

# “I sold everything and started running for charity”

South Australian Andrew Biszczak, 39, sold his house and business, and is running from Adelaide to Brisbane to raise \$1 million to support sick ‘butterfly’ children



I was in disbelief that someone could live in such hellish circumstances. Kate spent up to three hours at a time in a bath of salt and bleach to disinfect her wounds. She couldn't play or interact with other kids because a bump could cause her skin to blister – going on a slippery dip was like sliding down razors. The saddest part was that getting a hug from her parents could result in acute physical pain.

Moved by Kate's story, Sonia and I became associated with DEBRA Australia, the charity that supports EB families. We raised \$10,000 through small fundraisers and a half marathon event held in Kate's hometown, and thought we'd done enough, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Kate was stronger than anyone I'd met. I never heard her complain, she just got on with life. She even painted with the stumps of her hands. She signed up for a clinical trial, enduring countless injections and more pain, knowing it was too late for her.

## 1000

The number of Australians living with epidermolysis bullosa.

Source: [debra.org.au](http://debra.org.au)

Kate's courage made me re-examine my whole life. I was in pursuit of material happiness, but the harder I worked, the emptier I felt. My own accomplishments started to matter less and less. I wondered what my contribution to the world would be and what I'd be remembered for.

It was while I was questioning my future that Kate sadly passed away in 2015, aged 26. Her funeral was shockingly sad for me, and it was there that I learnt any new potential treatment for EB kids requires \$1 million to even begin research.

After some soul-searching, I realised I couldn't stand by and watch more children die from this cruel disease – I'd do whatever I could to help. I decided to raise that \$1 million by running from Adelaide to Brisbane. Sonia thought I was crazy. But she also knows I'm determined, and once I decide on something, I see it to the end.

I had some big mountains to conquer,

“**L**ike my peers, I was building a secure future with my wife, Sonia, and our daughter, Tiffany – working tirelessly to set up my real-estate company and saving to buy a house. Then I met a ‘butterfly’ child and my life changed forever.

I clearly remember the day in 2012 that I met Kate Turner and her mum, Linda. Kate, who was then 23, suffered from epidermolysis bullosa (EB), a rare disease

that caused her skin to blister and peel at the mildest touch. Like all sufferers of EB, her skin was as fragile as a butterfly's wings, hence the name. The constant damage had resulted in Kate's fingers and toes becoming fused. She described living with EB as like living with severe burns.

I'd never heard of or seen anyone like Kate – EB affects about 1000 Australians, and about 500,000 people worldwide. Meeting her was shocking and confronting, but getting to know her was inspiring.

(from top) Andrew's wife, Sonia, and daughter Tiffany are his support crew, following in the family car and caravan in which they now live; in training for his run from Adelaide to Brisbane



AS TOLD TO: ASTHA GUPTA; PHOTOGRAPHY: CHARLIE NICHOLSON; NAOMI JELLCOE; COOPER STEPHEN; RAY STRANGE



Butterfly children Kate Turner (left) and Johnny, 13, (above) have inspired Andrew's epic run

**WHAT IS EB?**  
 This rare skin disorder causes the protein that 'glues' the skin together to be reduced or missing, which means a sufferer's skin can blister and peel at the slightest touch.

Source: [debra.org.au](http://debra.org.au)

the first being my own health. I was 30kg overweight and if I'd run even as far as the letterbox I would've had a heart attack, so I had to get in shape before anything else. I hired a personal trainer, and contacted big companies to sponsor the everyday costs of making the run possible. Sonia was very understanding and promised to support me all the way. However, I failed to source sponsors, so even though I was doing marathon training and getting mentally and physically ready, we had no money to get started. I wasn't going to just let it go, so Sonia and I decided to self-fund the run by selling our business – but even that didn't cover the cost. Then she made the ultimate sacrifice by offering to sell our dream home, which we'd only recently purchased. We'd saved for five years to buy a property

we both loved, but it didn't compare to how important my mission to help kids with EB had become. Of course our families were very upset, and couldn't believe I was giving away our life savings to help families we didn't even personally know, and support a condition that didn't affect us directly. But I was convinced it was the right thing to do. We put the plan in motion and told Tiffany, who's now 10, that we were going on a big adventure around the country. I began my run this April, and am currently running 40-50km a day with the aim of covering 3000km over four months. Sonia is fully involved, and I love and respect her so much for it. She drives our support car, the only asset we have left, towing a caravan that's been loaned to us, collects donations, and keeps an eye on me while home-schooling Tiffany. It's a physical and mental challenge for both of us every day, but I know EB kids need the money. So I keep running, whatever the weather, as Sonia drives behind me at 10km/hr. People ask me what will happen to our future when the run ends, but I have faith that everything will work out. We'll start from scratch – we'll have to – but I hope my story makes people realise that if every Australian helped one cause or charity, then together we could change the world." **To donate to The Million Dollar Run, visit [themilliondollarrun.com.au](http://themilliondollarrun.com.au)**

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