

Withers travels round the world (virtually) in a fundraising fitness challenge

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What's the fastest way to get from Australia to California on foot during a global pandemic, whilst raising money for charities we hear you say? The answer? Well here at Withers all 1,200 of us got together from across all offices to walk, run, swim, cycle, dance, 'deskercise' our way around the world as part of a firm-wide wellbeing and charitable giving initiative.

This year has been tough for a lot of people and with travel off the cards and no bake sales in sight, we felt that we needed to come up with a way to keep morale up, move our bodies and still fulfil our important role of fundraising for charity. Now let's look at how we actually got from one side of the world to the other, and why.

What was the distance?

The distance from the sunshine in Sydney, Australia to the beauty of San Diego, California stopping off at all our offices on the way, totalled a whopping 23,000 miles.

When did it start and finish?

The challenge started on 21 October and, seeing as we are a competitive bunch here at Withers, we aimed to complete the challenge by the end of January 2021 – or sooner! To our surprise, we crossed the finish line 9 weeks earlier than imagined. So it turns out dusting off my trainers for this challenge was well worth it!

How are we giving back?

Seeing as we haven't been able to engage in the usual fundraising activities that we normally would for our firm charity partners this year, we've decided to try and make up for this with an end-of-year fundraising push as we take on this challenge. The goal is to raise US\$23,000 to match the number of miles of our challenge, across the following charities:

[Mother's Choice](#) – Hong Kong charity serving children without families and pregnant teenagers

[Mental Health Foundation](#) – UK charity with a vision for a world with good mental health for all

[Feeding America](#) – US charity working to connect people with food and end hunger

We are always proud at Withers to support charities and do everything we can to help them continue their great work so when the pandemic struck, we needed to rethink our whole approach to fundraising. Giving up or postponing fundraising was never an option.

Why did we do this challenge?

Like a majority of firms across the world, we were in a position that meant we had to change our usual working patterns to work from home and whilst that wasn't out of the norm for us, it definitely bought certain working habits into question. We were faced with a lot of unknowns – but I also can't deny the fact that working in loungewear isn't amazing. We realised that our recipe for success had to be tweaked slightly, so we took our focus on employee wellbeing, our drive and ambition to always support charities and our own lifestyle habits to create this global tour. Now that we all work from home, you hear dogs barking, kids screaming and you have more of an insight into colleagues' lives and their interests. We always knew that we had an enthusiastic and active workforce as some would cycle to work or run on their lunchbreak but, unfortunately with the coronavirus restrictions, this became harder for everyone. Ultimately, it shined a light on the importance of physical activity for our wellbeing and mental health so we created this challenge to ensure that no matter what restrictions you have in your local area, you can get up from your desk, move your body and prioritise yourself!

Unfortunately this challenge became even more important and crucial in light of the sudden and tragic death from Deep Vein Thrombosis of a family member of one of the London team earlier in the year. It is unfortunately too easy to sit down at our desk in the morning and not move until

late afternoon without even realising, so if you are reading this and don't have a FitBit nagging you to get up and move your body, consider this your reminder.

So what was the journey like?

As much as I would have loved to stay in Australia for the entire challenge and get a tan, we left the sunny beaches of Sydney, enjoyed the hustle and bustle of Tokyo, popped over to the beautiful BVI and then crossed the finish line being welcomed by our colleagues in San Diego. We encouraged everyone, and their dog (quite literally) to take part, and with thanks to our Withers mile (with a smile) conversion chart, which turns a wide range of activities into miles, we witnessed team members turn their cold water swimming, indoor and outdoor cycling, Caribbean soca dance classes and lots of dog walks into thousands of miles! We even had our Hong Kong office complete a walkathon where two partners went head to head lunging around the office. We saw some interesting works of 'Strava art' along the way too!

And to lend a helping hand, we ran global deskercise sessions on Zoom to get us all moving, and aim to continue these throughout lockdowns or local restrictions.

As with any world tour, we must hear from the participants themselves so we asked a few members of the firm to comment on how they are getting on. Georgina Moule, a Trainee, stated "the WWT has inspired me to start going for a daily lunchtime walk, which has really been lovely (and I even find my afternoons are more productive as a result)". Paul McGrath, a Partner in the Corporate team in London, initially took part to meet with others for group exercise, but lockdown came and he has persisted on his own. He told us that he is logging his weekly runs on Strava and finding it "very uplifting and motivating".

Margaret Robertson, CEO and head of the firm's wellbeing programme, comments: "Keeping morale up and finding ways to keep our people connected during this year like no other has been a big priority of mine. I'm delighted that everyone has come together across our international locations to take on the challenge."

The miles may be done but our work is not over yet...

Whilst we have achieved incredible things as people moved their way, virtually, across the world, one of our core reasons for doing this was to ensure we are supporting charities when they need it most. We are well on our way towards achieving our US\$23,000 target but we're not there just yet. Our three charity partners have been cheering from the side lines and have been integral in every mile we have clocked up but unfortunately they can't continue with their life changing work without donations from people like you and I. I have personally been donating the £4 a day I would have spent on coffee in the morning each week and as much as I do love a barista-made coffee, I know that money is going towards helping those who are in much more need of it than I am.

If you want to get involved and donate to any of the charities above, please click on the name of the charity and thank you in advance, no matter how big or small the donation, it all counts.

The challenge has allowed us all to create some healthy habits, prioritise our wellbeing and mental health and raise money for charity all at the same time. Hopefully I will actually be able to visit all 17 offices in person soon, but until then, I shall deskercise my day through the end of 2020.

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