



The Society of Sports Therapists and the BBC Children in Need  
Thousand Mile Challenge

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## **Service Spotlight: The Society of Sports Therapists and the BBC Children in Need Thousand Mile Challenge**

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### **Volunteering, Service, and the Purpose of BBC Children in Need**

Volunteering is central to service focused healthcare professions, offering opportunities to support communities through meaningful action. In 2025, BBC Children in Need's *Challenge Yourself* appeal called for collective effort to help "make life lighter" for children and young people facing significant challenges, emphasising unity, inclusivity, and the power of movement to bring people together [1]. Recognising the alignment between this mission and its commitment to safe physical activity, The Society of Sports Therapists (SST) engaged its members, universities, and students to support the *Thousand Mile Challenge* and enhance the participant experience.

### **Event Overview: The Thousand Mile Challenge**

The BBC Children in Need Thousand Mile Challenge invited 40 BBC local radio stations to each complete 25 miles of three-legged walking over two days. Each station was represented by two members of BBC Radio staff, tethered at the ankle and navigating varied terrains, weather conditions, and public facing environments, often joined by community supporters (Fig.1). Although reminiscent of school sports days, three-legged walking is deceptively demanding. Early SST feasibility testing indicated that one mile of three-legged walking equates to roughly 1.5 miles of untethered walking, with metabolic costs estimated at 4.5–6 METs, comparable to dancing, swimming, or light gym activity [2]. It also requires sustained cognitive effort to synchronise steps, maintain shared rhythm, and correct imbalance, making the challenge unfamiliar and unexpectedly strenuous [3].

**Figure 1.** BBC Radio Jersey producer Frankie Golding (left) and presenter Alison Moss (right), and SST member Keith Waldon (middle).

## **The Role of The Society of Sports Therapists (SST)**

To ensure the challenge could be delivered safely, SST undertook trial walks, movement observations, and laboratory-based assessments to help the BBC radio teams and therapists understand the biomechanical, neuromuscular, and metabolic demands, informing tailored and evidence-based recommendations. Parallel testing explored binding safety, including strap material, positioning, and potential trip or skin irritation risks. Comprehensive risk assessments followed, addressing partner mismatch, terrain variability, fatigue related coordination loss, and emergency action planning. This preparatory work culminated in a suite of participant resources: readiness to participate tools, partner selection guidance, warmup routines, rhythm building drills, hydration and fuelling strategies, and instructions for safe binding application. These materials helped therapists and presenters, most with limited experience of three-legged physical activity, engage safely and confidently with the challenge.

## **The Role of Universities: Staff and Student Contribution**

Across the UK, SST accredited universities mobilised staff and students to support both the build-up to the event and the challenge itself, while also promoting the wider purpose of the Thousand Mile Challenge in raising awareness and support for BBC Children in Need's work with children and young people across the UK. In the preparatory phase, university clinics offered screening, familiarisation sessions, and treatment of soft tissue concerns, helping presenters understand the physical demands of the task and prepare accordingly. Many universities also contributed to on-air interviews and media features, promoting safe participation and raising public awareness of the profession. During the event, volunteers delivered warmups, taping, blister care, cramp management, movement coaching, and first aid, alongside triage decision making, reassurance, and encouragement. Their coordinated national effort ensured presenters began each stage safely and were well supported throughout two demanding days of three-legged walking.

One of the academic supervisors highlighted the value of this experience: "Supporting the BBC radio presenters on their Children in Need three-legged walk gave our Sports Therapy students valuable hands-on experience, allowing them to use their skills in a

public setting and show professionalism and composure. This community event highlighted the responsibility involved and gave students insight into the varied roles Sports Therapists can take on, helping prepare them for their future careers.”

The CEO of the SST emphasised the importance of the voluntary support “In giving, we gain. Supporting others renews motivation, connection, and pride in what we do as individuals and as a professional community.”

### **Return on Investment: Students, Universities, and the Profession**

For students, the challenge provided an invaluable opportunity to apply academic learning in real time, high responsibility environments involving public interaction and live media scrutiny. It demanded effective communication, rapid problem solving, and clinical adaptability-skills central to professional practice yet difficult to replicate in the classroom [4]. Working closely with presenters and diverse community members also strengthened students’ ability to translate clinical knowledge into accessible advice for nonathlete populations. The experience enriched their portfolios with verifiable volunteering hours, applied practice, and meaningful public health engagement. For universities, the event extended their reach far beyond the performance sport contexts where Graduate Sports Therapists are typically deployed. The challenge enabled engagement with communities traditionally underrepresented in sport, including individuals who may never otherwise encounter Graduate Sports Therapists or access MSK support. Collaborating with BBC stations fostered new connections with broadcasters, community groups, and public facing organisations-relationships that created opportunities for future placements, media collaboration, and community health initiatives. The event also demonstrated the value of student led clinics as accessible, community focused health resources.

A Sports Therapy student shared their thoughts on the event: “Taking part in the Children in Need walk was a really valuable hands-on experience that boosted my confidence in using my skills in a real setting. It genuinely reinforced why I chose this profession.”

For the profession, the Thousand Mile Challenge showcased the adaptability and impact of Graduate Sports Therapists outside elite sport. Nationwide media coverage improved public understanding of the profession and highlighted its role in supporting safe participation, promoting health behaviours, and contributing to community wellbeing. Supporting others renews motivation, connection, and pride in what we do-as individuals and as a professional community.” Collectively, the challenge strengthened the profession’s profile, confirmed its relevance in public health contexts, and laid foundations for sustained community partnerships across the UK. Although BBC Children in Need did not publish a separate fundraising total for the Thousand Mile Challenge, the event formed part of the wider 2025 appeal, which collectively raised over £45.5 million to support more than 1,400 projects improving the lives of children and young people across the UK.

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