

Our Story

Gary & Penny Vaughan



Looking relaxed before the swim



Still got a smile on our faces



And we did it!

Gary's motivation for considering the Great East Swim programme came after a year of suffering with back problems. He underwent a lot of physiotherapy and was advised to become more active. He hadn't done much sport prior to the programme other than a bit of golf, and he had never really swum. When he told his wife Penny about the programme she was immediately interested, again for the health aspect, as she was experiencing aches and pains and she was fed up of ignoring them. Neither of them had taken on a challenge like this before so they decided to give it a go.

Gary and Penny doubted themselves after the first training session as they felt they were the weakest swimmers in the group but because they joined together they were determined to keep going and the coaches gave them so much encouragement. They were so determined that they also attended extra training hours as well as the Great East Swim coached sessions.

During the training they both felt much healthier and had increased energy. Penny lost 11lbs and Gary lost half a stone although neither of them were dieting. Gary's back problem vastly improved within 3 or 4 weeks and he now has almost no pain at all which has meant no need for any more physiotherapy. He enjoyed the training even though he found it difficult to get the stroke right.

They thought the event itself was brilliant and the feeling of being in open water on your own was nerve racking but the kayakers are reassuring and they both successfully achieved the ½ mile swim, Penny in 30:03 and Gary in 32:18.

Their family came and watched and their 21 year old son was very proud of them. Penny told us "He's now thinking about taking up swimming himself to train for next years Great East Swim and he's even happy to go swimming with me which I think is amazing." She feels much healthier and this has increased her self esteem. Penny cares for two parents with dementia so the stress relief from this activity has also helped her enormously.

For Gary the best thing was seeing Penny getting into sport and for them to be active together. His energy levels have vastly improved as well as his back, and they both believe that swimming will be part of their lives forever.

They recently completed the Lock Lomond swim despite terrible weather and they are looking into swimming holidays and wanting to expand their new found love of physical activity into walking too. They will definitely take part in the Great East Swim next year.

The Great East Swim Outreach programme, supported by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Sport, Sport England and local pool operators, aims to support inactive residents, who want to make a change to their physical activity levels, using a mass participation challenge as the motivation to help them achieve their goals and live more active lives.

The programme, provides 12 weeks of supported coaching, encouragement, membership to their local pool, free wetsuit hire and entry to either the 1/2 mile or 1 mile Great East open water swim held at Alton Water reservoir near Ipswich.