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# FUNDRUNNERS



**It started with a great idea and a handful of runners. Four years later, Can Too has trained 1700 people and raised millions for cancer research.**

**By Sophie McNamara**

**IT'S 6.30PM** on a hot Wednesday evening, and peak hour on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. As commuter trains rattle overhead, a group of 35 or so people gather in a park under the bridge. They chat as they lace up their sneakers, then begin a 5km run over the bridge and back to Kirribilli. These joggers are all ages and sizes, but they aren't just trying to get fit. They're making strides towards something bigger than their own health goals: ultimately, a cure for cancer.

They're part of Can Too, a programme where participants receive professional running or swimming coaching in exchange for raising money for the cancer research organisation Cure Cancer Australia.

Near the head of the pack is Can Too founder Annie Crawford, a lean 45-year-old

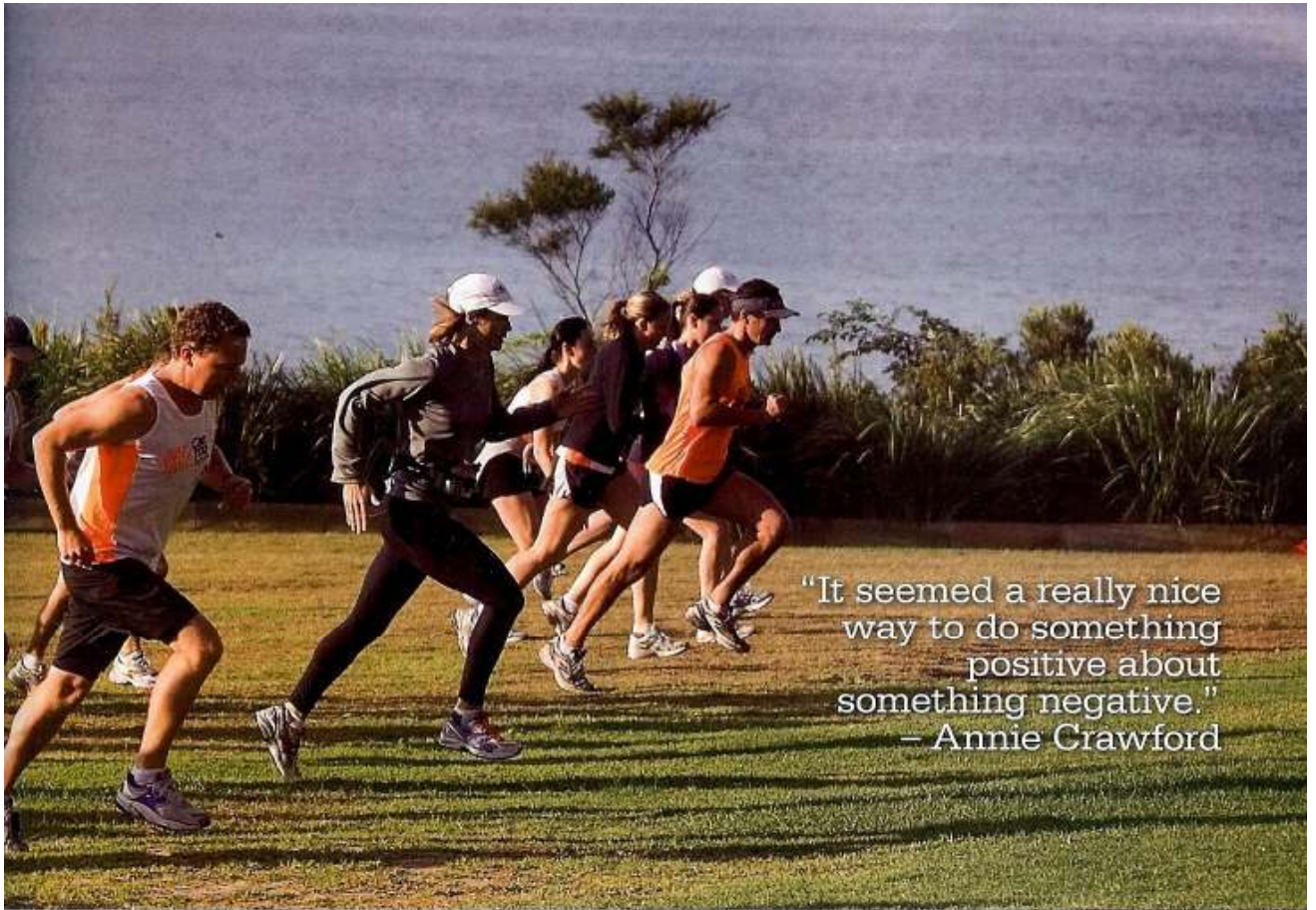


who stands out in the fluoro-orange Can Too singlet, smiling and high-fiving other runners. As a former social worker specialising in community mental health and sexual assault counselling, Annie says she has always felt the need to "give something back".

Annie returned to Australia in 2003 after helping to establish a successful biotech company in San Francisco, and it's then she decided to focus full time on making a difference.

She'd completed a marathon in the US through a similar fundraising programme, and came up with the idea for Can Too as a way to combine her passion for running with bigger goals.

