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Running Blind Annual Report 2023

Hello friends, Running Blind members and supporters! 2023 was a somewhat stressful year for me, and unfortunately for Running Blind as well.

2023 OUB Boating Day goes canoeing again

In 2022 I participated with OUB and supported a weekend in Grayling Michigan which involved a day of canoeing in large 8 person canoes. For 2023 they planned a scaled down version of that where George (the canoe owner) trailered the boats down to a lake near where the OUB summer camps occur, and they conducted an version of the canoe event down near Grand Rapids.

I was invited to participate, but I was in over my head with house construction work I had taken on with a major house addition I was in the middle of framing that summer, which left me battling the elements and not having the luxury of taking time off for pretty much anything for some number of months. So they paddled on without me.

Support for Khara (with a “boo” for EMU)

The main thing Running Blind participated in was providing support for Khara Gilmore. Khara was attending Forsythe Middle School in Ann Arbor and was working to be a member of both the track and cross-country teams there. That was a challenge for her, and with limited guide support, she did the best she could. After meeting her, I recruited two Ypsi High CC runners as guides (Kia and Diane) for Khara in late 2022, and thru the winter of 2023 they worked with her at indoor workouts at EMU’s Bowen Fieldhouse.

The arrangement worked out well as Khara would get in her somewhat abbreviated workout before the Ann Arbor Track Team’s youth team would have one of their weekly workouts. While Khara was not running with the sighted runners, she was in the same space and was able to soak up some of their energy as she would hear them working out around her. (Khara’s workout would end about when the AATC workout would crank up, but they would do their warm-ups while Khara was on the track.)

Although things went well with the indoor workouts in early 2023, they took an unfortunate turn later in the year. When the indoor season cranked up again in November, myself and the two guides showed up for our first workout, and things seemed very different. The entire AATC youth team was out in the hall as Khara and her guides were doing laps, and I was getting the evil eye from the AATC coaches.

Turns out I hadn't been told that EMU had made a big change to their rental policies, and no longer allowed any access to the track before the prescribed rental period. Early in 2023 it hadn't been an issue, and Khara would workout as the coaches would be setting out cones and getting things set up for the work out. That all came to a screeching halt in the fall of 2023, when no one was allowed on the track until 7:00 sharp. This prevented Khara from being able to work out, as she was not able to traverse the track safely when it was crowded with kids doing their own workouts.

I was confused and discouraged as I had enjoyed attending the workouts, and I felt there had to be a compromise that could be worked out. I tried to communicate with the EMU athletics staffers, but with phone messages and e-mail notes, I had no luck. The best I got was a brief e-mail reply from the primary facility manager indicating I'd get a follow-up sometime soon, but that didn't materialize. At some point you get the feeling that the people you are trying to reach are sand-bagging you, and they hope you will get the message and simply go away. I was upset but eventually I did exactly that.

I was in a tricky spot as the AATC felt that their contract that had with EMU was on the verge of being cancelled. (EMU felt there was some damage to the newly resurfaced EMU track based on someone using spikes during an AATC workout.) I felt like there should have been a compromise that could have been worked out, but that didn't materialize. It started off as a good year of support for Khara, but the way it ended was disappointing, with no thanks from me offered to EMU. (**Of note**, I joined the AATC Board in 2024, and I made sure that their workouts moved to Lincoln HS's indoor track.)

Running Blind Fundraising *(See our donations link)*

I still have not conducted a fundraising campaign since 2021, but we are always looking for ways to continue to contribute, and to raise the funds needed to do so.

If you can consider supporting us with as little as \$30, that would be appreciated. As always, **I promise you two things**: 1) all the money you donate will be spent wisely helping people that benefit greatly from our support, 2) your name will be listed on our website as a supporter and 3) you'll feel better about yourself and the world you live in! (The third one is a bonus!) How can you beat all that?! I hope you consider supporting us so we can continue to make a positive impact on the visually impaired community!

Thanks to our guides & our donors! *(All donors listed on the website.)*

Our efforts won't work without both financial support and the committed support of our volunteer guides. Thanks to all of you, and keep on runnin'!

Hal Wolff - Running Blind Director & Founder

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