

When my legs start to wobble I'll think of the kids I'm running for



▲ LAUGHS Ed gets in some race training

THE London Marathon is the world's largest single fundraising event. Last year it came up with a truly incredible £51.8million for a range of good causes. And this year up to three-quarters of an estimated 300,000 participants will push themselves harder than they ever have before and run through the pain barrier for charity. Among the host of personalities and celebrities will be Shadow Chancellor and marathon first-timer Ed Balls.

“YOU'RE going to run how far? At your age? What on Earth are you doing that for?” My wife Yvette was not totally convinced when I told her I was running the marathon. And there have been times, dragging my 45-year-old legs around Pontefract racecourse in the rain, when I've also had my doubts.

My old office in the Treasury used to overlook the final miles of the marathon route. It was amazing to see professionals and wheelchair athletes. But most poignant of all were the older, less experienced or less fit runners who - often reduced to a walk - would reach that stage when all the crowds had gone.

Part of me felt sad they did not get the attention they deserved and others had enjoyed. But amid the

exhaustion and pain, their faces showed the relief and pride to be so close to achieving their goal for their favourite charities.

I have no doubt I will be part of that last group, struggling to finish. But when my legs start to wobble, I know I'll have in my mind the two children's charities I am running for - Action for Stammering Children and Whizz-Kidz. And that will be enough to keep me ploughing on.

This week I took King's Speech Oscar winner Colin Firth to see the brilliant work ASC does.

We visited a group of children and their parents at the end of a two-week course at the Michael Palin Centre in North London, which ASC runs with the NHS, along with a second centre in Leeds.

One parent wiped away a tear as she told us the course had been the first time her 11-year-old son had met other children with a stammer and had

been able to talk to them about it. As a lifelong stammerer, I know how hard it is when you bottle it up.

Then we heard from the children themselves, who told us what a difference the course would make for them in school. One said: “I think I'll be able to speak in class, and I've learned to order my own lunch. I'll definitely be a bit happier.”

Whizz-Kidz, the second charity I am running for, transforms the lives of children with disabilities. It has already provided thousands of

children with mobility equipment but 70,000 are still waiting for help. But they do much more than that. Whizz-Kidz lets children have fun, which gives them the confidence and independence to go to school or university and play sports.

I'm talking about people like Jamie, 17, the star of his basketball team and about to go to York University. He does not let his wheelchair hold him back. He is a great advocate for disabled people.

When I worked with him as chair of the charity's Kidz Board, I was so impressed by his determination to get a better deal. That is the self-confidence these two charities give children - they are disabled but they are proud of themselves.

It is for these children that I am running the London Marathon. Because compared to what they face, what is a mere 26 miles?

▶ PLEASE support Ed's run and these two charities. To donate to Action for Stammering Children, text the words EBAC98 and the amount (max £10) to 70070. To donate to Whizz-Kidz, text EBWK99 and the amount (max £10) to 70070. Or you can visit Ed's Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/teams/edballs.

By ED BALLS

MP for Morley & Outwood and Shadow Chancellor



▲ SUPPORT Colin Firth, Ed and kids