



BACKBEAT
Venkat to shoot in Theni for his next Pg10

Praveen Tyagarajan

Free with TOI & STOI

Chennaiites put on their running shoes for a cause



Participants at the He For She run

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A stretch of Elliot's Beach still continues to be marked out-of-bounds for motorised vehicles as part of the city corporation's car-free Sunday initiative. Last Sunday, however, what got the attention of the early morning beach visitors was a campaign titled Walk Chennai Walk, which aimed to spread awareness about the importance of women's health. With an increasing number of walks and runs being organised to aid social causes in the city, we try and deduce why marathons and walk-a-thons are the way to go in spreading awareness.

A RUN/WALK EASILY RAISES FUNDS

As much as the aim is to spread awareness about the cause, it also looks to raise funds. A run or a walk easily raises money. "Be it the London Marathon or the ones in the city like the Chennai Marathon and the Dream Runners Half Marathon, the primary aim is to raise funds," says Praveen Giriya, a

marathoner, adding that given the increase in the number of runners these days, the funds that they raise, is a significant amount, too. "When it comes to a run with a social cause, marathoners are excited for two reasons — they get to participate in a run and also feel that they are contributing towards something good. With good turnouts for the runs, the organisers easily manage to raise funds," explains Praveen, who is also the secretary of Chennai Runners.

A WALK WORKS BEST FOR A HEALTH CAMPAIGN

Walking for just half-an-hour on a daily basis is the first step towards a healthy lifestyle, opine experts like Dr Priya Chockalingam from Cardiac Wellness, which organised Walk Chennai Walk. She says, "The minute the idea of a health campaign struck me, I could only think of organising a walk. What else could be so effective in spreading awareness about a healthy lifestyle?"

“WHAT ELSE COULD BE SO EFFECTIVE IN SPREADING AWARENESS ABOUT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?”

— PRIYA CHOCKALINGAM, ORGANISER, WALK CHENNAI WALK

WALKS/RUNS INVOLVE EVERYONE

A walk or a run engages everyone, irrespective of age or gender. A recent walk had participants from kids who are as young as five years old, to septuagenarians. Nithya, one of the participants, came to the walk with her six-year-old son. She says, "It was only a 1.5km walk, and my son was quite thrilled about taking part in it. Since it was a walk, and not a run, there were several people who participated with their families. There was even a trio whom I spotted during the walk — a grandmother, daughter and grandchild." In fact, runs organised for causes are short ones — it's all about involving everyone. "It has nothing to do with who wins the run," states Sabari Nair, who is part of the organising team of Womanathon, which will be held in Chennai on April 3. He adds, "This will be the second edition of the run. The initiative is to get the men celebrate the women of their lives by either running with her or running for her."

RUNNING IS BIG IN CHENNAI NOW

Running for turtle awareness might sound weird. The whole idea is to spread awareness using a medium that many are enthusiastic about. "Every time, people who turn up for the turtle walk, somehow end up joining us for the runs also. What is the point in having a street play on saving turtles when such things hardly get the attention of passers-by these days? Marathons and runs seem to have the attention of the people, which is why we organised a run this year titled the Olive Ridley Turtle Run," says Hafiz Khan, one of the organisers.

When it comes to youngsters, outdoor activities work best, especially if you are looking to spread awareness among them. When Joseph Napoleon conducted a campaign called He For She and wanted students to participate in it, he decided to organise a short run at Marina Beach. "This was to support gender equality, and there were around 3,000 students who took part. No other activity could have managed to rope in this many students," says Joseph.