

Welcome friends to this month's edition of Kids Crusaders. My goal is to introduce you to an amazing organization, give you just a few of the stories and introduce you to a few of the many people that make up this "family" and encourage you to consider joining, or referring someone you may know that could benefit from the unconditional love and support that is given and growing each day.

The group is something that I stumbled upon in my Facebook feed one night and am so glad that I took the time to look into it further. The official Facebook page is called I Run 4 Michael and you can request to sign up as a runner or a buddy (Please note: Buddies are DESPERATELY NEEDED!!) at www.whoirun4.com.

The founder of this group, Tim Boyle had no idea the impact he was about to have on so many people when he decided back in 2012 to quit a 2 pack a day smoking habit and start a journey into a healthier lifestyle. Tim posted a picture on Facebook for inspiration as he prepared to run his first 5k. One of his Facebook friends commented on the photo with something simple and profound. It said "You can run for me anytime!"...and from that the I Run 4 "family" was born. Tim said "I run because I can. When I get tired, I remember those who can't run and what they would give to have this simple gift I take for granted. And I run harder for them." Tim's "buddy" is Michael Wasserman. He is 53 years old and has Downs syndrome.



Quoted from the whoirun4 website is this all-encompassing description of what this "family" truly is.

"We all have friends who say, "run some for me," because they don't WANT to run. But what about those who can't run for physical or developmental reasons? Having been inspired by a close friend battling bilateral hip dysplasia, Founder Tim Boyle discovered a whole new inspiration to run.

Here at IR4, we foster relationships. We want to see runners and buddies alike experience the profound power of encouraging and being supported by people who were once perfect strangers.

Running can just be about health. Or it can be about dedicating our miles to and creating awareness for our buddies with special needs whose conditions span the spectrum from total physical disability to developmental delays to autism spectrum disorders, as well as myriad rare conditions we're only now learning about thanks to our participation in IR4.

Through [I Run 4 Michael](#) and its branch organizations [Kerri On: I Run 4 Remembrance](#) and [IR4 Siblings: The Unsung Heroes](#), athletes of all levels and kinds find new motivation, purpose, and power for their workouts. It's about more than miles; it's about building relationships and bolstering support systems."

The Ambassador for the organization is Jodi Stoner (known to all as Run Jodi). Jodi was matched with her buddy River Allen 1 year ago. Jodi says that River is "the little man of her dreams." River was born

with Spina bifida. Spina bifida is a type of birth defect called a neural tube defect. It occurs when the bones of the spine (vertebrae) don't form properly around part of the baby's spinal cord. Jodi says that while dedicating her miles to River she is also bringing awareness to his condition, advocating for his cause. River has given Jodi such motivation. At a recent doctor appointment, River started to run down the hallway and said to his Mom "Look Mom, I'm running. Like Jodi runs for me." It was at that point that they knew he truly understood! (River is 3 years old and can light up the world with his smile!) Jodi has set a personal goal to run her 100th half-marathon before her 50th birthday. She is 49 years old and has completed 85 half-marathons so far. She will turn 50 in January! Two families were joined as one through a common thread of love, compassion and dedication. She recently was able to meet River in person and they crossed the finish line together during one of the marathons. We spoke for about an hour on the phone for this article and at the end of the conversation, I felt like she was a long lost friend I had known my entire life. We picked up right where we must have left off, which is just part of the magic when I Run 4 people connect. She contacted me the next day with a quote that she wanted me to share. She said she had been thinking about how to sum up her feelings for the past few weeks and what came to mind was this, "I didn't light this torch; I am just trying to carry it." She ended by saying "This sums up how I feel about the blessings that have been given to me."

As a mom of a child with a disability, her closing statement touched my heart. We parents often live in a much "protected" and sometimes isolated environment, some by choice, some not. We realize that there are people in the world that are not always kind. Our instinct is to shield our loved ones from the cruel and hurtful things in the world. While this is not always possible, the reality is, it is becoming less of an issue. Inclusion is making its mark on the world and everyday people are embracing and accepting it. And the kind, loving people are everywhere; willing to share their gifts and abilities with us and support us on our journeys. They see us and they see our children as "blessings" to them. To sum up my own personal feelings after that conversation..."I feel like my heart has expanded outside of my body."



