



*Sheena (bottom row, centre), with her Team in Training participants after their race in January 2008.*

There are 42,195 meters in a marathon, and **Sheena Denscombe**, an analyst in Supply Chain Management, knows what it takes to get through every step of it.

Sheena works with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society for the Calgary chapter of the Team in Training (TNT) program, the world's largest endurance sports training program.

In exchange for training and support, Sheena's team helps raise money towards cures for blood cancers like leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma. Sheena helps train her team for races all over North America, including Vancouver, San Diego and Phoenix.

"I originally applied to be a run coach with TNT because there was a lot of incentive to travel," says Sheena. "But after getting to know participants and being a part of their journey, it's become far more personal."

Sheena, a certified track and field coach, boot camp instructor and personal trainer, quickly learned that it TNT would have far more benefits than simply travel.

Sheena's role as a coach comes with a lot of responsibility. It's also quite diverse – Sheena acts as a trainer, supporter, motivator and helper. Her basic training program starts with a three day per week commitment from the team, eventually building up to five days per week closer to the race day.

"It's almost like a mother role, I'm there from start to finish," Sheena says.

Quite literally - all of the coaches wait until the last racer crosses the finish line before they will leave. For many of Sheena's group, it is a brand new experience, as many are first-time marathon and half-marathon runners. Sheena says a lot of people begin the program with little to no experience.

"More than half of the people I have trained began as fairly inactive people," says Sheena. "We teach people some pretty basic things – everything from injury prevention to nutrition to how to pick the best running shoes."

Many of Sheena's team members are cancer survivors or are individuals supporting a loved one by participating. Making a personal connection with her team is one of Sheena's favourite aspects of training.

"It is incredible to watch people start on their journey," says Sheena. "Most people are running for someone who is going through it, but we also have people running for family or friends they have lost from cancer."

For her participants who are cancer survivors, training for these events is a blessing.

"I had one participant who ran the race with a t-shirt that said, 'You think running a marathon is tough? You should try chemo,'" says Sheena. "That shirt helped put things in perspective for me and the rest of the team."

Training for four months may sound like a lot of work for many, but Sheena can assure you it is also a lot of fun - there are events and social activities that go above and beyond physical training with the team.

"Before each race, we hold a 'Pasta Party' for participants," says Sheena. "It's not just about the food; we line the red carpet entrance and stand with pompoms and whistles to recognize everyone who walks in the door. It's a long journey for each participant and everyone deserves recognition for it."

The coaches also take time to decorate the doorways of their runners the night before the race to help motivate them. For the last race in Phoenix, Sheena also made doormats that read 'Here walks a hero' for each of her team members.

According to Sheena, the TNT organization has a large following in the United States, but is still growing in Canada. Of all of the provinces, Alberta is one of the first to have its own chapter. Even with the smaller Canadian following, Canadian participants raised an incredible \$70,000, contributing to the \$3 million raised overall at the event.

Of the total Sheena's team raised, 100 per cent of those funds stay in Alberta for local research – an important fact for local runners.

The relationships with her team members have been one of the greatest rewards for Sheena.

"I still keep in touch with everyone from the first season three years ago," says Sheena. "You become a family. Most of the past participants that I know say that it's the most rewarding experience of their life and I'm so grateful to have been a part of it."

Sheena's efforts have not gone unnoticed. Last year, TNT started a 'Sheena Denscombe Spirit Award'. Every year the award is given to someone who is motivating and gives 100 per cent towards the program.

"I never thought that I was such an inspiration to so many people, but I was," says Sheena. "To me it is quite an honour because my name will live on forever."

Sheena's next teams will begin training for races in fall 2008 in the Nike Women's half and full marathon in San Francisco and the Maui half and full marathon in Maui.