

# “Oh the places you’ll go”



# Athletics Ireland

## Conversation Series

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**Athletics Ireland Conversation Series Concept:**  
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# “Oh the places you’ll go...”

## Welcome Note

This was our final event in the Athletics Ireland conversation series, and we went out with a bang. The aim of this event was to get young girls excited about getting involved in athletics and have the opportunity to hear about different stories, journeys and experiences. Sarah Quinn, Aoibhe Richardson and Grace Lynch shared their journey through the highs and lows of athletics, but the golden thread throughout was how much athletics had positively impacted their lives. We also discuss the common challenges that female athletes face and how our panelists have navigated these. It is our hope that this conversation inspires the next generation of young women to dream bigger and know that support is always close at hand.



**Orna Murray,**  
*Your Health Psychology*  
**Researcher & Facilitator**

I have a Master’s in Health Psychology from NUI Galway and an Honors Degree in Applied Psychology from UCC. I have both professional and personal experience working with elite athletes, having had the opportunity to work as part of an elite sports science team, while also representing Ireland internationally for both distance running and squash. Passionate about sports and women’s health I am working towards ensuring the next generation has the tools and the support they need to reach their athletic and personal potential.

We want to offer support so that they understand their bodies and are able to work with them rather than against them. We hope to create a movement where girls from all backgrounds want to get active and stay active for life.



**Grace Lynch,**  
*Athlete Development Manager, Athletics Ireland*  
**Co-Facilitator**

As a member of the Irish athletics community from the age six, athletics has been an integral part of my life. Athletics has helped me to grow as a person, discover my passion and connect to others with similar interests and drive in life. Athletics can pose many challenges and while these challenges provide growth and progression through learning, it has highlighted to me the importance of having support in specific areas which can provide help in navigating some of the obstacles we encounter. Orna and I shared a vision and so the Athletics Ireland conversation series was born. It is our belief that these workshops focus on four very important areas which resonate with so many others. Through Orna’s expertise and the input from our community, we hope to provide an experience that not only sheds light on these topics but helps to begin a community of practice within the Irish athletics scene. It is our hope that this community will continue to grow and help to support the current and future generations of Irish athletics members.



## Aoibhe Richardson 5000m

Aoibhe grew up in Kilkenny where she competed for Kilkenny City Harriers starting at around age ten. She is the oldest of four girls, who all run, and her parents also coach in the club so it really is a family affair! She moved to the US in 2016 to attend University and compete in the NCAA. She did three years at the University of Portland in Oregon, where she got her degree in Psychology, and then transferred to the University of San Francisco where she completed her Master's in Public Health. Some highlights of her collegiate career included finishing in the top twenty in the NCAA Division one cross country, and qualifying for the Indoor and Outdoor NCAA Nationals in the 5000m. She has also been part of the 2019 silver and 2021 bronze medal-winning Irish Senior teams at the European cross-country championships. Aoibhe now lives in New York City, where she works and competes for Atalanta NYC, a non-profit and professional women's running team.



*YOU JUST HAVE TO KEEP ASKING YOURSELF, IS THIS ADDING OR TAKING AWAY FROM MY DAY TO DAY? AND IT ALWAYS WAS ADDING TO ME, IT ALWAYS WAS BRINGING ME JOY, IT WAS ADDING BALANCE TO MY WEEK. SO I CHOSE TO CONTINUE TO BE DIFFERENT AND CONTINUE TO KEEP TRAINING AND KEEPING INVOLVED IN MY SPORT.*



## Sarah Quinn 100m Hurdles

Sarah Quinn is from Mayo and is currently completing her Masters in Accounting at the University of Galway. She is a World Relays silver medalist, National Senior indoor and outdoor sprint hurdles champion. Sarah ran on the 4x200 Irish relay team that finished 2nd - the first-ever podium finishing place for an Irish women's relay team and has broken national records. She has been in sports her whole life and started her athletics career at the very young age of six.



