

Stephanie Roche – Ultimate Hell Week

Stephanie Roche decided to take part in the ultimate challenge for Diabetes Ireland and nephew Archie Wyse, writes Deborah Condon

When Republic of Ireland and Peamount United soccer player, Stephanie Roche, was approached to take part in RTÉ's Ultimate Hell Week, she decided to go for it and represent Diabetes Ireland as her charity of choice.

Stephanie is well known for having come runner-up in the 2014 FIFA Puskas Award for Goal of the Year.

However when it comes to diabetes, she admits that she did not know much about the condition until her nephew, Archie, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of seven, two years ago.

Archie's mum, Karla Wyse, recalls that the diagnosis was a huge shock because nobody else in the family had it.

Archie had been going to the toilet a lot at night, but when he started displaying symptoms like low energy and poor appetite, Karla assumed he had caught some sort of viral infection that was going around his school at the time.

She brought him to the pharmacy, but the pharmacist said they didn't like the look of him and suggested a visit to the GP.

When she mentioned to the GP that



Pictured left is Archie with dad Ciaran and mum Karla

Pictured below is Archie with aunt Stephanie Roche and his sister Elsie



Archie had been getting up in the night to go to the toilet, a urine test was carried out. The GP said there was glucose in Archie's urine and he needed to be brought to the Emergency Department to be tested for diabetes.

"I was thinking 'that is fine, I'll bring him, get him checked out and be home later'. Because we didn't know anyone with diabetes and there was no family history, it wasn't on our radar. I just thought he is a healthy kid, why would he get diabetes? We went to Tallaght Hospital not realising just how much time we would end up spending there," she says.

Karla recalls that the Emergency Department was really busy when they arrived, however they were seen very quickly and were given their own cubicle, which she thought was strange. Archie was hooked up to a drip and a doctor said he was displaying symptoms of diabetes.

"I still thought they were going to find out that we didn't know anybody with diabetes so that's not what it was. Then I heard the staff behind the curtains

talking about a little boy who needed a HDU bed and I thought 'God help that poor child', not realising that they were talking about my child," she explains.

Finally, at around midnight, Archie was brought up to a ward and at that point, a doctor asked Karla what she and her husband Ciaran had been told.

She said they had been told there was a bit of glucose in his urine earlier and they wanted to check him for diabetes. However, she reiterated that they didn't know anybody with diabetes, so they thought he was going to be observed over night and would be sent home in the morning.

"The doctor said, 'mum there is no reason that anybody would have glucose in their urine unless they had diabetes'. It still didn't register at that point. I thought that a blood test would show everything was fine," she says.

Soon after, another doctor came in with the results – Archie had Type 1

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diabetes and would need to be put on insulin immediately.

Archie, who is now nine years old, had already fallen asleep at this stage, but he does remember being woken at 2am to have some toast. He also remembers that he saw “lots of doctors” and that the nurses “were lovely”.

Archie also says that at first, the injections were “quite sore”.

“I got used to them, but the odd time it would hurt. It was really scary,” he recalls.

Karla says that it was terrifying to be plunged into a situation where your child has a chronic condition, “but you have to learn how to take care of them so that you can get them home”.

“We were using the term ‘new normal’ before Covid happened. We just had to get used to our new normal – it was like having a newborn again and going back to that stage where you have to constantly check and monitor your child and get up in the middle of the night to check them. It is a whole new way of living that you can’t even imagine unless you are in it.

“I had absolutely no idea of the sheer amount of work involved. I remember thinking insulin is the cure so once somebody gets it, they are fine. However, the management behind it and keeping everything in balance – it’s so much work,” she notes.

Archie got a pump in June 2021, 18 months after his diagnosis. He prefers it to injections. However, there can still be difficult times with his diabetes.

He recalls being in the park one day and somebody noticed his Freestyle Libre.

“A girl said ‘you must have diabetes and that means you eat a lot of sugar’. It made me feel sad and I ran back to my mam,” he explains.

However, Archie has not let diabetes stop him in any way. After watching lots of gymnastics in the Olympics earlier this year, he joined a gymnastics class and says he loves it.

Karla says that while every day is a school day when it comes to diabetes, the family is much more confident about



Stephanie Roche during one of the gruelling Hell Week challenges. “You were constantly having to get into cold water, so I couldn’t get the heat into me the whole time.”

dealing with it now.

“We are getting better all the time. Archie was also diagnosed with coeliac disease in May 2021, which threw a bit of a spanner in the works because that is very difficult to get used to, but we are getting there,” she notes.

Stephanie has nothing but praise for Archie and when she heard Ultimate Hell Week was for charity, she decided it would be nice to do something for him “as he had been through so much”.

Ultimate Hell Week saw 18 well-known people from the world of sports and entertainment attempt to pass the notoriously difficult Hell Week course, which has a failure rate of at least 90%.

Stephanie made it to the second-last day of the course, a feat she is deservedly proud of.

“When I handed in my number, I was disappointed and upset because I felt like I had done so well to get that far and the competitive side of me was saying ‘I could have kept going’. But when I watched it back, I remembered the feeling that I had – I literally had nothing left in me.

“In that last task, I got to what I thought was the finish line, but it was actually only half way, so when I watched it back, I felt a bit better to a certain extent. I could see that there was no way I could have kept going. I was just empty at that stage,” she explains.

While the tasks were undoubtedly difficult, Stephanie says that the hardest part for her was the cold.

“You were constantly having to get into cold water, so I couldn’t get the heat into me the whole time. As soon as you would get dry and comfortable, two minutes later, you would be in the water soaking wet again,” she recalls.

Karla says that she couldn’t stop crying watching Stephanie on TV and was “unbelievably proud” of her.

“I remember before she went, she said as long as there is not much water or heights, I’ll be grand. The first day, she had to jump out of a helicopter into water!”

Stephanie was exhausted and covered in bruises afterwards. Her fiancé and sister picked her up and she remembers them being shocked at her gaunt appearance. They told her a few days later, they had never seen her look so bad – she looked like a different person.

The series was originally meant to be filmed in January 2021, but was delayed until April/May because of Covid, which Stephanie sees as a small blessing.

“Can you imagine how cold that would have been?” she laughs.

However, despite how difficult Hell Week was, she believes the bravest person in all of this is Archie.

“To see the changes that he has had to make in his life at such a young age, just to see how he has dealt with it, we are all so proud of him. He gets on with everything and he knows so much about diabetes already that sometimes he even educates us about it,” she adds.