

Me.....Run? by Emma Woodall

In 2018, I was well into my weight loss journey when a GP colleague suggested I try parkrun. "Me, run? Are you having a laugh?" After a little persuasion, I found myself nervously sending him a screenshot of my shiny new barcode. Little did I know this was only the start.

Saturday morning arrived and I set off to Pontefract Park with my then 9 year old, Leon. He was to be my sidekick, my safety net, so I wasn't in this alone. Although Nostell was my closest parkrun, I couldn't go there. It was far too hilly, and God forbid I might see somebody I knew! I arrived at the racecourse with a million doubts in my head. Where did I go? What did I do? What if I couldn't finish? And the dreaded...what if I came last? I soon discovered that coming last is the tail walker's job. Crossing through that finish funnel that first time and picking up our shiny little finish token, little did I know what I had started!

Over the next few months, we showed up only in fine weather, back then if it rained it was a good excuse not to run! My friend joined us, much faster than me, but always there at the finish, encouraging me on.

A good eight months or so later, I felt brave enough to tackle another parkrun course. I met a whole new bunch of lovely people at Nostell. Leon continued to run with me week in, week out. Running became "our" thing. Then at the end of June last year, we got chatting to a lovely lady – Pat - about the junior running club. Leon took an instant shine to Pat and attended their next training session.

In July, Leon was running the Laila Milly 2k fun run. I knew there was an adult run too, but although I fancied having a go, I couldn't run...I didn't dare. Although I had lost around 3 stone by then, I still had no self-belief. I wasn't a real runner, I hadn't ever run more than a 5k parkrun. I couldn't say I ran, could I? I'd never keep up, and what if I couldn't finish, how embarrassing would that be?! With all this running through my mind, I took Leon along dressed in gear I could also run in should I change my mind. As much as deep down I wanted to run, I couldn't bring myself to register. Luckily, an ARR member that I knew managed to convince me, walking me to the registration tent. I was so nervous, shaking, all the negative thoughts running through my mind. I set off telling myself it was not much more than a parkrun! As I ran further, I started to wonder could I finish this? Even though nobody knew me, the support along the course was fantastic and I reached the end in tears. I did it! Lo and behold, this was the start of my ARR journey. I started training with the club in July 2019.

So far, I've only run two 10k races and burst into tears crossing the finish line at both, I find finishing so emotional. 2020 is my first full year with the club, but Covid has put an end to the racing this year! I still doubt myself, I have slightly more self-belief now, but I'm learning to be proud of myself. Two years ago, I never thought I'd be where I am now.

Emma Woodall, May 2020