

Running through the raindrops

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And they're off. - PHOTO: SUBMITTED

Nearly 100 runners turned up to take part in the annual 5K Ken Chand walk/run on Discovery Day last week despite torrential rain.

The drenched runners raised more than \$11,000 for 15-year-old Luis Mejia, who is in need of heart surgery. Luis, whose heart condition does not preclude him from exercising, decided at the last minute to join the run and ended up just as soaked as everyone else.

Shanna Merren, who is engaged to Luis's uncle and who was one of the driving forces behind fundraising for the teen, said: "Luis ran the whole race in his jeans... He was amazing." Luis has Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, a disorder of the conduction system of the heart. Most people with the syndrome can show no symptoms throughout their lives, but there is a risk of sudden fatal cardiac attack.

The syndrome is caused by the presence of an abnormal accessory electrical conduction pathway between the atria and the ventricles of the heart.

The joint fundraiser for Luis on 21 May was organised by the Cayman Heart Fund, Kiwanis and Cayman's ARK (Acts of Random Kindness).

"We cannot begin to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to all involved; whether through volunteers, sponsorships, donations, or registration of the 2012 Discovery Day Ken Chand Walk/Run. Everyone contributing is helping to give Luis a normal and happy childhood," said Ms Merren.

After a delayed start in hopes the sky would clear, organisers kicked the run off at 7.30am during a brief lull in the downpour.

Some runners carried umbrellas to try to keep the rain off, while others ran in their rain coats. All made it back to the finish line at Camana Bay considerably damper than they started.

Cayman Islands Governor Duncan Taylor was among those participating.

"It was almost like a wet t-shirt competition," laughed Sue Rajah of the Cayman Heart Fund, who thanked all those who took part. "250 people registered, about 100 showed up and around 85 actually did the run," she said.

Ms Merren said that Luis is due to undergo an operation to block the abnormal electrical pathway in Luis's heart in Costa Rica.

The teenager was first diagnosed with a heart condition when he and his family lived in Honduras three years ago. Ms Merren said that when he was first diagnosed, doctors said he needed a pacemaker. A second opinion from a cardiologist at the Chrissie Tomlinson Memorial Hospital and a third opinion from a hospital in Cuba showed, however, that he had Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome.

"He plays football and he's very active. We've been told that there's no problem for him to play and run," said Ms Merren.

An operation to reverse the heart problem in the United States would cost upward of US\$50,000, Ms Merren said, but it can be done in Costa Rica for about \$21,000.

"There's no way the family could afford that, so I started contacting churches and service groups - that's how all this started," said Ms Merren. The Kiwanis then got on board, as did Suzy Soto and Dr. Sook Yin of the Cayman Heart Fund, and then Cayman ARK.

President Monique Bush of Kiwanis said: "Every so often, a need can be addressed quickly and easily when service clubs work together. It has been an absolute pleasure for us to work with CHF and ARK to ensure that young Luis gets the attention he needs and that his family who have supported him financially and so generously also receive personal attention through ARK.

"We already work very closely with ARK on other projects and we look forward to the best KiwaniBike ever later this year as we attempt to raise significant funds for other needy CHF cases and for supporting our Key Clubs. We thank Shanna Merren of Hurley's Group for letting us know about this opportunity to be of service."

"Cayman Heart Fund was delighted to support the Kiwanis Club efforts to assist Luis Mejia and his family. It is further recognition of the role that heart health plays in a healthy community and we look forward to partnering with other charitable organisations to work towards our goals of reducing the incidence and impact of heart disease in the Cayman Islands," said Cayman Heart Fund Chairman David Dinner.

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