



Sport / Hong Kong

Hong Kong swimming legend Robyn Lamsam and deaf son raise HK\$180,000 in round-the-island Weez Walk

- Five-year-old Kyle joins Olympian mother in a 70km walk to raise money for Hong Kong youth mental health programmes
- 'We need to take every opportunity to educate people and dispel any crazy stigmas around Hong Kong,' says Lamsam

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Hong Kong swimming legend Robyn Lamsam's son, Kyle, walking around Hong Kong Island for the Weez Project's Weez Walk 2022 campaign. Photo: Handout

Olympic swimmer Robyn Lamsam has been instilling her positive attitude in her young son Kyle since the day he was diagnosed as being profoundly deaf in both ears.

The five-year-old proudly sported his "magic ears" – crucial cochlear implants – while holding his mother's hand as they embarked on a 70km charity walk around Hong Kong Island.

Mother and son raised nearly HK\$180,000 for Weez Walk, a part of the Weez Project campaign started by the parents of 15-year-old Jamie Pearce, who killed himself in 2017.



Hong Kong swimming legend Robyn Lamsam's son, Kyle, walking around Hong Kong Island for the Weez Project's Weez Walk 2022 campaign. Photo: Handout

The annual event welcomes walkers of all backgrounds, with proceeds this year going to local non-profit KELLY Support Group to deliver preventive mental health programmes for local youths.



Weez Walk has raised more than HK\$1.4 million so far, with entrants and organisers making a last push for donations before Sunday's deadline.

Lamsam, who represented Hong Kong at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics aged 14, won an Asian Games silver medal, and broke 21 national swimming records, said her family's positive attitude and tenacity she needed as an elite athlete "had seeped into Kyle".



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Robyn Lamsam (right) with teammates (from left) Katie Lau, Fenella Ng and Vivian Lee after winning the Asian Games silver medal in Japan in 1994. Photo: Handout

“I’m just so proud of him and the fact that he walked 70km – we did 54km in three consecutive days – and he just had the most happy-go-lucky spirit,” she said

Lamsam has always been honest about managing her son’s condition in the hopes it will help other families going through similar ordeals.

That Kyle received successful treatment so soon after his diagnosis is proof of the wonders of early intervention technology.

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“When we first found out about Kyle’s ears, I was devastated. To this day, I’m devastated,” Lamsam said. “But it is what it is, and five years later, no one knows this little chatty boy is deaf. In fact, he’s verbal diarrhoea sometimes.”

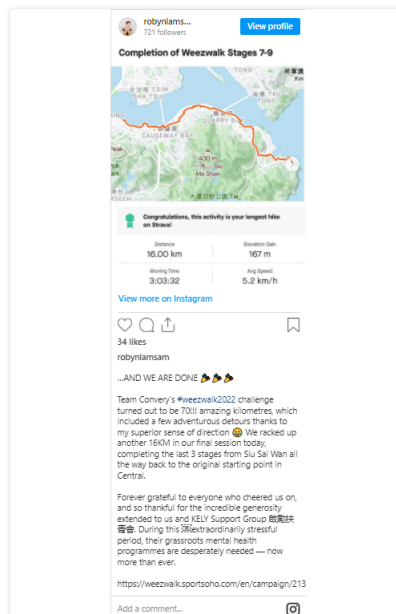
Lamsam used to worry she would not be able to communicate with her son, now, as her mother said, “we can’t shut him up”.



Hong Kong swimming legend Robyn Lamsam's son, Kyle, walking around Hong Kong Island for the Weez Project's Weez Walk 2022 campaign. Photo: Handout

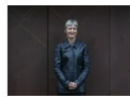
The “Team Convery” mother-and-son pair had initially targeted HK\$20,000 in donations, but it became apparent that Kyle’s story resonated much more.

“We got that in about two seconds, so HK\$20,000 became 50, then 100, and then I just thought ‘let’s not talk about the money side any more’. We just feel so touched to have such a huge support network,” Lamsam said.



It was not all smooth sailing, however. The pair had their fair share of wrong turns, dashing across main roads, and at one point, searching for an ear.

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“There was one bit of drama in Tai Tam because Kyle was swinging his stick around, and suddenly his ear fell off,” Lamsam said, adding the pair spent more than 30 minutes hunting for the rouge implant.

“Just when I was about to give up, there it was camouflaged underneath some leaves and pebbles. We found it, clicked it back on and it worked beautifully. Fortunately, the new model is water resistant for a couple of hours – good product.”

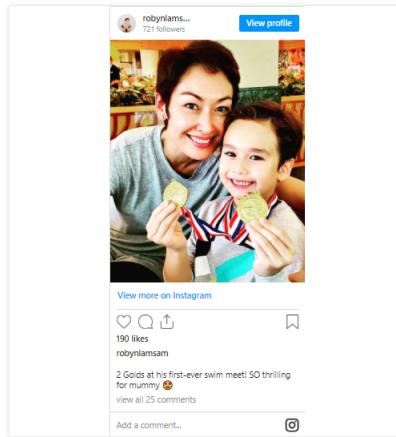


Former Hong Kong national team swimmer Robyn Lamsam with son, Kyle, in their Weez Walk fundraising campaign in Central. Photo: Handout

Philanthropic endeavours aside, Lamsam said it was essential for children to not become too familiar with a restricted lifestyle, and it was not surprising that people were struggling with their mental health

“Schools had shut down and all sports and extracurricular activities were closed for children. [The Walk] was a good opportunity for Kyle to get some exercise and out of the house,” she said.

“It’s really sad for kids to be staring at computer screens all day. They need to be able to go out and burn some energy in the fresh air.”



Though Kyle is perhaps too young to fully comprehend the concepts of fundraising and mental health, Lamsam said “he knew we were doing this to help people”.

Coincidentally, Sunday marks Kyle’s fifth anniversary of his “hearing birthday”, and the hope is he embraces “his uniqueness”.

“Kyle knows he needs his magic ears. We’ve never hidden the fact that he has special ears from him and we normalise and cherish his implants,” Lamsam said. “Sometimes we use the comparison of some children needing to wear glasses to be able to see properly.

After losing her son to suicide, mental health became a mother’s mission

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“We take every opportunity to educate people – some kids are curious in the streets and you’ll see them staring at the ears – and dispel any crazy stigmas around Hong Kong. Sometimes differences are not embraced in Chinese culture.

“Whether it’s with Kyle’s ears, or with whatever tiny scrap of fame I still have in Hong Kong, the underlying thing is to raise awareness about these social issues. Everybody faces challenges, they just come in different shapes. It’s how you choose to address and handle them.”

An estimated 13 per cent of Hongkongers experienced common mental disorders in 2019, but nearly 75 per cent of them did not seek professional health, according to MindHK.






Hong Kong swimming legend Robyn Lamsam's son, Kyle, walking around Hong Kong Island for the Weez Project's Weez Walk 2022 campaign. Photo: Handout

Some 53 per cent of secondary school students have displayed symptoms of depression in between, while a KELY youth survey from 2020 also outlined further anxiety and struggles during the Covid-19 era.

In its latest report, the University of Hong Kong's HKJC Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention concluded that "in recent years, youth suicides have become a heightened concern in society"

If you, or someone you know, are having suicidal thoughts, help is available. For Hong Kong, dial +852 2896 0000 for The Samaritans or +852 2382 0000 for Suicide Prevention Services. For a list of other nations' helplines, see [this page](#).

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Andrew McNicol is a sports writer with a particular interest in football, rugby and mixed martial arts. He also enjoys covering local athletics and niche sports in the region. He has a master's degree in Media and Communications Governance from the London School of Economics and Political Science.



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