

Wow – what a 24 hours!

In April 2017 Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign in concert with Heeley Development Trust and members of the local community posed this challenge to the local communities in Sheffield.

Can our community run non-stop circuits around a 1km route up a big steep Sheffield hill for 24 hours with at least two people always running?

The answer was a resounding yes!



To view hundreds more photos go [here](#)

Around 500 people participated in the 'small park BIG RUN' 24-hour community running challenge in Meersbrook Park on June 10/11 2017. The collective effort raised over £4,500 for women's and children's charities in Palestine and participants had a really good time doing it!

Organisers were astonished at the level of support; 161 signed up online and 129 more turned up and ran over the 24 hours. Every half hour slot was filled with at least two people running at all times – often it approached 20. Roughly 200 more participated in the family friendly fun run at the end on Sunday.



Why we did it

Meersbrook Park is a beautiful urban park with fabulous views and a great local community. We are so lucky to live in such a wonderful place where we can move around freely.

But that luxury is not available to all, our own freedom of movement was hard earned and is not available to all. Many people across the world are hemmed in by war, by government oppression or, as with Palestinians, by 69 years of continual military occupation. It is the awful plight of Palestinians that we focused on.

We were inspired to hold this event in our local park to raise awareness of the plight of Palestinians in general, but focusing on two points in particular.

- The Palestine marathon, in Bethlehem, is forced to repeat four circuits in the city as there is no continuous 26 mile route available that isn't blocked by an Israeli Military checkpoint or the giant separation wall.

- Tulkarm Refugee camp is roughly the same size as Meersbrook Park. 21,000 people live in Tulkarm. 21,000 people live in the whole of the Gleadless Valley Ward area.



Palestinian children on their way to school in Hebron are forced to pass through Israeli army checkpoints.

We placed large information boards around the route explaining the situation in Palestine explaining issues based around our theme , the right to free movement.

Seven of these we created ourselves with three others were reproduced from the Unison/Palestine Solidarity Campaign 'Dangerous occupation' exhibition.



Two info boards are shown below – all of the boards can be viewed [here](#).

FREE TO MOVE?

Disappearing Palestine



The Nakba – “catastrophe” – began in 1948 with the forced expulsion of over 700,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages.

In 1967 Israel illegally occupied the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, an occupation which continues to this day.

With its checkpoints and the Wall in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and its blockade of Gaza, Israel divides, segregates and imprisons Palestinians in their own land.



PALESTINE 1947-TODAY PSC

PALESTINE ▶ **LESTIN** ▶ **STIN** ▶ **SETTLEMENTS**

NAKBA ▶ OCCUPATION ▶ SETTLEMENTS

FREE TO MOVE?

Healthcare



Jason



I WAS
BORN AT
CLEVELAND
CLINIC



Camille



I WAS
BORN AT
ST VINCENT
DE PAUL HOSPITAL



Rami



I WAS
BORN AT
QALANDIA
CHECKPOINT



BETWEEN 2000 AND 2005*

**67 PALESTINIAN MOTHERS WERE FORCED
TO GIVE BIRTH AT ISRAELI MILITARY CHECKPOINTS.
36 BABIES DIED.**

VISUALIZING PALESTINE

We wanted to hold an event that brought these facts to mind, raised money for two Palestinian charitable endeavours and engaged our local community in an active, fun and joyous event.

The programme of the day reflected this mix of local community activity and international politics. The Lord Mayor Anne Murphy came to open the run. Only two days after the gruelling General Election campaign the newly elected local MP Louise Haigh not only visited but gamely ran the first hour.

"This was an amazing group effort with teams running 24 hours around the park in support of some great causes. The team helped organise a great event with plenty going on throughout. Thanks to all who took part and helped to raise so much for these great causes." Louise Haigh, MP Heeley



Louise Haigh (left) at the very start of the run.

Diyar – a visiting Palestinian women’s football team from Bethlehem – ran the first lap helping emphasise the deeper significance of the event.



Palestinian women’s football team Diyar posing for photos with the Sheffield Lord Mayor Anne Murphy

24 hours of running

Who would have thought that running up a bloody steep hill over and over again at all times of day and night would be so much fun!





