**Red Hot Chilli Steppers 3 Peaks Challenge, 30/06-03/07/2024**

A colleague in our Office has a life-limiting eyesight condition that renders him 99% blind. He is only able to see outlines and shapes of people in bright sunlit conditions, but has the most amazing positive, can-do approach to life.

He wanted to raise money for a Charity he has been closely involved with, supporting children born deaf and with no sight, and came up with the idea of climbing the 3 highest mountains in the UK in 48 hours….when he can hardly see to put one foot in front of the other!

His positivity generated massive interest, so several meetings were held for anyone interested, and a group of really keen, committed people coalesced. There was no criteria to be allowed to join, if you kept coming to the planning meetings and took part in the Training Hikes, then you were included.

This gave us a core group of 10 people, all active members of Plymouth HASSRA, and we divided the planning roles. One person booked the hotel accommodation; one liaised with the Minibus company to set an itinerary; one planned the routes we would take; one was responsible for ensuring everyone’s gear was good enough; another arranged the training hikes; others took on the media role, promoting the event to raise sponsorship.

We promoted our plan Nationally on an All-Colleague call, reaching out to other Depts including as far afield as Scotland.

We created a really strong Team ethic, everyone helping each other to overcome their own challenges, including fitness, sore legs, blindness, injuries, falling ill, having to complete this challenge inside 48 hours, with long drives between hikes and short recovery times. We also had to contend with atrocious weather conditions that week, being cold, very wet, with high winds. One of the key Team members had to drop out at the last minute due a family emergency, so we took a little doll version of her so that she was still with us in spirit.

Eventually, a group of 9 varied and assorted people set off to climb Snowdon, Scafell Pike, and Ben Nevis in 3 days. Fitness levels varied, but it was always intended that it was the taking part that was more important than getting to the summits. The group was extremely diverse and completely inclusive, including a menopausal woman, a trans woman; a blind man, with ages ranging from 26 to 68. Very few of the group had climbed any mountain, let alone the 3 biggest in the country on 3 consecutive days, and we also had to drive 1200 miles just to get there.

We gave people nicknames describing our diversity and emphasising the inclusive aspect of our group: Captain Chilli – Wayne Vowden; Grandfather Time – Rod Peers; Mamma Chilli – Vicky Bartolini; Treasure Chilli – Martin; Flash Chilli – Zoe; Goat Chilli – Aria; Princess Chilli -Jas.

Mountain walking is one of those tough activities where the only person who can do it is yourself, but it’s much easier as a Team. Your friends make you laugh, walk along with you, take your mind off the pain, holding onto your arm and encouraging you literally every step of the way, building everyone’s resilience and determination to make it to the top.

Group members reached the summit of all three mountains. One of our Team only made it half way up one, but she was so delighted with her achievement it gave her a real motivation to come back to do all three. We all returned with a huge sense of success and achievement. The effort was so inspiring, that as we climbed, other walkers we passed stopped to give us donations.

We raised £3200 for the Charity, enabling them to provide additional activities for the children. People have since told us how inspirational they felt we were, and as a result have themselves been encouraged to be more active.