over six days, concluding on the iconic Promenade des Anglais in Nice. Ber will be among 50 other cyclists, each participating for their own important causes. Ber declared, *"Every pedal stroke will be dedicated to advocating for organ donation and supporting Fiona and other patients who are living with kidney disease."*

Ber's fundraising target is €6,000 with every cent raised going directly to the Irish Kidney Association, the registered charity that provides vital support for kidney patients and their families and carers as well as promoting organ donation for transplantation.

Fiona, who is deeply moved by her friends' dedication, expressed her gratitude: *"Having two such dedicated close friends who will go so far for me is incredibly humbling. Grainne made an extraordinary sacrifice to me seven years ago by donating a kidney to me, especially as she had a young family. Her generosity allowed me to be present for my husband and children and lead a fulfilling and healthy life until recently. There are no words to describe the depth of my gratitude. These two amazing women adopted me as one of their own. It's not just about the profound gift of life Grainne has given to me and the physical 750 km challenge Ber will undertake at her own expense; it's the emotional and moral support they've provided me every step of the way. Their commitment to raising awareness for kidney disease and living donation means the world to me and gives me hope for the future."*

Ber's has expressed that her efforts to increase awareness about living kidney donation are further bolstered by the recent passing of the Human Tissue Bill, which includes the introduction of non-directed altruistic living donation in Ireland. *"There's newfound hope for those in need of a kidney transplant,"* she noted. Ber urged, *"Please support my Paris2Nice Cycle Challenge for the Irish Kidney Association and together, we can make a difference and give hope to those awaiting a second chance at life. To learn more about my Paris2Nice charity fundraiser please visit www.idonate.ie/fundraiser/BerDowney (http://www.idonate.ie/fundraiser/BerDowney)."*

Becoming an organ donor is a simple process: carry a donor card, note your consent on your driving license, or set up the organ donor app on your phone but most importantly Share Your Wishes with your loved ones. For more information on organ donation and the Irish Kidney Association visit www.ika.ie (http://www.ika.ie)

Region

Nationwide

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