**LT55k feedback from Bollington Harriers**

**Background: Why external support was needed**

* We are a running group not a club – we have no coaches, only Run Leaders
* We have been effective at getting the community running since reforming in 2017 (over 130 paid up members)
* We have programmes for shorter distances (couch to 5km), popular evening runs of 6-10k distance (pre-covid 30+ attendees was commonplace) and every Spring we organise a series of training runs to help members reach the Half Marathon distance. All of this is more organisational (devising routes, leading runs, etc) than coaching.
* To date almost all runs are mixed abilities we do not have A groups and B groups; members enjoy the social side which cuts across speed; we have a balance of genders and quite a lot of older runners
* In late 2019 committee identified that there was an increasing need for longer, and even longer, runs / running support.
  + For ‘shorter’ distances up to marathon there is quite a lot of experience within the club but this is not the case for ultras
  + We had quite a lot of members who had completed 1 or 2 ultras (c20-25 equally split between men and women) but very few who had done 5+
  + More specifically we had a dozen members who had entered the 2020 Lakeland Trails 55k (majority of these had only run an Ultra locally and not completed any running event in The Lakes)
* When Covid caused postponement of the 2020 event the extra time created an opportunity to get external coaching help to support members up to the rescheduled event in 2021
  + 11 Harriers followed the programme to the 55k from October 2020 (and 2 other members ran the race training independently)

**Was it successful?**

* A BIG YES, everyone made it to the start and everyone got round
  + In fact, the number running the 55k increased from when we began the programme as two initially didn’t have places (thanks Nicky)
* A range of race times were achieved; many very happy, some a little slower than hoped – typical racing really!
* Bollington Harriers had more participants in the 55k than any other club
  + And lots of members are now thinking about one of these races for 2022
* Aside from the actual race lots of knowledge was gained along the way which we feel sure will be applied to other future events. Nicky’s tips and guidance were invaluable: Nutrition, kit, pacing, reccie-ing, psychology, etc

**Why was it successful?**

* (Relatively) Homogenous group in terms of ability and experience
* All aiming for the same goal
* Nicky’s Plan
  + This became the go-to for most, carried around, pinned on fridges, etc
  + Everyone did more running than in the past and even when compared to training for a previous ultra; the mileage seemed high for some of the group! But this is probably why everyone got round so well.
  + Flexibility to the plan; the weekly mileage goal was expressed as a range which gave something for everyone. People started from various fitness levels but gradually the group coalesced and by March everyone was trying for a similar weekly goal
  + Getting everyone to think about height gain as a weekly goal was good
  + Everyone found the speed element the hardest to fit in (compounded by no park runs)
  + Feedback from some that they would follow the plan even more diligently next time
  + There was one observation as to whether cross-training should have been in the plan too
* Zoom calls kept people on track (we only did one without Nicky). Nicky was very generous with her time, adding in extra calls.
* Nicky’s reputation definitely helped: ‘if Nicky says to do this I will’; ‘if Nicky is on the call I’ll show up’; etc
* And all despite Covid – throughout the 9 months we were unable to all sit round a table to catch up (due to lockdowns, rule of 6, etc)
* We ran together as a group twice with Nicky; and by the second run we had all got to know Nicky much better (Note due to Covid these were the only times we all ran together in 9 months – the club had decided out of respect to the community we would stay with groups of 6 only)
  + We took care of creating the routes and the admin of organising the runs; it may have been difficult for Nicky to set routes without local knowledge. We wanted to give Nicky a good flavour of what we had on our doorstep.
* Reccies really helped. Those who managed to do them found them invaluable preparation in terms of getting their heads round the landscape, the terrain and how to ‘chunk’ the race.
  + Nicky did a virtual reccie via Zoom for everyone (reviewing terrain, when to eat, etc) and then we organised a huddle in the pub for those who hadn’t done one to go over a map with someone who had – all very helpful.

**Things to consider / possible improvements with hindsight:**

There were very few suggested improvements from the group, reflecting the success of the training, but things to consider are:

* Consider broadening the scope of the Plan to also include key dates relating to kit and nutrition: eg Plan to have your rucksack sorted by date x so you then have enough long runs left to get used to it; Carry the full kit list on long runs from date y; Use a specified time period to experiment with nutrition but aim to have your core food decided by date; z etc
* How to get the group out of listening mode and asking more questions? The questions improved as the time went on. This is a challenge as ‘you have to get to know your coach’ and perhaps inevitably as people ran further and race day got nearer that led to more questions.
  + Nicky’s input to specific questions was invaluable and highly regarded

Andrew & Sara

*20th July 2021*

**Appendix: Results for reference**