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*I'M GOING TO TAKE CHANCE ON MYSELF, BACK MYSELF, AND I'M GOING TO TRY AND REACH MY POTENTIAL WITH ATHLETICS.*





## Grace Lynch Marathon

Grace Lynch is an Irish distance runner specializing in distances ranging from 5k to Marathon. She has represented Ireland as a junior and senior athlete. Her professional background lends to her expertise in the area of sports performance through her qualifications; BSc Sport and Exercise scientist, Neuromuscular physical therapist, AAI Level 1 endurance coach and currently working as a regional development officer with the Athletics Association of Ireland. Grace has a passion for helping others through both her experience as a runner and her professional qualifications



THERE'S A LOT OF LEARNING THAT WE CAN DO BY JUST TELLING EACH OTHER OUR STORIES AND WE ACTUALLY REALISED THAT THERE'S A LOT OF US NAVIGATING THE SAME CHALLENGES AND THAT WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY THAT WE CAN ALL DO BETTER.



## Knowing What's Right For You

Knowing what's right for ourselves is a lifelong journey, there are so many opportunities and different paths we can try. It can bring up uncertainty if we aren't sure of what we want to do (this is true for athletics, but also for life in general). While there is no one-size-fits all answer, here are some tips to learn how to trust your gut instinct and get to that feeling of **'knowing'** and **'loving what you do'**.

- There will be a lot of trial and error.
- Stay curious until you feel at home.
- Learn from experiences, both the good and bad ones are amazing opportunities to learn something about ourselves.
- It's very normal to have doubts or uncertainties along the way (we can almost guarantee it).

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**'Running was definitely the sport that just kind of clicked. And I think when you find that you are kind of good at something or you could be good at something, it's kind of addictive and you want to keep coming back. So I think pretty early on I realised that I was probably most suited to running.'**

— Aoibhe

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**'Find something that you couldn't imagine your week without doing it. I couldn't imagine my weeks without having a sprint session or without having training and a schedule and all that sort of stuff. And that would've been the same when I was in school. I couldn't have imagined not going to athletics on a Friday evening but there were a lot of other sports that I could probably miss.'**

— Sarah

Ultimately, finding what is right for you is going to be a unique journey. Trust your inner voice and be open to new experiences. It's also 100% okay to make mistakes and change your mind.

## Dare To Be Different

Sometimes it's easy to think we need to conform and be like everyone else, it can seem less complicated to just fit into certain boxes. But when we embrace what makes us unique, we can tap into what lights us up, what gives us a spark and makes us feel like ourselves. Being different gives us the chance to challenge the norm and break down barriers for other girls and young women. Talking to Sarah, Aoibhe and Grace who all dared to be different, they have paved the way for countless other women. When we embrace our uniqueness, we have the power to challenge the status quo, inspire others, and leave a lasting impact with the people we meet.

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**'I think for a while I probably succumbed to just going with the norm.. .but if I could go back now and say to myself, just have the courage to step outside your comfort zone and try something new and do something that appeals to you, that feels more at home to you- I certainly would. When I did eventually go to my athletics club, I was so comfortable and I knew that's where people accepted me ... If it feels kind of scary to take that first step, just ask yourself what's the worst that could happen? You take that step - and if it doesn't work out? You take a step in a different direction.'**

— Grace

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**'It's in secondary school where it first starts to become a thing where I don't know, you notice a lot of your friends are no longer doing their sports and you are the only one kind of making that priority. And I think that was kind of a decision time for me where I have to ask myself, okay, do I go with the norm? All everyone else is quitting their sport, they want to prioritise their leaving cert, do I do that too or does running really add something to my life and I want to keep it a part of my life? And I definitely did, but I was the only one in my friend group that was still doing a sport, still going to training three times a week'**

— Aoibhe



## Learning To Say No

Learning to say no is an important skill that empowers you to prioritise what truly matters to you and maintain a healthy balance in your life. But what we often forget to talk about is that sometimes we have to say no to friends and people you get on with, the upside is that you then get to say yes to things that you love doing.

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**'You just have to know yourself and know your boundaries and get good at saying no. And that's not something that I was always great at, especially in secondary school. You don't want to be the odd one out. You don't want to be the one not going on the night out because you have to get up the next morning and do a run.'**

– *Aoibhe*

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**'It's a skill to be honest, being able to say no and prioritise yourself. When it comes to running and performing at your best, it takes so much time and effort . Saying no to certain things is essential'**

– *Grace*

## Navigating Transition

Navigating transition is an important, exciting and challenging part of life, and as young women, you are going to experience times of change and growth. Whether it's transitioning from primary school to secondary school, exploring new friendships, facing academic challenges, or navigating the menstrual cycle's impact on performance, these transitions can sometimes feel overwhelming.

