Swimming sensation with half a heart encourages swimmers to take part in charity swimathon

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Thomas Evans, a 12 year old swimming sensation with half a working heart, is encouraging others to take part in a charity swimathon organised by the heart charity Little Hearts Matter.

Thomas, who lives in Bromsgrove, took part in Little Hearts Matters' Big Hearted Swimathon last year, swimming 102 lengths and raising over £1700 for the charity that supports families when their child is diagnosed with half a working heart. Thomas said: "I wanted to do it because I knew that Little Hearts Matter is a great charity that helps people like me who have half a heart, and members of their family too. They have helped my family since before I was born."

Thomas' very serious congenital heart condition is called Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome, which means only half of his heart functions properly and he becomes out of breath very quickly, making exercise very difficult. Because of this Thomas had never been able to swim more than a few lengths in one trip to the pool. Thomas said: ""I originally started with a goal of 15 lengths and raising £100. In my first swimming session I swam two lengths and felt excited about doing it. My mom set up a 'Virgin Moneygiving' page and the money I raised overnight was well past my goal. In the second swimming session, I swam 6 lengths (to my mom's amazement, as it was the furthest I had done in just one session in the pool) so I realised that I would easily reach 15 lengths by the end of August. I change my lengths goal to 40 lengths. I ended up swimming 102 lengths in total and raising over £1700!"

Thomas is taking part in the Big Hearted Swimathon again this year and has plans of swimming even more lengths and raising even more cash for children diagnosed with half a heart. He said: "Surprisingly, I didn't find it that hard to reach my length goal, so when I do it this year I will probably have a goal of 160 lengths, which is equal to about 2.4 miles."

Thomas has written a set of tips below for others, to encourage them to take part in the charity swimming initiative:

• If you aren't a confident swimmer, try practicing at your local swimming pool a few weeks before the swimathon starts.

• To boost the fundraising, ask your parents to share updates and photos of you (as long as you don't mind) on social media.

• Another good thing to do to make it easier for people to donate money is to set up a fundraising page using a good service like Virgin Moneygiving.

• Try starting with a low target, both money and lengths, as you could increase it if you reach it early.

• Friends and family might be happy to help. My local music school held a cake sale.

For more information about Little Hearts Matters' Big Swimathon,
visit: http://www.lhm.org.uk/Info/big-hearted-swimathon-184.aspx

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