

Dublin Marathon Showcases Diverse Support for Irish Kidney Association (<https://www.activelink.ie/node/111791>)

The Irish Life Dublin Marathon 2024 (on October 27th) saw a remarkable gathering of individuals over the bank holiday weekend united by their experiences with organ failure, organ donation and transplantation, all stepping out on the course to raise awareness and funds for the Irish Kidney Association (IKA). www.ika.ie/dublin-marathon-2024/#teamika (<http://www.ika.ie/dublin-marathon-2024/#teamika>)

Among the inspiring participants was **Galway native Ernesto Antonio who was marking the 25th anniversary, to the exact date, of his heart transplant surgery** at the Mater Hospital. Having worked as a nurse in the UK in organ retrieval, he flew into Dublin to take part in the marathon to honour his heart donor and proudly wore a t-shirt emblazoned with the message *"In Memory of My Donor."* The previous day, he reunited with his transplant surgeon Jim McCarthy, a poignant moment that underscores the journey of life-saving organ donation. At the age of 60, Ernesto has completed incredible feats over the past quarter-century, including swimming the English Channel and climbing Kilimanjaro and earlier this year walked over 1200 kilometres through Spain to honour his donor. While he is content to undertake the marathon at a slow pace this year, he once broke a world-time record for a heart transplant recipient in the 2009 Dublin City Marathon, completing it in 3 hours and 45 minutes. Reflecting on this milestone, he shared, *"Every step I take is for my heart donor. Thanks to them, I've seen my daughter grow up. I'm forever grateful."*

Joining Ernesto were several first-time marathoners, including newlywed Dublin native **Glen Francis (32), living in Duleek, Co Meath**. His father-in-law Ruben Perez underwent two kidney transplants at Beaumont Hospital. Inspired by Ruben, Glen, who grew up in Portmarnock and now works with Aer Lingus as an aircraft maintenance planner, dedicated months to training for the marathon, driven by a deep appreciation for the charity that supported his wife Becky's family for over three decades. He said, *"Learning their story and seeing first hand the journey to Ruben's second transplant inspired me to take on the marathon challenge in solidarity with my new family."*

It was a deeply poignant first marathon for **Olivia Farrell, from Leixlip, Kildare** who was taking part to honour her only child, Lauren, an organ donor who was just 24 years old when she passed away in 2022. Olivia shared, *"I'm very proud of Lauren and her legacy. She carried an organ donor card and has given others a second chance at life."*

The lineup also included **Maria Byrne from Gorey, Co Wexford** who ran her 32nd marathon, her first since she donated a kidney in 2022 to her brother-in-law and father of two, Ken Reddin. At the time of the living donor kidney transplant, Maria, who works as a healthcare assistant in a GP surgery, was 36 years old and her youngest of three children was just three years old, and Ken, a father of two young boys, was 48. Unfortunately, the transplant failed but Ken went on to receive a second kidney transplant from a deceased donor. Maria said, *"I have no regrets, my offer to donate gave hope to our family, and we are profoundly grateful to the family of the deceased donor for restoring Ken's health."*

Emma Conlon, a senior renal dietitian at Tallaght University Hospital, from Lucan, Co Dublin and now living in **Kimmage**, ran her first ever marathon to raise awareness of the Irish Kidney Association's vital supports *"I've seen firsthand the impact the charity has on patients,"* she shared.

Aoibhinn Raleigh, age 27, a social media influencer from Leixlip and organ donor card carrier who also has her organ donor status, code 115, recorded on her drivers licence, tackled her first full marathon for the kidney charity to spread awareness about organ donation. Aoibhinn created the running club, **Sole Mates**, in May 2024, for beginners and slow runners, which has become a huge success with weekend meet ups in various locations around. She has inspired a large community on her social media **Sole Mates Dublin** to get active and build community, growing an incredibly large following in social media in a short space of time with more than 9,000 followers on Instagram and 50,000 on TikTok. Her large following on social media amplifies her message, making a significant impact on organ donor awareness. *"I wanted to use my platform to support the Irish Kidney Association, promote organ donor awareness and encourage others to consider organ donation,"* Aoibhinn said.

