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S1 00:09 Welcome to the Sports Medicine podcast brought to you by The Sydney and J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply, and bring you the most up-to-date coverage of the wide world that is sport medicine and human performance all in the language that you can understand and share with your friends. And now, here's our host, the director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.

S2 00:38 Hello, and welcome to the weekly addition of The Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance podcast. We're so glad that you took the time to download us and you're listening. Every week we work to bring you an interesting person in the world of sport medicine and human performance, and usually sometimes general health, and today is no exception. We have Ms. Lee Leadman with us today, who is the program coordinator and the member services manager of the Back on My Feet organization in Dallas. Welcome to the podcast today, Lee.

S3 01:07 Thank you. How are you?

S2 01:09 Well, we are really good today. Lee, let me take a minute and tell the audience a little bit more about you and why we have you on and then we'll just jump into the conversation.

S3 01:18 Okay.

S2 01:20 Lee is from Palm Beach, Florida, originally. She has a degree in Communications and a minor in Exercise Science from Palm Beach Atlantic University. She and I were commiserating a few minutes ago about our time in South Florida, but Lee moved to Dallas a couple of years ago to work with the Back on My Feet organization in Dallas. So welcome to Texas, Lee, and let's start off. Tell us, what is this Back on My Feet organization?

S3 01:46 Thank you, thank you. I've been involved with Back on My Feet for a little bit over a year now. Back on My Feet is a national non-profit organization actually based out of Philadelphia. We were started back in 2007 by a woman named Anne Malla and we use running to help those experiencing homelessness change the way that they see themselves so that they can actually make real change in their lives. Our goal is employment and independent living, and we use running to help get our clients there. We start with-- we ask them to run Monday, Wednesday, Friday mornings, early, 5:45 in the morning, and the end goal is that we might see them achieve that employment and housing.

S2 02:27 Well, that's really cool. We have had several podcasts where we have talked to people from around the country that are using sports and exercise as a social

change media, so it's really cool to see that this is another approach to doing that.

S3 02:40 Yeah.

S2 02:43 Is this something that you always had a passion for doing, or is this something that you've kind of stumbled into? Because we've always talked to our guests about how they got into what they're doing, and then we'll come back to the organization in a little bit.

S3 02:55 Yeah, I would say I did stumble into it. I was involved with the population heavily in college and typically was involved with weekly feedings and just helping out with a soup kitchen and various other homeless offerings in West Palm Beach. And then, I actually did graduate with my minor in exercise science; always had a passion for fitness and helping people, just get back into shape and feeling good. And also, the other part of me was very passionate about this homeless issue. And once I got onto Back on My Feet, those two, I realized, just were bridged together. And I applied for the position as program coordinator, and I did get accredited about a year ago, and so it's really neat to see the two of my passions come together daily, and to be able to really build relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness and also physically run alongside of them and watch them achieve their goals.

S2 03:55 This is an interesting program. You mentioned that you take these individuals and you run with them at six o'clock in the morning on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Is this a volunteer thing for these people? Do they just show up and say, Hey, I want to do this? How do the homeless individuals find out about it? Do you recruit them?

S3 04:15 Yeah, we were here in Dallas at four homeless facilities. We're at four different facilities, and I work very closely with the care managers of those facilities to get recommendations from them of their clients who might be ready or interested. We obviously have a criteria. We do have some veterans who have injuries, and handicaps, but we do want our runners to be safe, and so they have to be a fit for the program, and they do get recommended once they're in a place where they're job-ready, and we're able to help them on that journey, then they can come and join Back on My Feet, and show up. We ask that they attend 90% of the time, and so attendance is very important with us.

S2 05:00 And it's not just a running program, and when they have been involved with the running program, this can lead to a new work to lead to employment, and to housing for these folks, right?

S3 05:12 It can. Back on my feed specifically, we have cooperate sponsors, and we partner with various corporate companies here in Dallas, specifically AT&T being one, The Marriott, The Omni Hotel. We work with some other hotels in the area just to bridge that gap of a connection for our clients. And so once they've come and they've shown us that they're showing up, they're working hard, and they are ready for employment, then we are able to transition them and help recommend them for employment through some of our partnerships.

