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Karen Gaffney braves the elements to complete Boston Harbour swim - Down Syndrome International, 13 November 2009

Image:

[Karen Gaffney 2 \(/karen-gaffney-2\)](#)

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Karen Gaffney, a 31 year old award winning self advocate, public speaker and long distance swimmer with Down syndrome from Oregon, USA, recently completed one of her most difficult challenges to date, a 5 mile, 3 hour swim across Boston Harbour in Massachusetts in treacherous weather conditions. The swim was part of the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress' October 2009 awareness campaign and Karen had to negotiate 4 foot swells and gusting winds as well as the cold water during the swim. In fact, conditions were so adverse that the Coastguard was forced to change the route during the swim but Karen persevered to make a great success of the challenge.

Karen was fully aware of the testing conditions from an early stage "It was really cold. The first half an hour to 45 minutes it started getting really rough". But afterwards she recovered well "I feel great" she said, "a little stiff, but I'm alive!".

The event received state, national and international coverage and represents another stepping stone in Karen's mission to raise awareness of Down syndrome around the World "I did this swim to show people what people like me can do. We are more alike than we are different".

Karen Gaffney's life to date has been one full of achievement. She received her high school diploma from St. Mary's Academy in Portland, Oregon in 1997 and attained an Associate of Science degree and teacher's aide certificate at Portland Community College in March 2001, following which she has undertaken various teaching assignments. In 1998, she founded The Karen Gaffney Foundation, a non profit organisation dedicated to championing the journey to full inclusion in families, schools, communities and the workplace for people with Down syndrome or other developmental disabilities, and she remains the Foundation's President today. Karen travels the World fulfilling public speaking engagements, personal appearances and conducting advocacy workshops and is in great demand for these services.

Karen's other passion is swimming and she swims just shy of two miles a day, five times a week. Prior to her Boston Harbour swim Karen has completed various high profile swimming challenges. In the summer of 2001 she became the first person with Down syndrome to complete a relay swim of the English Channel. Then in 2007 Karen competed in the "Escape from Alcatraz" relay Triathlon in June and followed this up with an incredible 9 mile swim across Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada Mountains to raise funds for the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC).

Karen Gaffney continues to inspire both people with Down syndrome and everyone who has witnessed her achievements in the US and worldwide and DSI looks forward to following the challenges she will no doubt set herself in the years to come.

For further information on Karen Gaffney and her Foundation you can visit her website at www.karengaffneyfoundation.com (<http://www.karengaffneyfoundation.com>).