Celebrity hairstylist Trudy Hayes from Walkinstown, Dublin had been sharing her preparation for the Dublin Marathon on her social media sharing her personal journey from a shock diagnosis of organ failure in 2007 to receiving donor kidneys from both her parents, first a kidney from her father and later a kidney from her mother which she is still enjoying the successful longevity of eleven years later. Trudy is an avid runner and explained her motivation for running in the Dublin marathon and raising funds for the Irish Kidney Association, *"I want to highlight how organ donation can change lives. One donor can save up to seven lives, and that's a legacy worth sharing."*

Lisa Clarke from Craughwell, Co Galway said *“My mum had a kidney transplant 23 years ago and just 8 months ago she returned to hospital dialysis treatment which she undergoes three days a week. Thankfully, its working well for her. She is 83 now but our family is endlessly grateful for the service and support she receives from the Irish Kidney Association. We truly appreciate the years of good health the transplant enabled her to have.”*

Declan Meaney (39), from Ballyea, Ennis, Co Clare who works in Human Resources at Clare County Council, laced up his running shoes for his first-ever marathon. Declan’s motivation stems from a personal connection - his mother Lynda Meaney was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD) twenty-one years ago and for the past three years has been travelling a 50-minute journey to Limerick three times a week to receive haemodialysis treatment. Declan shared, *“Unfortunately, I was ruled out as a kidney donor to help Mam which was very hard to swallow as everyone wants to see their mother in great health. This run is my way of contributing and hopefully bringing a little good karma our way, so my Mam can receive the transplant she’s been waiting for.”*

It was the first Dublin Marathon for **Colin O’Leary (43), a native of Douglas and now living in Kileens in Co. Cork** He was running in honour of his late mother-in-law, Catherine Moloney, who had Polycystic Kidney Disease and was receiving dialysis for three times weekly for eight years at the same hospital where he works in as an electrical foreman, Cork University Hospital, before she passed away last year. *“Running for the IKA is a way of honouring my mother-in-law while raising funds for essential services the charity provides which she and my wife have availed of,”* Colin said.

Also joining this heartfelt marathon challenge were **Kildare cousins Thea Ui Lionnain from Kilcock and Niamh Brennan from Maynooth who flew home from Edinburgh and Berlin** where they work. They were running in the Dublin Marathon in memory of their beloved late aunt, Mary Nolan from **Clonmel**, a kidney patient and diabetic who was 52 when she passed away. Niamh echoed her cousin Thea’s sentiments saying, *“Our aunt Mary was deeply loved, and the Irish Kidney Association helped her and our family immensely. By running the marathon, we hope to raise awareness and funds so that other families can benefit from the same support.”*

Joseph Tobin (25) from Bunclody in Wexford, who is now living in Dundrum, Co. Dublin was new to the full marathon distance having previously completed three half marathons. Joseph, a software engineer was running for the Irish Kidney Association, a cause close to his heart as he and his mother share the same kidney condition. Joseph said, *“Seeing my mother’s experience with kidney disease has motivated me to raise awareness and support the charity that has helped our family so much. The Irish Kidney Association’s Support Centres in Dublin and Cork which offer free accommodation, holiday homes, and counselling services have made a huge difference to us.”*

Jeanette Murphy, a consultant nephrologist from Illinois, whose husband’s family are from Dalkey, Co Dublin, flew in from the US for the marathon and explained her reason for choosing the IKA to support. *“I want to support the Irish Kidney Association and help with the global fight against kidney disease in honour of my patients.”*

Conor Nevin, from Knocklyon, Co Dublin was running for the IKA which supported a relative of his who received a kidney transplant. **Orla Hayes from Ratoath, Co Meath** ran the marathon for the IKA inspired by her older sister Lorraine who underwent a kidney transplant when she was 9 years old and is still enjoying its successful longevity, and now has two children, twenty-nine years later. Also running in the marathon for the IKA was **John Fitzgerald, a consultant Anaesthetist at Beaumont Hospital**, who engages in preassessment clinics for patients with end stage kidney disease.

Each participant running for the Irish Kidney Association (IKA) donned a bright yellow t-shirt with its logo. As they converged in Dublin city from various parts of Ireland and abroad, their collective effort embodied the spirit of solidarity, raising funds to help those affected by kidney disease and organ donor awareness.

For more information about organ donation, the Irish Kidney Association (IKA), each of its inspiring Dublin Marathon runners and links to their online fundraisers, please visit www.ika.ie/dublin-marathon-2024/#teamika (<http://www.ika.ie/dublin-marathon-2024/#teamika>)

Region

Nationwide

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