Lesley Larson, Runner/Buddy Relations Director, began running around 5 years ago after the birth of her 3rd baby. She learned about the idea of I Run 4 through a mutual friend she had with Tim Boyle. Originally she was intimidated about joining as a Runner with the program for fear that she would let someone down. She overcame her fear and was matched with her "buddy", Troy Ramsey. Troy is a 21 year old young man that has Down syndrome. Lesley got to meet Troy for the very first time this year when Troy's mom surprised her by bringing him to the Fargo Marathon in North Dakota from their hometown in Ohio. Lesley had no idea that Troy would be at the race until, there he was. A lot of the marathons are now recognizing the impact that the I Run 4 organization is having and will often supply medals for both the runners and the buddies upon completion of the race. Lesley states that this is all about mutual support. Its friendship, encouragement and an extended family that simply makes each day better. She currently runs 5 days a week. She posts many pictures and updates about her day on the

Facebook page so that Troy can be a part of her everyday life. Separated by miles, connected by love. Nobody was ever let down! Lesley has taken on the role of Runner/Buddy Relations Director to help out the organization. While matches are made weekly, not every match is a perfect match. Sometimes a little communication can help to allow both runners and buddies understand the commitment involved when being a part of this amazing

family.

My son Nick was matched on March 12 Macdonald and Jen Seid. We are double match for Nick, dubbed "Team finishing school to become a

sure there will be many adjustments the near future) while Jen is working as attending school to become a Physical Therapist. Jen is currently training for a marathon and both she and Adam will be running a race in the middle of June! Adam is also an avid biker (40 miles per week average, both road and mountain) and has posted some pictures and videos for Nick to see. Each post, picture, video is another small step of 2 families becoming one. Nick has recently started to stand with the help of orthotics (and 2 people) and has challenged Adam to ride one mile for every step he takes. There is mutual motivation, unconditional love, acceptance and friendship that will last a lifetime. Nick and I are so excited to begin this new chapter with two amazing people.



of this year with Adam blessed to have them as a Nick". Adam is currently Chiropractor (Yay...since I'm needed for my aching back in an athletic trainer and

There are so many stories to share, too many for me to even begin to scratch the surface of. Every day people are being brought together and good things are happening. Be a part of this movement. If you know of someone that could be a "buddy" encourage them to go to the website www.whoirun4.com and click on the MatchMe icon at the bottom of the screen. There is a super great video to watch that will give you an idea of how truly heart touching and life changing this organization is. (Runners may also apply, however buddies are in urgent demand as there are currently over 3,000 runners waiting to be paired. If you join as a "Runner" be prepared to wait approximately 6-8 months to be matched with your buddy. The wait is worth every minute.) For people that may seem hesitant to join as a "buddy" for fear of the unknown, there is nothing to fear; there is only unconditional love and support. There are thousands of people that would be willing to explain what an amazing organization this truly is. There is also a link that you can share <https://youtu.be/P4NYL77Nwk>, PLEASE DO!!

I Run 4, Inc. is now an organization with 32,573 members. There have been over 10,500 "buddy" matches through 50 states and 29 countries. Currently there is a list of over 3,000 people waiting to be matched with buddies. Buddies are desperately needed, so please spread the word to everyone you know; help this family grow!

There are no words that I can come up with to truly describe this experience. I believe that you have to live it and since recently being matched, every day Nick and I are learning more and more about our new friends. We are forever grateful to have Adam and Jen join us on our journey.



“To love without condition, To talk without intention, To give without reason, And to care without expectation...this is the heart of a true friend.”

Find your friend today. Visit www.whoirun4.com.

Until next month, laugh, love and know that you are never alone on your journey (especially if you belong to the I run 4 organization!!!)

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