**When she started Can Too, Annie Crawford hoped to raise \$50,000 for cancer research; to date, she's helped raise more than \$2.65 million**



"It seemed a really nice way to do something positive about something negative."  
 – Annie Crawford

Annie lost her father at age 51 to bowel cancer, so her choice of charity was easy. "My parents were incredibly happily married and I'm one of seven kids," she says.

"Dad's death had a huge impact on me and my family. Can Too seemed like a logical, really nice way to do something positive about something really negative."

Annie started small, with a handful of runners jogging around an oval. "When I started it, I thought, If we could get 25 people who raised \$2000 each, that would be \$50,000. And to be honest, I hadn't really moved beyond thinking of \$50,000."

Her expectations were quickly exceeded: about 50 people completed the programme in 2005, raising more than \$100,000. Can Too now boasts seven running and four swimming sites in Sydney, and has recently expanded to include a runners' programme at Albert Park in Melbourne.

More than 1700 people have trained for running or swimming events through the programme, raising \$2.65 million for Cure Cancer Australia in the process.

Participants join Can Too for all sorts of reasons and there's no minimum fitness requirement. The amount Can Tooers >>

#### VETERAN CHAMPION

**MARGARET-ANNE HAYES** joined Can Too in 2007 and her achievements since have exceeded her "wildest dreams". She's lost 24kg, completed several running events, including a half marathon, charged through a 1km ocean swim, and raised almost \$20,000 for cancer research.

No small feats for anyone, but what makes Margaret-Anne even more inspiring is that she's just months shy of her 70th birthday. "Being with Can Too has literally changed my life," she says. She joined the programme after making a pact with a friend who had suffered a stroke. "We decided that if she survived and recovered, I'd join Can Too and run 9km. And we've both fulfilled our part of the bargain."



#### WEIGHT-LOSS WINNER

**ZOE HOWARD** joined Can Too in 2007 with the aim of losing 20kg. She has now completed several running events including a full marathon – and has lost 24kg in the process. While she previously had little interest in sport, Zoe says the Can Too preparation provided her with the confidence she needed on race day. "You know that you've done all the training; you have a race plan and have running partners with you," she says.

The 38-year-old nurse is now a mentor to other participants. Can Too was also a great chance for Zoe to meet people, having moved to Australia only a couple of years before. "It's really good fun and I've made great friends. We keep in touch and continue running in the off season."



## HEALTH HEROES



Can Too's swim programmes professionally train participants for 1km, 2km or 2.7km ocean swimming events

need to raise varies depending on the race they're training for, ranging from \$800 for the ten-week running programme to \$2000 for the 20-week marathon training.

Participants receive as much support in reaching their fundraising goals as their fitness goals. Most people ask for sponsorship from family and friends, while more innovative ideas have included jelly wrestling nights and cross-dressing parties.

The Macquarie Group Foundation covers programme costs such as coaches and uniforms, so every dollar raised goes directly to Cure Cancer Australia.

So far, Can Too's fundraising has financed 33 scientists, covering projects as diverse as understanding brain tumours in children, and cross-cultural communication for breast cancer patients.

The bigger purpose driving the Can Too participants is never far from their minds. The Wednesday night training sessions often include guest speakers such as cancer researchers or cancer sufferers, while some participants are themselves cancer survivors.

Annie believes the secret of Can Too's success is the fact it merges the participants' personal health gains with public health benefits for the entire community, through this research.

"It's that whole win-win thing... and in terms of why it continues to grow, I think it's because people love it. The camaraderie that grows out of these groups is phenomenal," she says.

"We get e-mails from people that would just make you cry in terms of how it's been life-changing. It's probably what keeps driving me: watching people in transformation." +

### RUNNING FOR A CURE



**JAMES HANNIGAN'S** family has no history of cancer, so they were all devastated when James's sister was diagnosed with ovarian cancer last year. "We were in complete and utter shock, to be honest," says the 41-year-old. He joined Can Too's half-marathon training programme this year to "contribute to funding cancer research, as well as doing something social and getting fit". The generosity and support of friends, family and colleagues provides extra motivation for his running, and he's found Can Too's mentors and coaches just as inspiring. "It's hard to avoid the clichés, but from day one I've just known that this is the right thing to do."

### FROM IDLE TO IDOL



**JO GARLAND** laughs when asked if she did much exercise before joining Can Too two years ago. "No. When you're not exercising, you hear people say how great exercise makes you feel, and you think 'Yeah, whatever.'" But since running four half marathons with Can Too, the 34-year-old has more energy and a new zest for life. "When I finished my first run with Can Too, I couldn't take the smile off my face for days," she says.

Both the fundraising and fitness goals took her outside her comfort zone and have given her a boost of confidence by, she says, "just knowing that you are able to do something that other people wouldn't do, and stick at it".

### INTERESTED?

You don't need to be an athlete. Group training sessions operate twice a week, plus the coaches will give you a day-by-day training programme for the rest of the week. Training for these events starts:

**SYDNEY:** Blackmores Half Marathon, June 17; 9km Bridge Run, July 15. Swimming programmes begin later in the year.

**MELBOURNE:** Marathon, May 27; half marathon, July 8; 10km run, August 5.

For more information see [www.cantoo.org.au](http://www.cantoo.org.au).