Friends were made, challenges achieved and the sound of laughter and friendly chat was everywhere. People from a wide variety of walks of life joined in; refugees, asylum seekers, disabled people, pensioners, children, ultra runners, keen runners, some very unwilling runners, one cyclist, families and several dogs.



The Steel City Striders running club and the *Running is Wrong* team both provided personnel for the whole 24 hours. The Striders clocked up over 300km collectively.

As well as hundreds of kilometres the *Running is Wrong* team clocked up a number of painful injuries but persevered; one completed a full marathon distance over a number of legs. The 1km course record was set at a nigh on impossible to beat 3 minutes and 41 seconds by Sam Needham of GoodGym – no mean feat when a third of the course is up that darn steep hill!

The complete list of teams was: *TeamRacingSwain, Runner Beans, Anna and Tony, Upper Albert Road, Donegal Dawdlers, Steel City Striders, Running is Wrong, The Belonging Group, Green Triangle, greystones and friends, Onen Hag Oll, Fabulous Furry Freak McGregors and Running Bears.*



Jasper McDowell (left) looking pretty fresh faced after an overnight stint of 55km!

Jasper McDowell, from Geneva in Switzerland and based in Loughborough turned up unannounced and covered a mind boggling 55km overnight powered only by a big box of dates, water and some quite impressive resolve.

That's more than a marathon.

We know of two other runners who completed marathons in stages. At least two runners completed half marathons.

Many ran several times over the 24 hours. Children as young as three years old ran laps.

The Belonging Group is a social club of refugees and asylum seekers that play football, share food and blow off some steam together every Wednesday at Umix, the home of Football Unites Racism Divides. We offered them free places and covered their travel expenses. After a few crossed wires they finally arrived, ran and, despite the hill. You can see from the picture below they really enjoyed themselves.



The Belonging Group

Others with profound physical challenges completed circuits. Kids were carried along by Sherpa parents on shoulders and in pushchairs. Some jolly residents from Brook Road came out offering glasses of wine to late night volunteers – two of them gamely decided to run a lap, we had to remind one to tighten up his crocs!

Sian a first-year junior doctor, finished her shift at the Northern General on Saturday evening and came straight over and completed another gruelling shift of running for us!



*What else would you do at 4.30am if you can't sleep? Make Palestinian coloured pompoms of course!
Thanks Rosie!*

One volunteer came across a lady sat on a park bench at 4.30am Sunday morning ripping up strips of fabric – she said couldn't sleep so had decided to come into the park to make and hand out pompoms in Palestinian colours for the runners.



People took up the baton in many ways – some quite literally. Graham Parry, from the neighbourhood action group Groundwork, cycled through Palestine in early 2017 and brought back an olive branch. The internationally recognised symbol of peace. It was beautifully machined by a local wood artist, Rowan Todd, and passed from runner to runner for the whole 24 hours.

It wasn't only running



As well as the run several other activities were held. We showed a short film 'A Running Occupation', whose camerawoman grew up in Meersbrook, covering experiences around the Palestine Marathon. This was held in the Meersbrook Park Walled Garden along with a photographic exhibition and also a lovely stall where volunteers served tea and delicious home baked cakes.

Additionally, in the garden we held a children's craft workshop to make beautiful lanterns that decorated and illuminated the course overnight.

Further down in the park, a local group of street tennis enthusiasts brought their bats and balls and marked out a court. It's an easy game to play, though hard to master, with an inclusive streak that reflects perfectly the nature of our 24-hour run.

Diyar, returned on the Sunday. They held a penalty shoot-out competition against local children, and some grownups too!



Humbling heaps of happy help

People gave their support in humbling heaps! We are deeply, deeply grateful. Course marshals alone numbered over 50. We had numerous volunteers for the other activities, the registration desk and in the walled garden.

The marshals helped ensure the runners were kept safe, boosted their spirits and liaised with other park users with whom we shared the space. Many signed up beforehand and many volunteered on the day. It is hard to understate how helpful they were. We are so grateful to them and all of the other volunteers.

Runners and supporters carried and waved Palestinian flags and many gave generous financial donations to the two funds we are supporting. Many people baked and donated cakes to sell in the Walled Garden.