S2 05:45 You had mentioned earlier that this started in Philadelphia, and obviously, we're talking to you, and you're in Dallas. I see that there are 11 cities nationwide that have this program.

- S3 05:55 Yes, there are. We actually just launched back in October in Los Angeles, and so we are now officially coast to coast, and we're excited about that. It is primarily in the northeast, and then all the way we are in Austin, Texas and Dallas for our Texas chapters. We'd love to grow but right now, we're in 11 cities.
- S2 06:17 Now, lets talk about impact that you all had. So often we talk to folks about these things and you say well, have you had an impact? How do we know this is working? And I'm impressed with Back on My Feet because on their website, it's very clear about what their impact is and the numbers of people that they have helped.
- S3 06:34 Yeah. Back on My Feet has had really high success rate and as part of that - a big part of that - is from the volunteers that run with us and they are providing-- they're challenging our clients with goals. They're setting goals, whether that be running a 5K, or in fact, getting a job. They all have different goals, and they're all volunteers from the community who are coming out Monday, Wednesday, Friday to really hold them accountable to those goals. And that's also part of my job, as well, it's just to meet with our team. We call them members. Everybody is a member with Back on My Feet. And so we have residential members, and nonresidential members.
- S3 07:14 What's really powerful with us is that we want to break down the barrier that stereotypes can cause. And so we say we're all runners in the morning. We all have that in common. Somebody might be experiencing a hard time, and then there might be somebody that's just coming out to volunteer, but at the end of the day, we're all runners and we just want to see each other as equals in that. And that we also, we really encourage that this is just a transition for them, they are not homeless, and we are working with individuals experiencing homelessness. A lot of that is that you can attitude that we tell them, and we want to empower our members that they can and that this is just temporarily their condition. I think that there's a lot of power and there's a lot of-- what works with Back on My Feet is the accountability that we are offering in just the support of - we call it a family, and so we hug. Hugging can be powerful, and they laugh at first, but once they really become a part of our family, everybody's hugging everybody, and we're cheering for each other at the races, and it's just something really special.
- S2 08:24 You mentioned residential, and nonresidential members. What is the difference between those two?
- S3 08:28 The residential member would be the individual who would be living in the facility. And so then the nonresidential member would be somebody who is coming along just from the community to come and run with the team.
- S2 08:40 I noticed on your impact numbers that so far, it appears that Back on My Feet has helped 3,602 members. And of those 3,602, about a third of those have gotten employment after being a part of the program, and about 855 have obtained housing. Those are really good impact scores.
- S3 09:04 Yeah, yeah, we do. We work. We partner with a lot of other organizations here. So we work together, we do. We work with facilities, and they're helping with employment as well. We're really proud. We're proud of our members. They're working hard, and they really are achieving their goals.

