

Robbie swaps rowing for running again to aid charity

An East Lothian man who last year rowed the Atlantic for charity is set to compete in a more personal charitable challenge.

Robbie Laidlaw, 35, originally from Gullane and now living near London, is to run the Tata Consultancy Services London Marathon this month to raise money for the British Heart Foundation.

His son Gray is a child with Down Syndrome and was born just before Robbie set out on his epic rowing adventure. He aims to raise awareness of the condition as well as raise funds for research into congenital heart conditions.

Robbie's TCS London Marathon fundraising campaign was launched on World Down Syndrome Day – 21 March – and has already raised over £5,000.

Gray also has partial atrioventricular septal defect (AVSD) – a condition common in babies with Down Syndrome. AVSD occurs when there are holes between the right and left chambers of the heart – and the condition will require surgery at the Royal Brompton Hospital, London.

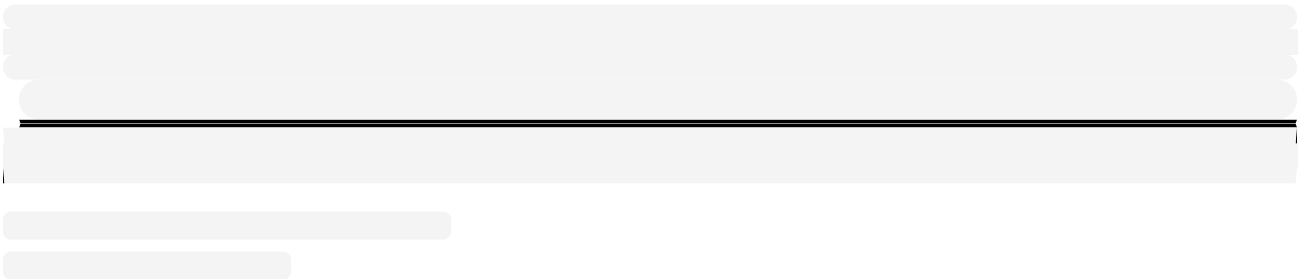
About half of all children with Down Syndrome have AVSD.

Robbie and his partner Kiri want to raise awareness of Down Syndrome, with all its challenges and the joys, and also to champion people with learning disabilities.





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A post shared by Spirit of hospitality (@spirit_of_hospitality)

World's toughest row

Last year, Robbie raised more than £300,000 for Hospitality Action, a charity for the hospitality and catering sector, by

rowing the Atlantic – an epic journey of 3,000 miles from the Canaries to Antigua in the Atlantic Challenge.

He completed the row in 38 days, surviving, blistering heat, hallucinations and a capsizing, with his boss, Chris Mitchell, from Genuine Dining, a leading contract catering company.

They were competing against some 40 other boats and finished fifth overall. Most boats had crews of three, four or five – and Robbie and Chris came first in the pairs category. The boats ahead of them were all crewed by four or five men.

The scale of their epic voyage is underlined by the fact that more people have scaled Everest than rowed the Atlantic.

“We didn’t know before Gray was born that he had Down Syndrome and our focus now is to care for him and support all his developmental and other needs,” said Robbie, adding:

“Running the TCS London Marathon on 27 April is our way of saying thank you to all the healthcare professionals who have cared for Gray and to raise money for a very deserving charity.



Gray hitches a lift from runner Robbie



Happy family: mum Kiri, Gray and dad Robbie

“We also hope to raise awareness about Down Syndrome, and dispel some of the myths, so that kids with the condition can attend their local mainstream school and find fulfilling work – living lives free from barriers, and welcomed within society.”

Robbie had hoped to run a small part of the marathon with Gray in his pram, but the race organisers are not so keen! Instead, baby Gray will be at the start and finish to cheer on his Dad.

To contribute – <https://www.justgiving.com/page/robbielaidlaw>