"I've had a brilliant time over Saturday and Sunday massaging runners who were taking part in Small Park Big Run." Carolyn

We also gained support from many in the world of business. We had help from local businesses; Lembas, Regather, Beanies, The Treatment Space, People for Print, Sheffield Tree Care, Cafe des Amis, Up and Running and Naked Ape. And larger ones too; the Co-op gave us gallons and gallons of water, Go Outdoors provided headtorches for the night runners and Virgin Gym Broadfield Road gave all runners a complimentary free visit. Carolyn Lindsay of the Treatment Space provided free massages for those with aching limbs on both days.



Workers from Coop delivering the free water for runners. We had plenty coming out of the sky at this point too but it stopped before the beginning of the run.

We are all in it together

Following the event, indefatigable co-organiser Andy Jackson from Heeley Development Trust's mission said:

"I had an overwhelming, wonderful weekend! What a privilege to meet all the amazing folk that took part in Small Park Big Run. What a brilliant community event – and the perfect end to the week in which people voted to say there IS such a thing as Society! Incredible personal achievements and athletic feats too – sadly not by me but hey – I still can't walk today! Running is Wrong!!!!"

The Trust worked so hard to make this event happen – offering resources, logistics expertise and muscle without which it is impossible to imagine how we could have made the event work. Meersbrook Park Community Walled Garden opened their doors and welcomed our efforts. Only one week after their open weekend they agreed to do it all again and staff the facilities for us. Friends of Meersbrook Hall allowed us use of the hall as a base where marshals could rest, runners change and recover and organisers grab sleep. Meersbrook Park Users Trust also provided help and resources.

These community activists and many others like them work year around improving our public spaces, making our communities better places to live.

We have much to thank them for.

The fun run and the link up with Gaza

As the 24-hour mark approached, the Palestinian football team returned to an emotional ovation, the Carfield Choir sang wonderfully in front of Meersbrook Hall and we successfully linked up in a live broadcast with members of the Never Stop Dreaming Children's project in Gaza.

They spoke messages of support and made us realise the vital importance of maintaining links of friendship and support with embattled, struggling communities elsewhere. Who knows, one day it could be us. There were many tears in many eyes.



Carfield Choir singing inspirational songs as the 24 hour run is winding up.



After the energetic and hilarious warm up routine from Caz Perry the event was topped off with a joyous one lap free fun run with families and returning runners numbering roughly 200. The lap finished by the Walled Garden where participants were cheered over the finish line and handed welcome ice pops. There was a final hour with more tea and cake in the Walled Garden.



Superstar fundraisers

The run made a healthy profit, runners and spectators donated generously on the day and many people raised sponsorship. Over £4,500 in total. All of these funds are going to the two charities. Oscar (9) and Amni (7) – children of one of the organisers – raised £501 in sponsorship! They both ran two half hour shifts, the Fun Run, helped out on the day and even did a bit of marshalling with their mum. Oscar ran a total of 12 laps and was rewarded for his efforts by a trip to A&E with strained foot ligaments. He said:

"I don't mind – it's for a good cause, at least it's me suffering and not the children in Palestine."

Feedback and 2018

Feedback from runners and the general public was highly supportive with the most often asked question being whether the run would happen in 2018.

"If the event goes on next year, we could field a large team and have a relay covering every hour." Tom Mutton, Goodgym

"When can we do it all again?" Hannah

"What a brilliant day out. So happy we had a chance to be a part of this." Mary

"As a non-runner, I'd never have thought that 24hrs of it could be so enjoyable. Well done everyone and hope it's back again next yr!" Kate

"It was a wonderful event for all who attended, from the endurance athletes to the strollers. I saw so many smiles. It was organised with such care and attention to all aspects of attendees' needs. Thank you so much. The only way it could have been enhanced is the thought that we can do it all again. Very well done." Beth

Read more [reviews and comments](#) from participants.

2018? We'll let you know when we recover!

[update: The date for spBR18 has been set for 15/16 June 2018]

Some useful links

To stay informed on any further events please [sign up to our mailing list](#).

Follow us on our [Twitter feed](#) and our [Facebook page](#)



Join our [Strava running club](#) and hook up with fellow runners.

Find out more about [Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#), they hold activities, events and meetings throughout the year.

[Heeley Development Trust](#)