- S2 09:21 Now in Dallas, about how many folks to you have involved in this at a time?
- S3 09:27 Right now, we have about 50 members. And it depends-- we just started our new wave, and we'll have a graduation in July, where they'll graduate. Another component of our program is called our Next Steps Program. We partner with a consulting firm here in Dallas, in Las Colinas, called Accenture. They do a five-part Educational Skills for Success Series for us, so our members are getting the opportunity to attend a resume writing workshop, a professional image class, and they're also getting that mock interview practice in before you have an interview with one of our employment partners. Everything is building up to that job. In addition to their running, they're also maintaining that educational piece.
- S2 10:11 So, one of things that we've talked about in the past with podcasts like this, is how sport really opens a door to accomplish so many other things in life. And with what you're just talking about with job interviewing skills, that seems like this is another program that is allowing that gets people involved in the sport, and that gives you an entry way or a gateway to do some other things, to help them with some other things in their life.
- S3 10:35 It does, and they are very much parallel, that our members are-- they begin to see things through the lens of running, and they begin to see that once they have started something, they can finish it. Whether that be running a block, for those that come in and say, 'I can't run, I just walk,' and then they eventually do a 5k, and some go on to do half marathons, and marathons. It really is that feeling of achievement, and that feeling of really finishing what you started that I do believe is very powerful, and a lot of that is so much attributed to the fitness component. They're feeling better. They're getting up. They're getting out there. They're starting their day with a run rather than sleeping in, and it's really motivating them to achieving their goals.
- S2 11:22 Do you have any individual success stories that really stand out to you that you'd like to share with the listeners?
- S3 11:29 Yeah, we have a lot of success stories. I was just at a breakfast this morning and I met with one of the women in our program. She came on first day, wasn't-- a lot of them were very hesitant about the running. They don't know that they can do it. She came on and she didn't know if she could run, and soon after that she was running blocks. I ran with her a couple of weeks later, and we were running two miles together around Dallas.
- S3 11:58 I just began to see her-- and in so many of them, I see their entire demeanor change. They come in kind of downtrodden, discouraged, and once they start to run, and when they start to see that they can do something they didn't think that they could, and they're being supported by others in that, you just start to really see hope in their eyes. And so for her, in particular, Dorothy, we were able to connect her with the Dallas Arboretum. She did have a degree on Horticulture, and she truly didn't have a connection, and she told me that her dream job would be to work for the Dallas Arboretum. So I was able to connect with them, and eventually connect her, and she went over and she had an interview, and she did get the job. And this morning just to see the joy on her face of she's had that chapter for about five months now, and the excitement of the Dallas Blooms and spring coming, and she's still running. She is employed and she just graduated from the facilities program, and now she's looking for housing. She's just a success in my eyes, somebody who really was transformed.

Her attitude changed completely through her ability to run. So now, we can say that Dorothy is an alumni member. She's working and she's still on the team. We say always on the Back on My Feet, a part of the family, but our goal is that they would transition out of their current situation.

S2 13:25 But they can continue on in being involved with the program as what you call alumni members, right?

S3 13:31 Yes, they can. They're always welcome to come back and run with us and we have several members that do come back and run after they've moved out.

S2 13:38 Neat. Well, I guess I would assume that the self-confidence that comes with running is what leads to that hope and that joy when things actually start to turn around for them.

S3 13:47 Yes, they do. They become extremely confident. Their outlook is of a 'you can' attitude. Their confidence just skyrockets once they see that they can accomplish something, and it's really as simple as running. And so, very neat to see the correlation of the two.

S2 14:03 How do you have members that, maybe they want to-- how do you handle it if you have members that may want to be involved with the program, but they have physical issues that can prevent them from running, or even they have injuries while they're running or training?

S3 14:18 We have had that happen, we've had a couple of members who had - a lot of times not even from running-related issues. One of our members actually had a scaffold fall on his leg and he was trying for a half marathon. It's just another life lesson and you're going to have things come up and you're going to have things that will derail you from your goal, but to see him still come out and he has still come to every run even though he has a boot on his foot, and he wanted to run that half marathon, and I believe that he will one day. But we just encourage them to keep their eyes on the goal, but also listen to their body. We don't want anybody to be injured further by running and so we do have a lot of walkers. We have a lot of people who come out and they walk and that's all that they can do, but that's also is just a tremendous self-confidence booster for them to get out, to be able to walk with a team and be encouraged so.

S2 15:14 What we'll do is we're going to put up the website on our show notes for folks, but are there ways that interested listeners could get involved in supporting or working in your program?

S3 15:25 Yes. If you have a chapter near you, we would love to have you involved in the program. The most tangible way would be to run with one of our teams. You can get in touch on our website. There's a list of all the local chapters and you can reach out to the program coordinator, and they will be happy to connect you with a team. And if you are not near a local chapter, we would love to have you help us fund-raise. If you're a big runner and you do lots of runs, you can always fund raise for us, and so we can connect you on our site with our director of communications and they would love to help connect you with fundraising, give you a cause and a purpose for some of the races that you're doing. But if you are in a local chapter area, we'd love to have you come out and run with us.

