

MICHAEL McGRATH *is* RARE INSPIRATION

Award winning business man, motivational speaker, charity founder and polar adventurer Michael McGrath tells Rare Revolution how self-belief and passion drives him to provide RARE inspiration to others.



After being diagnosed with the muscle wasting disease muscular dystrophy (MD) aged just 18 in 1984, Michael made history 20 years later by becoming the first disabled person to successfully lead expeditions to both the North

and South Poles. This journey gave rise to a new life plan, inspiring Michael to embark on a career as an internationally recognised motivational business speaker and engaging hearts and minds.

Creating a life full of purpose, inspiration and adventure



Since his diagnosis as a young man Michael has created a life full of purpose, inspiration and adventure.

Michael, the *business man*, has built an enviable list of clients, providing carefully tailored speeches for organisations including Virgin, PwC, Shell and the NHS. He is an influential figure in hospitality and remains diligently engaged with the industry having served as a Disability Ambassador for Hilton Hotels, while he also volunteers as a judge on the prestigious Cateys Awards.

"Leadership, courage and trust combined with resolute self-belief, confidence, teamwork and a singularly focused obsession towards achieving desired outcomes are critical success factors", says Michael who draws on his own experiences, giving wider business and life lessons. But there is so much more beyond Michael the *business man*; **he is a strong, courageous and big hearted man of inspiration.**

Michael the polar adventurer

In 2004 Michael took his place in history when he became the first disabled person in the world to conquer both poles. It all started in April 2002 when Michael achieved the unthinkable and successfully reached the North Pole, alongside the Christopher Cope North Pole Expedition, raising funds for muscular dystrophy.

Of course such a mission is not without considerable risk for the most able of body, but throw in the additional challenges that Michael faces and you realise how incredible this feat really is. "People with my condition feel the cold more because our circulation is less efficient", says Michael. "Temperatures of minus 40 degrees can drop with wind chill, to minus 60 in the Arctic".

Strong winds, treacherous conditions underfoot and temperature extremes were all of grave concern to Michael and his team, which comprised of professional fitness, nutrition and medical experts. They had to work hard together to ensure he had the best chance of success.

After an eventful start to the trip and hostile weather events, Michael had made it; seen here walking the final leg with the support of his expedition colleague, Chris Cope.



Michael McGrath and Chris Cope

"I wanted to walk unaided to the Pole, but because of the weight of the Arctic boots, the challenge was even more testing"

Talking of the momentous feat Michael recounts, "It is an extraordinary silent, eerie place. It is one of the most hostile and raw environments you can imagine. All you see is ice and blue sky. The sunshine is very bright because of the glare. In two or three minutes any facial hair freezes and crystallises around your face. Your eyelids can freeze together, so you have to keep blinking. It is very beautiful, fragile and breathtaking".

Unbelievably it was on the return journey from the Pole that Michael conceived the idea to attempt the South Pole, a mission which he went on to achieve less than two years later in January 2004.

This time Michael planned the trip as an independent operation under his leadership and he used this and his previous Arctic adventure as a launch pad for creating a new charity, the **Muscle Help Foundation** (MHF). MHF is a unique national family charity that delivers highly personalised experiences, known as *Muscle Dreams*, for children and young people with MD. Within the family of MHF, where Michael is a founder and CEO, he is affectionately known as the *Chief Muscle Warrior*, which seems fitting.

Recognising that he had seen deterioration in his condition since his 2002 expedition, Michael knew he would face fresh challenges.

"Difficulties are just things to overcome", he says as he explains the added issues caused by Antarctica being 9000 feet above sea level, causing "altitude sickness and greater risk from the sun due to the depleted ozone layer". Michael spent a week acclimatising at the base camp in minus 25 degrees while they waited for a window in the weather. "On landing the altitude sickness kicked in. It gives you a pounding headache and makes you feel nauseous and there is nothing you can do about it."

Pulled in a sledge, Michael was buffeted by the wind and uneven ground conditions, but with support and encouragement from his team, he was lifted into the upright position where he walked the last 310 metres to reach his second Pole, each metre symbolically representing the approximate 3.1 million people worldwide with MD.



"My Grandfather, Ernest Shackleton listed the qualities he looked for in a Polar Explorer as optimism, patience, imagination, idealism and courage. I believe that Michael possesses all of these."

*The Rt. Hon Alexandra Shackleton
(Expedition patron and the
Granddaughter of Irish polar
explorer Ernest Shackleton)*

Michael on the Muscle Help Foundation

During his polar expeditions, Michael raised considerable funds and awareness for muscular dystrophy. He was able to use this to launch MHF which has gone on to become a multi-award winning charity, delivering more than 200 transformational Muscle Dreams, helping children realise cherished ambitions, including hanging out with Lewis Hamilton, training with the England football team and interviewing Al Pacino. The charity has gone from strength to strength and was named the Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team's official charity partner for 2015/16.

Michael has many prestigious accolades to his name:

- In 2005, Michael received the prestigious **Business Traveller of the Year Award** presented to him by Kate Adie in Dubai.
- In 2012 he was chosen as a **Paralympic torchbearer** for the London Olympics.
- This year Michael was named one of the most influential disabled people in Britain, featuring in the **Power 100 2016**.

In 2004 Michael's work was recognised in the Queen's Speech, when Her Majesty praised his **"contribution to national life"**.

Michael has been described as "an inspiration" by Virgin Group founder, Sir Richard Branson, and one of the charity's patrons, actor Sir Kenneth Branagh, has described him as "a phenomenon".

There are great things ahead for MHF as Michael and his team continue to drive the charity forward. In 2017, they will deliver more Muscle Dreams and move closer to their **#powerof657** goal (currently at 225), while attracting new charity partnerships. 2017 will also see the launch of a new foodie campaign called MeatBalls4MuscleDreams, a platform to engage the nation's appetite".



Family man, visionary and man of inspiration

Acknowledging the impact on his family, Michael noted: "We were setting up the charity, recruiting expedition team members, planning, securing sponsorship and handling media, in addition to my getting physically and mentally ready. It was hard on my family. I know I was a testing husband and father during this time.

But family remains very much at the centre of Michael's world and when asked what big ambitions he has for the future, he replied:

"If you'd asked me that question a few months ago, I would have said to see my beautiful daughter Gemma get married. This has now happened and I was the proudest Dad on the planet."

Michael has learned a lot from his achievements. "You are as powerful and strong as you allow yourself to be, and the most difficult part of any endeavour is taking the first step. I expect a lot from myself. I have so much I still want to do with my life."

When asked what Michael would say to his 18 year old self or other young person receiving a RARE diagnosis Michael says:

*"Whilst I try hard to live by my inherited ethos (from my old schools' alma mater/motto) 'Quant Je Puis' literally translated meaning 'As much As I Can', I might say that irrespective as to one's limitation (be it disability or otherwise), **life is absolutely no dress rehearsal - you get one shot at it, so live it and love it fully and when you can, try and pay it forward.**"*

What next for Michael McGrath?

"I've always had a fascination for all things space. Some years ago, I had the opportunity to sit in a Virgin Galactic space pod in Dubai....who knows!"

Something gives us the feeling that we may well be featuring Michael the Space Explorer one day!