

Olivia Strong of Run for Heroes awarded the MBE

Olivia Strong (27) has been awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in recognition of her role as Founder of Run for Heroes, and for services to fundraising during Covid-19

Olivia is a documentary producer and earlier this year she created the Instagram challenge: Run 5KM, donate £5 to the NHS and challenge 5 others to do the same. Since it began the not for profit has raised over £6.7 million which has completely overtaken her original target of £5,000. The simple, but effective, challenge inspired many people to get out and run and it has also improved their mental and physical health.

She set up the fundraising idea during Covid-19 to encourage others to get outside and use their permitted outdoor exercise to raise money for the NHS Charities Together, the umbrella organisation that takes in charities which support the welfare of NHS staff in their fight against Covid-19.

Olivia told us: "My work was cut back to two days a week and I had all this free time on my hands and wanted to help. I tried to sign up to be an NHS volunteer, but they weren't accepting applications. Then one Friday I went on a run round Arthur's Seat, and I just noticed that there were loads of other runners out there even though it was raining. And I thought it would be a good idea for all these runners to donate and pay to do the daily exercise and give the money to the NHS workers

who needed it the most.

At that time 5k was in the guidance, and £5 was a doable amount. So then if you nominate five other people then the fundraising could continue to spread. So on the Friday night I set up the Instagram account.

“On the Saturday my sister Melissa and I went out for a run and each nominated five people. I set up a Virgin Money giving page and set the target at £5,000. So it was to run 5K to raise 5K. By the Tuesday the support for that had already reached £5,000.

“People caught on to the mechanical nature of 5-5-5. It really flipped fundraising on its head because it was really asking people to pay to become part of a wider community rather than fundraising.

“Exactly a month into the campaign we had reached £5 million.

“Two of my friends also helped: India Pappalardo-Strachan who is a UX designer did all the branding. Alice Taylor works in PR and she had been furloughed so she did all the press. And my brother and sister also helped a lot to push the idea out.”

About the award Olivia said: “ When the letter came telling me I had been awarded the MBE, I was completely speechless. I just felt this was the right thing to do at the time, and I was trying to be part of the community.”

The funds raised will be spent on wellbeing packs for staff and volunteers, as well as costs like travel, parking, accommodation and food. The not for profit helped thousands of people who are working to save lives during the global pandemic.

From next year the plan is to create an annual virtual 5k event in the fifth month of the year. It may be called 5k May, but that is all to be planned next – for now Olivia is basking

in the glory of her MBE as indeed she should.



Olivia Strong MBE

Earlier in the year the Prime Minister recognised the achievement of Run for Heroes with a Points of Light Award for outstanding volunteering. And legendary athlete, Mo Farah, supported the NHS with a run in April to raise some funds.

<https://www.runforheroes.uk/donate>

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India Pappalardo-Strachan

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Alice Roberta Taylor