S2 16:10 What if someone's in a large area and they say, "This sounds like a really cool program that we'd like to try to put in place where we're at," say like in Houston

- area and so forth? An expansion by Back on My Feet, is that a slow process, or is it something that maybe some of our listeners could get involved with as well?
- S3 16:29 No. Right now, we are trying to build where we're at. And I don't know how quickly they are looking to expand into other cities. You can always send a request in to our Philadelphia office, then I know somebody will get back to you as soon as they can about where we're headed, but I can't really speak to that today. I'm not sure how quickly we're growing.
- S2 16:49 Okay. We may have listeners that want to run, but they don't make it enough of a priority. What would you say to those listeners, those folks that are listening then? So you know that might be a good idea, but I just-- I don't have the time, or I just can't make it a priority in my life. How would you help them over that barrier?
- S3 17:11 I would say Force yourself. Force your body. Mind over matter. You get out there and once you start, I believe that you will see the impact that it has on, really, your mind, body, soul, spirit, all of it. Running really is powerful. Running can really change your circumstance and change your outlook on life a lot of times and that you feel better, but I would say-- sometimes people just say, 'Just do it. You just need to get up and get out there, get going and do it.' I just did a half marathon this past weekend and I really didn't want to, but I began to train and I really began to feel the positive effects of what training for that goal and achieving that goal, how that can really impact your life.
- S2 17:57 What is your perception about how many of your members that start actually wind up making that commitment to run every day? Do you have a lot that start that don't come back? This question comes up over and over again when we talk to folks about, in our business, about helping people be physically active.
- S3 18:16 We do. We do. It is not a fit for everybody, and I do think there has to be an element of personal desire and somebody's got to want it. So for the population that we work with, I encourage them to come out, but I can only take them so far. There's got to be some motivation from within. The percentage, I think we have a pretty high percentage - I would say about 75% - that I orient would stay with us. And a lot of that is just them coming out for that first run and really experiencing that family component that we offer to them. But we do have those that fall off, and that hour is just not in their realm, so they will not wake up that early. But like I said, you can only take someone so far, and so there's got to be that motivation there.
- S2 19:02 Great. Well Lee, we really appreciated having you on today, and you taking the time to visit with us today. We give our guest an opportunity to give us their take home message at the end of the podcast. So what would you like for people to remember, if they remember just one thing from this podcast?
- S3 19:19 I would say I would encourage you to seek someone out and run with them. If that's physically or running alongside of them in their journey, and you'll be amazed just how much that will impact you. And I would just encourage you to take the second look, and no one is ever too far gone, no one is ever hopeless, and so we're big believers in that with Back on My Feet that everybody can and everybody will achieve their goals. Sometimes it just takes that second look and it just takes looking a little bit deeper than what you see on the outside, but I would tell you to go ahead and find someone to run with and help them get to

where they want to be.

S2 20:00 Super. Great take home message. Thank you again for being with us today.

S3 20:03 Of course, thank you so much for having me.

S2 20:06 And I'd like to thank all our listeners for taking the time to download and listen to us. And as you know, regular listeners to the program will know that it is at this time every week we have the podcast question of the week. And here, with the podcast question of the week this week is our producer, Kelli.

S4 20:20 What roles do the residential members have with Back On My Feet?

S2 20:25 And that's a great podcast question of the week, so be the first one to send us the answer at huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu, and you'll win one of our nifty podcast t-shirts. Hurry up and get your response in. There's a great competition to be the first one to get that response in. But don't think you're too late, so go ahead and answer, send us an email, and you never know. Every once in a while, we'll send out extra T-Shirts as well. Again, Lee, thanks so much for being with us this week.

S3 20:52 Yeah, thank you.

S2 20:54 And thank you all for taking the time to listen. We hope that you join us next week, when we have another interesting individual in the worlds of sports medicine and human performance. And until then, we hope you have an active and healthy week.

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