Press release

For immediate release

Wednesday 2 April 2014

Nigerian-born Victor undertakes third half marathon in five months inspired by childhood memories of leprosy

Chiswick-based supporter Victor Nathan, 35, is running his third half marathon in five months on 26 April to benefit The Leprosy Mission.

Having completed the ‘Seven Hills’ challenge on the Dutch/ German border in November, he went on to achieve a personal best time of 1’44” in the Llanelli Half Marathon in Wales on 2 March.

He is now in training for the Garmin Half Marathon in Kansas, USA, on 26 April as well as making plans to run the White Nights half marathon in St Petersburg, Russia on 29 June.

Victor witnessed The Leprosy Mission’s life-changing work first-hand when growing up in Northern Kaduna, Nigeria. Born to a Nigerian father and British mother, Victor moved to the UK aged 16 and now works in care management for the National Deaf Services at Springfield University Hospital in Tooting.

Victor said it was memories of leprosy-affected people in Nigeria that inspired him to run for The Leprosy Mission. He recalled seeing some people who were very disabled by leprosy begging on the streets near to his childhood home. Then there were others who had been provided by The Leprosy Mission with mobility aids such as carts and crutches.

He said: “It was amazing to see what difference these very basic mobility aids had on their lives by increasing their independence. Most of the people had very damaged feet and lower legs and there was a mechanism for the carts to be powered using their arms via a bicycle-type chain.

“*My father became friends with someone affected by leprosy who, despite being disabled by the disease, always presented himself well and sold chicken feed on the street in little bags*.”
“He raised enough to send his children to school. They were not leprosy-affected or disabled and would have had a good life. It is encouraging to see how just a little help can get people a long way.”

To sponsor Victor’s efforts please visit: www.zequs.com/campaign/garmin-half-marathon-kansas-26-april-2014#.

*In many countries where The Leprosy Mission works, stigma surrounding the disease means that many people would not buy from someone with leprosy-caused disabilities.

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About The Leprosy Mission England and Wales:

The Leprosy Mission is an international Christian development organisation, transforming the lives of people affected by leprosy. Our goal is to eradicate the causes and consequences of this disease.

We are currently focusing on 11 countries where leprosy remains both a chronic disease and a social challenge. These are: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Sudan and South Sudan. Issues centre on disease, disability and discrimination. They also include: neglected tropical disease; housing; poverty; social exclusion; micro-loans; education and employment opportunities.

About leprosy

- Leprosy is a mildly-infectious disease caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium leprae (a relative of the tuberculosis bacterium or ‘TB’ germ). It can stay in the body for up to 20 years without showing symptoms.

- Leprosy causes nerve damage and, if left untreated, can lead to a loss of sensation in the hands and feet. This can lead to disability and the amputation of limbs. Leprosy also damages nerves in the face causing problems with blinking, eventually leading to blindness.

- It is not hereditary and it cannot be caught by touch.
• It is most common in places of poverty where overcrowding and poor nutrition and housing allow people to become more susceptible to leprosy infection.

• The last case of indigenous leprosy in the UK was diagnosed in 1798 and although it can no longer be contracted in this country, around 12 new cases are diagnosed in the UK each year.

• Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), which was developed in the 1980s. Within one day of starting MDT there is no risk of the disease spreading to anyone else. Lack of education, however, means that many people affected by leprosy are still stigmatised, even after they have been cured, especially if the disease has caused disability.

• There are around three million people worldwide disabled as a result of the late treatment of leprosy. In 2012 there were 232,857 new cases of leprosy diagnosed. That is approximately one every two minutes. More than half of these were found in India. (Source: World Health Organisation).

• In 2012, five countries where we work, which have more than 1,000 new cases of leprosy diagnosed each year, reported an increase in the number of new cases detected. These were India, Nepal, Nigeria, South Sudan and Sri Lanka.