



## MID-ATLANTIC [ PROFILE ]

## Make the Miles Count

Brooke Curran runs marathons—plenty of them—and raises money for at-risk kids in the D.C. area.

BY SARAH WASSNER FLYNN

● Brooke Curran had just dropped off her daughter at soccer practice and was returning to her home in Alexandria, Va., when she slowed to a stop at a red light. She caught a glimpse of a young mom, weighed down with grocery bags and pushing her stroller, with a second child in tow. Across the street, immigrant workers waited at a corner, hoping to pick up a job for the day. The sight of it all, she recalls, struck a nerve.

"This was just two miles from my house," says Curran, 44. "As the light turned green, I had this 'aha!' moment. I decided right then and there that I couldn't be that person who just drives away and forgets everything she sees. I knew at that moment that I had to step up to help my community."

And help she has. Just last month, Curran finished her quest to run a marathon on every continent, in every state, plus in the world marathon majors—Berlin, Boston, Chicago, New York and London. (After she set her goal, a sixth marathon, Tokyo, joined the majors for the 2013 season.) In the process, Curran raised more than \$200,000 for at-risk children in the D.C. area. Not

only that, but she also subsequently started up a nonprofit organization, RunningBrooke (runningbrooke.com), focused solely on supporting local charities, such as Girls on the Run, The Reading Connection and Action Alexandria.

"I wanted to inspire people to give back locally and to link that with my running," says Curran, mother of three and a former smoker. She initially began running simply as a way to "get out of the house and stay sane" but eventually began competing at a high level—nabbing a 3:09 marathon PR in 2009. However, she felt her motivation wane the faster she became. RunningBrooke, she says, gave her running a sense of purpose.

"I needed to find another reason to run," says Curran, who won the Antarctica Marathon in 2012 as part of her marathon quest. "A big, audacious goal," she remembers.

Four years—and more than 60 marathons—later, Curran is already pursuing her next big goal: She is raising \$1 million and running 100 marathons for needy children in northern Virginia. She plans to use a large portion of those funds to build and rejuvenate playgrounds



Brooke having fun in Wyoming.

in the area while supporting exercise-focused programs, such as Girls on the Run, to put a dent in childhood obesity rates. "It's up to 44 percent in Alexandria," she says. "We're committed to bringing that number down."

Although marathons are seemingly second nature to Curran, she admits that tackling those 26.2 miles never comes easily. She struggles with recently diagnosed asthma and exercise-induced bronchospasm (EIB) for starters, and, with a packed race

schedule, she had to sacrifice her speed. But with a renewed sense of purpose to her races, Curran has realized that simply finishing is far more rewarding than finishing fast.

"There are plenty of times I'm at the starting line knowing that I'm not going to run my best, and I'm thinking, 'What am I doing here?'" she says. "And then I remember the kids and the fact that we are changing their lives for the better, and I know it's all worth it. We're making the community better and stronger."