

Ballymena woman's New York marathon effort raises £7000

THE caring Ballymena aunt of a three-year-old who suffers from a terminal muscle wasting condition has just raised over £7,000 by completing the gruelling New York City Marathon.

Former Cambridge House pupil, Sharon Letters told The Ballymena Times she was "touched" by the response to her efforts from people throughout the Ballymena borough and far beyond.

She put herself forward for the world famous marathon event to help the charity inspired by her little nephew Sam McCausland whose mum Tracy is also a native of Ballymena and a former Cambridge House pupil.

Sam, now three, was diagnosed with the terminal muscle wasting condition Congenital Muscular Dystrophy when he was just one.

Muscular Dystrophy affects thousands of children in the UK, and causes the muscles of the body to gradually waste away.

Sam's parents, family and friends set up the charity SAM (Struggle Against Muscular Dystrophy) in 2008 to raise money for research in order to help find an effective treatment and eventually a cure for the disease.

Talking of her feelings about Sam and the decision to run the NYC marathon Sharon said: "Like everyone else connected to Sam I was devastated when we were told of his condition.

"I couldn't understand how something like this could happen. Everyone who meets Sam falls in love with him. He is so funny and loving, and to think of what the future

potentially holds for him makes my stomach churn and my heart so sad.

"I wanted to do something to raise awareness of the charity, raise money, and also give me a huge personal challenge at the same time. New York is such a high profile event - it's the world's largest marathon - and by doing something this big I thought it would inspire people to dig deep and support me and the charity!"

Sharon started her rigorous six month training schedule in May, increasing her mileage each week, pounding the pavements four times a week, with cross training one day a week. Her fiancé Stephen was her trainer and running partner as she prepared for her epic run.

"Twenty-six miles is a long way and I knew it would be no easy feat to someone who is not a natural runner," said Sharon.

"There were some days going for a run was the last thing I wanted to do and when the miles built up sometimes enthusiasm was a bit short! I did occasionally question why I had got myself into this but then all I had to do was think of Sam."

"Sam was my inspiration to do the marathon and thinking of him kept me going. I knew that no matter how painful my muscles would be during a run or how tired I was, it is nothing to what children with CMD have to cope with.

"I would think of Sam's cheeky little grin and his infectious laugh and I want him to have reason to keep smiling and laughing. I would love Sam to have the chance to one day be able to run a race himself."

Sharon's efforts have certainly paid off! So far her online fundraising total has exceeded £7,000 and the donations are still rolling in.

"I am really touched by the response I have had. People have been so generous both with their money and their support. I am pleased to have spread the word to people about CMD and the charity as this has touched a lot of people who have never heard of CMD before."

Sharon and SAM would like to extend an enormous 'thank-you' to everyone who has donated.

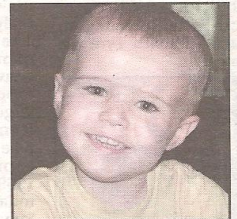
It's not too late to help her raise even more money. You can donate

online at www.justgiving.com/runforsam

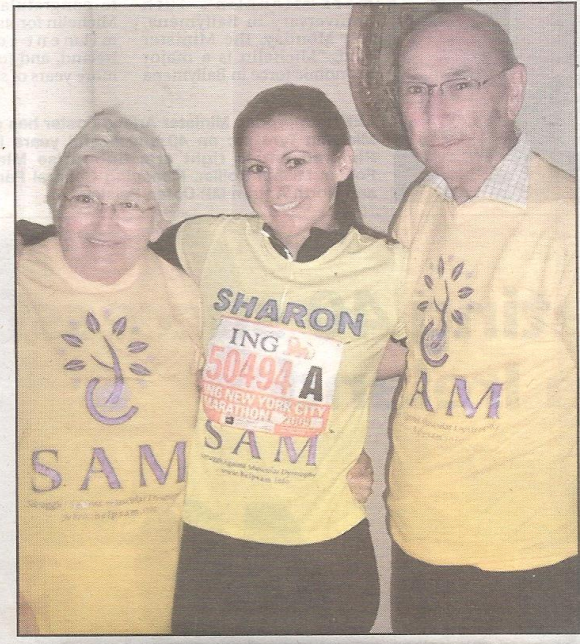
SAM is a 'zero cost' charity. No money is taken from the charity funds for overheads, salaries or administration. This means that every pound raise can go to research to help bring an effective treatment one step closer.

To find out how you can help or get involved please contact SAM through the charity website www.helpsam.info.

RIGHT: Sam McCausland (3) who suffers from Congenital Muscular Dystrophy and is the inspiration behind the charity, PleaseFixSam



BELOW: Sharon just before she set out on her 26.2 mile marathon for SAM pictured with her parents Sam and Pat Letters from Ballymena who flew to New York to support her.



Perfectly matched