



Press Release

April 3, 2025

Couch to 5k running class graduates never thought they'd be able to do it – but now they can, and you could too!

A grandma who never thought she'd run again, and a brain tumour survivor battling back to health, were among the recent graduates from a free Fenland 'couch to 5k' running programme – and you could be in the next cohort.

A near-octogenarian seasoned marathon runner, who found the support and encouragement of a friendly sociable group motivating, was also among the Active Fenland group, many of whom never expected to progress from walking the route.

Sam Ingram, aged 50, of Wisbech, who was struck down by a brain tumour four years ago in the midst of the Covid pandemic, which she also contracted, said: "It just goes to show anyone can do this, no matter what you have been through."

Sam's recovery is still ongoing. She has had to undergone five major operations since her diagnosis, including to have a metal plate fitted in her skull, but has fought back to return to part-time work. She used to enjoy cycling, but due to ongoing symptoms no longer feels safe on the road. Running has given her a new physical outlet, which has helped her body and mind.

"For me, running helps take away the trauma. And, coming here, is totally different than just doing it by yourself. It does me so much good.

"Since this all happened, I look after my health more and running has become a part of that. I like the challenge and to show myself, and anyone else facing a diagnosis like mine, that things can improve."

Grandmother Louise Payne, 60, of Walsoken, had seen her weight creep up since she and her husband moved away from friends and family in Essex a couple of years ago.

Last June, Louise started a weight-loss drive and built up the courage to walk the 5km parkrun (a free community event where you can walk, run or jog that takes place in Wisbech Park and parks and open spaces weekly across the country), but found it a massive challenge. At the end of the 12-week Active Fenland 'couch to 5k' programme, Louise ran the whole route, having last run when she was in her 30s. And through a

combination of regular exercise and healthy eating with the support of a slimming club, has lost three stone and almost reached her target weight.

Louise said: "I didn't dream I would have ever run again but I've now run the whole 5km which is a miracle for me. I'm still in shock. I can't believe it's me that's done it.

"There's such friendship here and support. I would have been embarrassed to run before, but this gives you confidence and you see all the others doing it and there's no judgement. We've all got something in common trying to achieve something together.

"I have osteoarthritis and now I have less aches and pains. It has been life changing for me really. I was getting less able.

"We're all going to carry on meeting every week and doing the parkrun on Saturday."

'Graduating' alongside the others on April 1 (2025), Grandmother Angie Rust completed the 'couch to 5k' programme for a second time with Active Fenland. Now, as a regular Wisbech parkrun attendee, the courses have helped to keep her running weekly for a year. She even bought her grandchildren along to one of the Active Fenland family sessions.

She said: "Every run, you feel a sense of achievement after you've done it."

Keith White, aged 78, who started running marathons when he was 57, has even found the sessions valuable.

"My running is not what it was," he said – despite completing his most recent marathon only last year! "It's too easy when you're on your own to think to yourself 'I won't do it'.

"When other people are turning up, you turn up too. You think 'if you can do it, so can I'."

Volunteer running coach Gary Bligh, who also runs free, open-to-all Team Trackless running progression training sessions, meeting between Wisbech Police Station and the Boathouse Business Centre, 7pm, Mondays, said: "With the couch to 5k sessions we say to people, don't give up after two or three weeks, give us 12 weeks and you will see the difference.

"The outcome we want is for running or exercise to become a normal part of life, to build confidence and create healthy habits."

Bookings are now open for the next 12-week blocks of free couch to 5k weekly one-hour running sessions – available in March and Wisbech.

The sessions allow people to progress at their own pace, building up from gentle walking to, as is right for them, intermittent or sustained jogging or running.

Active Fenland is also offering family running sessions, as one-off sessions or a course, open to adults with children aged eight and above.

Active Fenland runs a wide variety of low-cost and no-cost exercise, social and wellbeing sessions across the district. It offers friendly, supportive, beginner level experiences for all,

as well as programmes tailored to those with additional needs, such as mobility issues, dementia and cardiac issues.

Free family running sessions, for adults accompanied by children aged eight plus, for which booking is essential, will be held:

- Tuesday, April 8, and Tuesday, April 15, 9.30am to 10.30am, meeting at Wisbech Park, Lynn Road, Wisbech PE13 3AB.
- Wednesday, April 9, and Wednesday, April 16, 10.30am to 11.30am, meeting at West End Park, March, PE15 9LT.
- Tuesdays, from April 22 to June 10, 6pm to 7pm, meeting at the pavilion at Wisbech Park, Lynn Road, Wisbech PE13 3AB.

Free 'couch to 5k' programmes will be held:

- Wednesdays, from May 14 to July 16, 6.30pm to 7.30pm, meeting at the Elm Road Sports Field, March, PE15 0BH.
- Tuesdays, from April 22 to July 8, 9.30am to 10.30am, meeting near the pavilion at Wisbech Park, Lynn Road, Wisbech PE13 3AB.

Find the full Active Fenland programme and book at: www.fenland.gov.uk/activefenland

Ends

Photos:

Please note the contributed photo of Louise Payne before her weight loss is a small file and unfortunately, we do not have access to a higher resolution version.

Louise Payne never thought she'd run again – but can now run 5k!

Louise Payne before her three-stone weight loss.

Photo 1: Wisbech couch to 5k graduates, with, front centre, coach Gary Bligh. Next to Gary, left, Sam Ingram. Next to Gary, right, Louise Payne. Behind Gary, right, Keith White. Far, second from left, Angie Rust. Far right, Dawn Goodley, of Active Fenland.

Photo 2: They did it! The Wisbech couch to 5k graduates after their final session, with, kneeling centre, coach Gary Bligh and, kneeling, right, Active Fenland's Dawn Goodley.