

# PARKRUN

PRRT'S HANNAH MACLEOD DISCUSSES PARKRUNS AND THEIR MANY BENEFITS.

I suspect there are very few people who haven't heard about parkrun. It is a free, weekly, non-competitive, timed 5k run, jog or walk and it is held mainly in local parks but there are a few beaches (Portrush) and stately homes thrown in as well. The phrase 'It's not a race, it's a timed run' is shouted in over 540 locations in the UK and 77 in Ireland (although this increases almost weekly!). It is held in 20 countries around the world and is expanding so rapidly it is hard to keep up.

## How it all began!

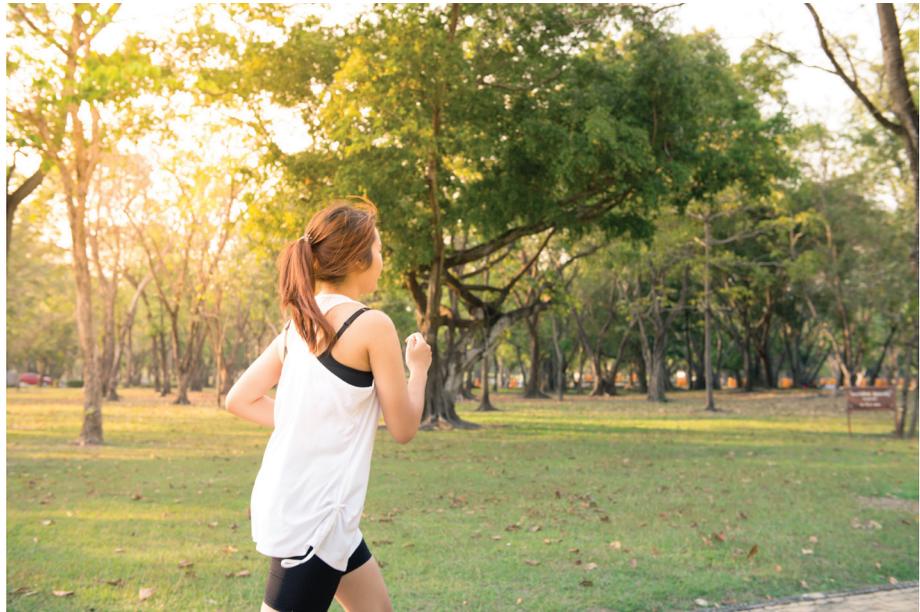
The first parkrun started in 2014 when Sir Paul Sinton-Hewitt was an injured runner. He was missing the social aspect of running so decided to set up a timed 5k for his friends. He was the timer and results recorder, they ran and then they all went for breakfast. It took 2 years for the next parkrun to be set up and then word of mouth spread. In 2010 it arrived in Northern Ireland but the idea remains the same. Parkrun is free (and always will be), non-competitive and is about socialising (read: post run buns).

## Why is it so good?

One of the great things about parkrun is that from the moment you register and get your barcode, you suddenly are part of something. It doesn't matter what your background is or how important or otherwise your job is, at the start line of parkrun everyone is equal. That bit of paper with your ID on links you to millions of people all over the world. Walk, jog or run, if you turn up to an event you'll be welcomed. Parkrun is a great conversation starter: Is this your first? Where do you normally run? How many have you done? Which is your favourite? Are you staying for buns?

## To race or run?

The difference between parkrun and many other organised races is that it simply isn't a race. Of course, there are some who want to beat their time from a previous week (or that man in the blue top who keeps sprinting passed right at the finish line....), but actually for most people it is just about turning up and enjoying a bit of exercise with friends. In fact, parkrun is very proud of the fact that each year, the average finishing



time gets slower as more and more people get involved either to walk or walk/jog.

## The benefits

It isn't just the physical benefits of exercise that parkrun can help with. The support of other runners, the routine, the sense of achievement are all important benefits and can be gained whether running or volunteering. The effects of the social interaction it offers are becoming more clearly recognised by GPs and health care professionals. A recent study by parkrun found that of the healthcare professionals referring patients to parkrun 78% of them did it to help improve mental health, 56% to boost self-confidence and 52% referred a patient to parkrun to help them make friends and reduce loneliness.

## The people

At our local parkruns in Northern Ireland there are many examples of people whose lives have been improved by parkrun. There was a gentleman who decided in his 70's to become a runner because the event was started on his doorstep. A regular volunteer with depression who finds the weekly contact with people invaluable, it gives him a reason to get up and talk to people and it gets him through the week. I've seen myself

how people can start of hardly being able to get around walking due to poor fitness gradually building up to the 5k and the pride on their faces when they complete the parkrun or when they beat their previous best time.

I've been doing my local parkrun for 6 years. A friend and I heard that an event was starting near us. We registered, downloaded our barcodes and rather timidly arrived at the start line thinking that if everyone was super fit, super-fast or just a bit scary then we'd pretend we weren't really there to do it but had just happened to be in the park running at the same time. We completed it, enjoyed it, met new people and have returned pretty much every week since either to run or to volunteer.

If you haven't been to a parkrun yet, sign up at [www.parkrun.org.uk](http://www.parkrun.org.uk) and go. You can walk it, jog it or run it – or a combination of all three. If you attend regularly then try volunteering some time. You'll be very welcome whatever.

If you are anxious about starting or would like some advice before you take the plunge then contact the physiotherapy department at PRRT and we will be happy to help!

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychology, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly.

Contact PRRT on Telephone: 029 9042 7788 | Email :[servicesadmin@prrt.org](mailto:servicesadmin@prrt.org) | Website: [PRRT.org](http://PRRT.org)



Rehabilitation and  
Retraining Trust