Sylvie sets 'marathon' challenge

SYLVIE Brown, right, epitomises the spirit of refusing to give in.

At the age of just 21 she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and a few years later the condition became so bad she could hardly move her legs or get out of bed.

Now 30, Sylvie has not only fought her way back from disability but also given herself a new outlook on life, becoming more positive and taking on fresh challenges.

Her latest effort involves training for a personal 'marathon'.

Sylvie aims to walk on a treadmill for 26.2 minutes – the time in minutes is the equivalent of the miles covered in a marathon – without stopping or taking a break. The challenge would have been unthinkable until recently.

"I really want to do my treadmill marathon without any breaks. That is my aim, anyway," says Sylvie, a self-employed website designer, who lives in Upperthorpe.

"I have been training for weeks and trying to build up the time I can last on the treadmill. This will be a real challenge for me.

"I do not know whether it is actually achievable but if I don't manage it on my first attempt you can bet that I will try, try and try again until I do.

"I will be determined to push on through the pain but it depends whether my legs get shaky. I'll be doing the challenge in the morning, as this is when my legs are at their best."

Her big test comes next Thursday at the Upperthorpe Healthy Living Centre, where she goes three times a week for gym and swimming sessions.

Trainer Nicki Platts says: "She's doing really well. When Sylvie started she could walk for three minutes on the treadmill and she has increased this to 20 minutes. She has also been training to strengthen her legs. She always used to use her wheelchair to get around the apparatus in the gym but now she walks."

Sponsorship money goes to the Multiple Sclerosis Resource Centre, which encourages people with MS – there are 85,000 people in the UK with the condition – to take on their own personal challenges.

Sylvie set out to raise £250 and so far has pledges of £790. Now she is aiming for more than £1,000.

She says: "A diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis does not have to be the end of the world. Though there is no cure for MS at present, there are plenty of things you can do to help yourself. I am living proof that this is true."

Six years ago she felt very differently, struggling to cope with life. Then she decided to confront the illness head on.

She did a tandem sky-dive and was overwhelmed by the support she received from friends, family and wellwishers, which inspired her to take control of her life and change her attitude to the condition.

She also visited a nutrition consultant, altered her diet and took a lot a vitamins and started an exercise programme.

"I went for it and very gradually began to turn my life around. The last six years have been a long haul back but I feel truly blessed in more ways that I can possibly describe. The MS has not progressed at all in this time. I have actually improved and recovered to a good degree."

●See www.lifeafterms.com for more information about Sylvie and how to sponsor her.

Kate Lahive