

Step forward to save lives

Ray Algar reports on an initiative which went beyond fundraising and into the very personal sphere of bone marrow donation

During July 2013, Gymtopia.org published a very personal story. It was about Chris Spencer, manager of Hornchurch Sports Centre in Essex, UK. Chris had leukaemia and was urgently in need of a life-saving bone marrow (blood stem cell) transplant.

According to the Anthony Nolan charity, there are currently around 1,800 people in the UK in need of a bone marrow transplant – usually their last chance of survival.

Who was Anthony Nolan?

At just three years of age, Anthony Nolan was diagnosed with a rare blood disorder and his only hope was a bone marrow transplant. No-one in his immediate family was a match, and a transplant using bone marrow from an unrelated donor had never succeeded because there was no database to find matching donors. So Anthony's mother Shirley campaigned and fundraised to create a central database. Sadly Anthony died, but his legacy is the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Register, the largest of its kind in the world.

Mobilising members

Over the course of 2013, staff at Hornchurch Sports Centre – operated by SLM under its Everyone Active brand – began fundraising and driving awareness of the Anthony Nolan charity, asking customers to join the donor database. In a single evening during July 2013, staff encouraged 154 customers to join the



A superhero fundraising day at Hornchurch Sports Centre in Essex

Gymtopia – a place where clubs do social good

Gymtopia was conceived by founder and chief engagement officer Ray Algar, who believes the global health and fitness industry has enormous influence and potential to do good in the world, beyond its immediate customers. The idea of Gymtopia is simple: to curate and spread remarkable stories in which the fitness industry uses its influence to reach out and support an external community in need. It was created with the generous support of various UK and overseas individuals and organisations.

Read more stories and submit your own: www.Gymtopia.org



database, meaning 154 more opportunities to potentially save a life. The centre website and Facebook page are still used to continually remind customers to join the register.

What can the UK fitness sector do?

A great deal. If just 6 per cent of the sector's customers joined the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Register, it would instantly double in size – something that has taken 40 years to achieve. Here are four things you might consider doing:

- Call the Anthony Nolan helpline on +44 (0)303 303 0303 and discuss how to harness your community
- Send this short video link the next time you send an email to customers – <http://bit.ly/AnthonyNolanVideo>
- Run a donor recruitment event
- Encourage customers to join the Bone Marrow Register – <http://bit.ly/AnthonyNolanRegister>

Update: Chris found a donor match and had a transplant in October 2013. He hopes to return to work soon. ●

BECOMING A DONOR

Beginning the journey to saving a life is easy. Just fill in a short online questionnaire – <http://bit.ly/AnthonyNolan> – and then provide a small saliva sample. If there's a match with someone on the register, the final step is similar to giving blood.

The ideal donor is:

- Living in the UK
- In good health
- Aged 16–30. Younger people make the most successful donors for blood cancer patients. Anthony Nolan is also eager to recruit more young men from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds

IN A NUTSHELL

Initiative by: Everyone Active (UK) – www.everyoneactive.com
Location: UK
Status: Ongoing
Impact: Global
Gymtopia keywords: Health & Wellbeing, Medical Research
Charity supported: Anthony Nolan