**Press Release**

**A woman, who has been blind since birth, will be taking part in this year’s virtual London Marathon to raise vital funds for The Salvation Army**

Kelly Barton, from Southport who lives with her 14 year old son, took on the challenge of running the London Marathon, along with a gruelling training schedule, to raise money for The Salvation Army and its new expression in Liverpool, Strawberry Field which houses Steps to Work; a programme that supports young adults with learning disabilities and other barriers to employment gain work. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the event was cancelled earlier in the year however Kelly’s dream can still become a reality as she takes on the challenge of running the famous 26.2 mile marathon distance on Sunday, October 4, in the new format known as the Virtual London Marathon.

The 43-year-old will start from The Salvation Army church and community centre on Shakespeare Street in Southport and will finish at the famous red gates of Strawberry Field in Woolton, Liverpool.

Kelly, the volunteer co-ordinator at Strawberry Field, has been registered as blind since birth. She said: “I haven’t been able to train much during lockdown because guide running was banned due to social distancing rules, so this new way of taking part in the London Marathon will be a definite test, made harder without the crowds of London to keep me going, but I am ready to embrace the challenge to raise money for such a worthwhile cause.

“Some young people can face many barriers when it comes to gaining employment and I am someone who understands just how hard that can be.

I’m living proof that there should be no barriers to employment at all and everyone should be encouraged to see their potential and reach for their dreams. That’s why I’m really passionate about the work that Strawberry Field does and why I want to raise money for the work taking place there. I know that the Steps to Work programme can, and will, change young lives."

With an initial target of £2,000, Kelly will run the 26.2 miles with her partner and guide runner, Mike Leatherbarrow. Those with a visual impairment can run with a guide runner who assists them through either being tethered together or, in Kelly’s case, holding the arm, just below the elbow. Mike can carry out this vital role for the run and adhere to social distancing because he Kelly’s partner and therefore in her support bubble.

Kelly continued: “It’s an amazing feeling to be able to run and to run fast, all my life I’ve gone around slowly and with such care; I’ve never had running experience before but now I am supported by Mike who gives me the confidence to run and although it was daunting at first I’ll never stop.

“When you can’t see, you have to walk really carefully and you have a cane so I’m in control. But with a guide runner you have to put all your trust in them. Mike describes what is going on around me, and he’ll let me know the sites that we’ll pass so I really won’t be missing out on anything.”

Kelly has taken part in various runs since first taking up the sport at the age of 40 and took part in the London Marathon two years ago, in 2018, but had to walk a large proportion of the course. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, and to prepare for this year’s run, Kelly took part in Southport’s weekly Park Run, which is five kilometres.

Kelly added: “If me taking part in the marathon gets just one person running or encourages people to think that they can get a job or that they can do anything then it would make me so happy; I want people to know that you can do it!”

To donate to Kelly’s fundraiser please visit www.justgiving.com/kelly-barton.

To find out more about Strawberry Field and the work that they do, visit [www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com](http://www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com)

**-ENDS-**

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Location - Beaconsfield Rd, Woolton, Liverpool L25 6EJ

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Salvation Army is an international Christian church and registered charity, which has been transforming lives for more than 150 years. Working in 131 countries worldwide, The Salvation Army offers friendship, practical help and support to people of all ages, backgrounds and needs. In the UK and Republic of Ireland this work includes more than 750 community churches and social centres. Registered Charity Nos. 214779, 215174 and in Scotland SC009359, SC037691. For more information visit the website [www.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk)

FACT SHEET

The Salvation Army and Strawberry Field

* Strawberry Field was purchased by The Salvation Army in 1934. The organisation opened the site as a children’s home in 1936 and for nearly 70 years the site supported some of Liverpool’s most vulnerable children until it closed in 2005.
* A young John Lennon lived nearby and played in the grounds. It eventually inspired him to write the song Strawberry Fields Forever.
* In the summer of 2019 The Salvation Army opened a new visitor centre on site. The centre is a welcome addition to Beatles tourism in the city, with responsible tourism at its heart. It is home to a brand-new visitor experience, complete with visitor exhibition, café, shop and gardens, as well as a Steps to Work programme, which aims to help young adults with learning difficulties and other barriers to employment into work.

The grounds and interactive exhibition

* Visitors through the exhibition learn about the site’s history and connection with The Salvation Army, including exclusive insights into the former Salvation Army children’s home, John Lennon's childhood and the writing and recording of the famous song, as told by John’s close friends and family.
* The Imagine More Café offers a tempting menu including breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea, sourced from local producers.
* The shop stocks a wide range of exclusive Strawberry Field memorabilia. An online shop is also available <https://store.strawberryfieldliverpool.com>
* The gardens, where John Lennon used to play as a child, offer a calm space for reflection and a place to explore spirituality.

Responsible Tourism

* Profits from the Visitor Centre help to fund the Steps to Work programme, which supports local young people, aged 18-25 with learning difficulties and other barriers to employment. The programme aims to remove barriers and support trainees into employment. The 12-18month employability programme includes an 8 week ‘work readiness course’ followed by 3, three month work placements with a local employer, which could include the Strawberry Field shop, visitor exhibition, café or garden. These work placements include two days a week at work and two days a week at The City of Liverpool College.

Visiting Strawberry Field

* To ensure safety during this time of Covid 19, tickets to the visitor exhibition must be booked in advance. More details available at [www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com](http://www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com)
* Visitor Experience Adult entry is currently £8.95
* Under 16’s go FREE with paying adult
* Free admission with ID for NHS worker and guest – Strawberry Field is participating in Britain Unites – A nationwide initiative to thank our NHS, from the UK travel & tourism industry <https://www.britainunites.co.uk>
* The popular Imagine More Café at Strawberry Field is open but with a difference. Tables must be booked in advance by calling 07407088968.
* The site is a short walk away from John Lennon’s childhood home in Menlove Avenue where he lived with this Aunt Mimi.
* Strawberry Field is open and accessible to everyone, thanks to its Changing Places toilet facilities please see our recent release: <http://www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com/news>

Health and Safety

* We’re GOOD TO GO - Strawberry Field has been awarded Visit England & Visit Britain’s industry wide health & safety standard for visitors known as “GoodToGo”
* Visitors must book ahead to enable the team to control capacity across the exhibition, café, garden and shop.
* Social distancing of 2m must be adhered to on site. The site is currently operating limited visitor numbers.
* Temperature checks are being conducted upon entry.
* In line with the current UK government requirements regarding the wearing of masks, all visitors to our centre are required to wear a face covering.
* Media guides are disinfected before each use and touchscreen bags and disposable ear covers are available.
* Sanitising towers are available throughout the building.
* All facilities including toilets undergo strict cleaning throughout the day.
* Full details of health & safety standards can be found on the website <https://www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com/visiting-us-during-coronavirus>