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Run for Bhopal: Sussex University Style

Andrew Chitty, lecturer in Philosophy at Sussex University is leading the UniSus Bhopal Runners, a group of 20 staff and students who are running the Brighton Marathon for the Bhopal Medical Appeal.

The runners will be joining 18,000 other entrants on Sunday 15th April as they attempt the over 26 mile course around Brighton to raise £10,000 for the charity.

The Bhopal Medical Appeal is a Brighton-based charity that funds two clinics in Bhopal, India, offering first-class health care to anybody affected by the 1984 Bhopal Gas Disaster, or by the ongoing disaster that witnesses thousands of people drinking water contaminated with toxic chemicals.

On 3rd December 1984, a cloud of toxic gas leaked from a Union Carbide pesticide plant and spread across the city of Bhopal, India. 8,000 people died within days. In the years since, the death toll has risen to more than 25,000. The site has never been cleaned up and the remaining toxic waste continues to contaminate the area. Dangerous levels of toxic chemicals are now found in the drinking water of many tens of thousands of people, which is Bhopal's second disaster.

The UniSus Bhopal Runners have been organising twice-weekly 5-mile lunchtime runs since last term and this term they are adding longer runs on Sunday mornings.

We sat down with Andrew to see how things were going.

1) How Is The Training Going For The Group Far?

Not too bad. Unfortunately one of us has had to drop out because of dislocated knee cap and we've had a couple of other less serious injuries, but most of us are now at the point where we can run 8 or 10 miles if pushed. We'll aim to gradually build that up to near 20 miles by the end of term.

2) How Much Running Experience Have You Had?

I did cross country running for a couple of years as a teenager and in the decades since then I've always been a 'recreational jogger'. Then two years ago I joined my local running club and started training properly, and doing local races and Parkruns. I ran my first marathon last April in Brighton.

3) Any Advice For Less Experienced Runners Who Are Joining You This Year?

Enjoy it! It's amazing how much you can improve as a runner by training gently and within your limits, as long as you keep it up consistently two or three times a week and extend your distances slowly. There is gain without pain.

4) Where Did You First Hear About The Bhopal Medical Appeal?

I was looking at the souvenir edition of the Brighton Argus last April right after the Brighton Marathon, and below the pictures of crowds of healthy runners was an advert showing a child with pitifully deformed legs with the caption 'Next year why not run for the Bhopal Medical Appeal?' The contrast was very striking. So I looked them up on the internet and got in touch. It was a very effective advert!

5) Why Is This Cause So Important For You?

Partly because I feel such an injustice has been done to the people of Bhopal by inflicting this human-made disaster on them – the new documentary film Bhopali shows this very powerfully – and the rest of the world owes them whatever help we can give to recover from it. Partly because I am so impressed by the work done by the two clinics supported by the Bhopal Medical Appeal and I'd like to do something to support them.

If you would be interested in helping with their fundraising efforts, please contact Nikola Wells at nw78@sussex.ac.uk

You can visit the UniSus Bhopal Runners JustGiving page at <http://www.justgiving.com/teams/unisusbhopalrunners>.

Fancy a challenge this year but not quite ready to run a marathon? The Bhopal Medical Appeal is currently recruiting runners for the British London10K Run which takes place on the 8th July 2012. For more information please email info@bhopal.org.