

# GOING THE EXTRA MILE

by Ulrica Marshall

When Susan Griffen, an American citizen and long-term Tokyo resident, crossed the finishing line after four hours and six minutes at last month's Tokyo Marathon, it was not just her friends and family that were supporting her. At The National Centre for Child Health and Development (NCCHD), a paediatric hospital just a few miles away in Setagaya-ku, some 25 children on the cancer ward were cheering for her and her 74 co-runners, who have taken pledges on behalf of the Tyler Foundation.

"The kids said that everyone is always telling them *"Ganbatte, ne!"* as they go through each phase of their difficult treatment. But by cheering on the runners, they are able to say *"Ganbatte!"* to someone else for a change," explains Kim Forsythe, Director and Founder of The Tyler Foundation, a non-profit organisation supporting children with cancer and their families in Japan. "Fundraising through pledging for runners in the Tokyo Marathon is truly a win-win situation for all involved. There are virtually no fundraising expenses, so each pledge is practically a pure donation. The runners, many of whom would be running in the marathon anyway, feel inspired to be running for a cause—beyond their personal running goals."

More than 32,000 runners set off from the marathon's Shinjuku starting point on a crisp and sunny February morning. "It was absolutely fabulous," comments Susan, who has run seven marathons across the globe, including the two held in Tokyo this year and last. "The crowd was the best I've ever seen. The Japanese people were so nice and there were so many of them!"

Susan, mother of three children between the ages of 15 and 20, has led a running club, based out of the Tokyo American Club, for the past five years. Many of these runners were also her training partners ahead of the marathon. Susan is well-known in the charity world, having chaired the TELL (Tokyo English Life Line) Runathon for four consecutive years and is also secretary for Refugees International, a Tokyo-based non-profit organisation supporting refugees worldwide. The Tyler Foundation is the third and latest charity to benefit from Susan's time and dedication.

The Foundation was inspired by and named after Kim's son, who tragically died in 2005 at 23 months of age from infant acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a condition that had been diagnosed when he was less than one month old. One child is diagnosed with cancer every four hours in Japan and although the cure rates have improved significantly over the past twenty years, treatment for certain cancers such as the one which Tyler suffered from only offers hope to

some ten to twenty percent. Even if the cancer is cured, many children are left with learning disabilities and growth problems. Few will ever be able to have children of their own. The long and arduous treatment is harrowing for patient and parent alike, and the Foundation provides support, comfort, and education at what is a most difficult time.

The Tyler Foundation is already making a positive difference to over 100 children; mainly through the NCCHD, but is now setting its sights higher by aiming to raise ¥100 million over three years to build a Shine On House; a support centre accommodating local Japanese and expatriate families with children afflicted with cancer. "The House will provide accommodation, counselling space, daily and weekend care, and activities for siblings of patients," Kim explains. But such an ambitious goal will require substantial funding, especially since the organisation receives no government finance.

With Kim's husband and Tyler Foundation co-founder, Mark Ferris—himself a keen runner—and the ongoing support of Mara Yamauchi, a leading

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—Susan Griffen, marathon participant

British marathon contender and Beijing Olympics hopeful, the idea of fundraising through pledges to dedicated runners at the Tokyo Marathon was born. The concept is not new. Running for charity has been a key goal in marathons in New York, London, and Sydney, amongst others, for many years. Until now, little or no charity funding has been raised at the Tokyo Marathon.

"The Japanese...don't really understand charitable giving so much," explains Susan, "I don't know why, maybe it's not part of the culture." But she believes that this is starting to change: "I definitely do. Working for Refugees International, I've seen it changing."

In the context of fundraising at other international marathons, the Tyler Foundation's target appears perfectly achievable. The latest published data by The London Marathon Limited shows that £31 million (¥6.5 billion) was raised on behalf of a host of charities in 2002, with more than 76 per cent of competitors running for a cause of their choice. The total raised by the Shine On Marathon runners came in at the ¥11 million mark; a significant step on the path to the Shine on House.

Susan and her husband Tim were among the first to sign up to the Shine On Marathon Challenge. Training started in earnest four months before the race, following the recommendations set by *The Complete Guide to Running* by Earl W.



Fee, which many consider to be the authority on preparing for a marathon. But the path to the race was not entirely smooth, with Susan sustaining an injury during the early stages of her training. "Something happened to my foot over Christmas and I thought it was something really debilitating, but I took a week off and trained on the spinning bike; I came back and it was fine."

As for any runner, the event itself also presented some hurdles;

"I have a knee problem, which comes and goes and tends to come during a marathon. Around 18k I thought I would have to drop out—it really hurt, but then it stopped—I couldn't believe it," recalls Susan. She emphasises that running for the Foundation gave her extra inner strength to finish the marathon: "I have never run for charity before, but I remember specifically one time (during the marathon)—it was right near the end and one kilometre seemed like a lifetime. I looked down at my glove and it said Shine On Marathon Challenge...and that inspired me. It was a great thing," says Susan. Sporting bright orange gloves bearing the logo of the Tyler Foundation, Susan even managed to secure additional pledges from fellow runners during the course of the race.

Asked for a message to prospective *Being A Broad* runners at the next Tokyo Marathon, due to take place in March 2009, Susan is emphatic: "I would highly recommend it. For anyone thinking of doing a marathon, if you live here you must do the Tokyo marathon—it's fabulous. And why not—what the hell!" If you do run the marathon next year, make sure you go the extra mile. Put on your orange gloves and help put a smile on some little faces at a hospital not far away.

For more information about the Tyler Foundation and the important work they are doing for children suffering from cancer in Japan, visit [www.tylershineon.org](http://www.tylershineon.org). **BAB**