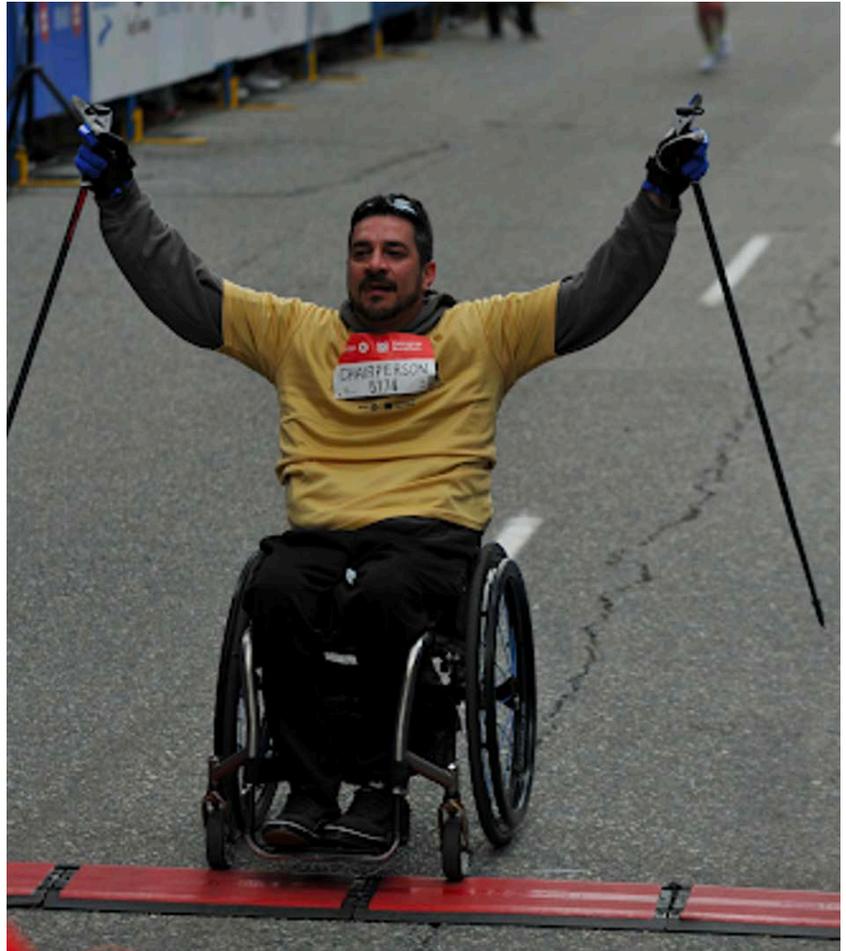


Finding Opportunities through Health and Fitness

WHO IS KYLE? Have you ever met someone and been truly amazed at their drive, work ethic, and accomplishments? To me, Kyle Gieni is one of those people. Kyle is a constant inspiration as he strives to reach and surpass his goals. So what makes him different? Was he born with an innate determination to stay motivated in reaching his goals? I had the chance to interview Kyle and investigate what can oftentimes be the hardest part of reaching your goals, getting started and staying consistent.

You may be wondering who Kyle Gieni is. Kyle Gieni is many things, he was the very first participant at the Physical Activity Research Center (PARC), he has been an active participant in over 68 research studies, he is the president of the BC Wheelchair Floorball Association, he's been to nationals for table tennis, he is a marathoner and Kyle is also a T4 paraplegic.



Kyle's Fitness Journey

After Kyle's injury, he had to reimagine what daily life and exercising looked like for him. He has been working out regularly since 2008. Starting at GF Strong and then PARC, he discovered new ways to stay physically active. When he first started he often used the Scifit and Nustep to get his legs moving to prevent spasms, get the blood circulating through his legs, and loosen up his muscles as his main goals. Later, his goals shifted to working on his upper body to build up muscle and strength to improve his transfers, wheeling, body composition, and ability to perform daily activities. But there was an unexpected goal he found along his fitness journey. After years of working out consistently, he noticed himself getting fitter and stronger and finding great improvements in terms of emotional and mental health. His confidence in himself was growing and he felt "stronger mentally", alongside his increasing physical strength. He realized that completing a marathon wasn't out of reach.

Kyle completed his first half marathon in 2014 in his manual wheelchair. He had always been interested in completing marathons and after doing 9 half marathons he felt like he could complete his first full marathon. However, there was an obstacle getting in the way of him reaching this goal. After his first few half marathons, Kyle was left with a lot of soreness which made him worried about how much pain he would be in after a full marathon. This could have left Kyle to give up his goal of completing a full marathon but instead Kyle believes in using innovation

and trial and error to keep trying to reach your goals. Instead of manually pushing his chair, he now uses adapted ski poles which help engage larger back muscles correlating to better performance and less soreness the next day. This innovation gave him the confidence to reach his next goal of completing a full marathon in 2022.

Other than innovation and trial and error Kyle says training and having a regular fitness routine are integral to completing a marathon. His training involves consistent visits to the gym using weights and cardio machines as well as sport-specific training by getting out for some long wheels in his chair. He believes both indoor and outdoor training is necessary in order to build up endurance and strength which will translate to better performance during the race.

Kyle is now working towards his next goal after he unofficially broke the world record for completing a full marathon in a manual wheelchair this past year. His time at the Vancouver BMO marathon was 3 hours and 12 minutes while the world record holder completed the London marathon in 3 hours and 18 minutes. He has contacted the Guinness World Records and is in talks with them to record his time at the BMO marathon next year so that he can officially break the world record.

Opening Doors Of Opportunity

Even if you aren't training for a marathon, Kyle believes that having a regular fitness regime can open doors to other opportunities. Working out regularly has given him a sense of personal strength that has translated into him seeking out opportunities like sledge hockey, wheelchair floorball, and table tennis. Physical activity has improved his strength but also his confidence in a social atmosphere where he's made many friendships and numerous connections. Kyle believes that the strength you build while working out can translate into the real and sporting worlds to open up doors of opportunities.

Some Final Thoughts

Here is just one example of one person who has found that fitness and health can lead to a multitude of opportunities you may have not thought about before. It doesn't take a natural-born athlete or innate motivation. It just takes passion and consistency. If there is a goal that you've been thinking is out of your reach, try getting started and working your way slowly up. Over time you'll surprise yourself with what's possible.

If you are unsure of how/where to begin your fitness journey check out our website Ocean Rehab and Fitness where you can find a gallery of exercises and pre-made workouts that you can follow along! You will find detailed instructions and photos to help you start exercising on your own.

Kyle will be completing the Vancouver BMO marathon in 2023, hoping to officially break the world record for the fastest time completing a full marathon in a manual wheelchair. He is hoping to do this to raise awareness for what is possible for people with disabilities and raise awareness for the BC Wheelchair Floorball Association. If you would like to support Kyle and his efforts or get involved you can visit the BC Wheelchair Floorball Association website: www.bcwheelchairfloorball.ca

About the Author

Arden is a 5th-year Kinesiology student and NASM-certified personal trainer who has been working alongside Megan Williamson at Ocean Rehab & Fitness with the BCMOS Adapted Personal Training Program. She has a breadth of experience in fitness and health through growing up playing competitive soccer when younger and now working at the Physical Activity Research Centre at ICORD, with BCMOS, and UBC Recreation. She is passionate about movement and opportunities for accessible spaces and knowledgeable trainers in the fitness world.