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**'You have to be willing to leave your old self behind, take the best parts of it and go hell for leather at your new venture. And that's what I kind of decided to do. I wasn't going to be half in it. I was going to be all in. I wanted to give myself the best chance. So yeah, social life and stuff like that kind of took a hit after a while, but I was really happy with my life once I had decided who I wanted to be and grew into that person. But there is that kind of transition phase of being like, who am I? But yeah, that was kind of my journey at the start.'**

— Sarah

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**'I just had a feeling there was something more out there for me and that running could be a bigger part of my college experience. And I thought that I wanted it to be a bigger part and I said, I'm going to go for it. I'm going to see what it's like if I hate it, I can come home after a semester, I can come home after a year, but if I don't try, I'm going to regret it and I'm always going to think what if. So yeah, I went for it. And I think once I was on a team with a lot of like-minded individuals, I just found people that I clicked with really quickly, which is such a great thing about sport.'**

— Aoibhe (on deciding to go to college in the states)

With practice, support and patience we can learn to navigate transitions like these pros. Our advice is to embrace the journey, lean on your support system, and trust in your own abilities!

## Environment

The people you surround yourself with, your environment, and your daily routine plays a big role in your mindset, behaviours, and actions. They say 'you are the result of the five people you spend the most time with', it highlights the influence that the groups we are part of can shape our beliefs, values, behaviours, and overall mindset. Remember, you have the power to choose the people you surround yourself with, the environments you immerse yourself in, and the routines you create.

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**'There's certain things in my day that I need. So whether that's a really good sleeping routine, knowing when my training is taking place, or even small things like having time in my day just to be by myself and recharge . I know once I have all of that done and I know exactly what I'm doing for that week, that I have set myself up for a successful week ahead.'**

— Grace

Life can be unpredictable, and it's important to strike a balance between structure and adaptability. While having a routine is helpful, it's also important to allow for flexibility and spontaneity.

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## Injury and Setbacks

Dealing with injuries and other setbacks can be challenging both physically and emotionally. It's normal to feel a lot of emotions when faced with something unexpected, frustration, disappointment or anger can seem to bubble up from nowhere. However, with the right support we can use setbacks as an opportunity to develop mental resilience and strengthen your mindset.

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**'Every day I wake up, it's the first thing I think about in the morning. It's the last thing I think about, I go to bed and it's all just about managing the feelings of frustration and stuff like that. But I have massive, massive trust in the process that I'm on. I have massive trust in the people I have around me helping me. And it's all about the long game for me, to be honest. There's no high performance athlete and there's no normal athlete that gets away with not having any injuries. And I think it's your ability to manage them both mentally and physically is what's going to determine your outcome. You can't determine whether you get injured or not because that's going to happen at some point. And it's all, whether it's a small injury, big injury, whatever it might be, but it's all about how you manage your emotions, manage your actions, and you have the ability to come back stronger than ever. And I know it might take a little while, but that's going to happen.'**

— Sarah

Remember, while you're recovering, maintaining a healthy diet, getting enough rest and engaging with other hobbies you enjoy will help keep you sane. While it's very normal to want to return to training as soon as possible, make sure to chat to your support system about realistic goals for getting back. Celebrating the small wins along the way, along with being patient with yourself will make the journey easier.

## Defining Success For You

Defining success for yourself is personal and unique to you. Consider what's important to you, what do you want to work towards and how are you going to get there. Instead of copying others' definitions of success you get to set out your own goals and path.

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**'Success looks very different to me every day that I wake up because it's dependent on what stage of rehab I'm at, what I need to get done on that day. And if I've gotten up, I've gotten my college work done, I'm on top of things off the track and then I've gotten my session going on the bike or the pool, whichever it happens to be that day, my rehab stuff, if I go to bed knowing that I've all of that done, that's success to me for that day.'**

— Sarah

### **N.B**

- *Your success might look different each and every day.*
- *Your journey is as important as your destination, enjoy both.*
- *If you get caught up comparing yourself to others (which we all do from time to time but rarely is it helpful), try to catch yourself doing it and shift your focus to how far you've come.*

## Words of Wisdom

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**'Ask and chat to people who've been through it, don't be afraid.'**

— Grace

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**'You don't know what you're capable of. You don't know what could be out there for you until you, you'd try.'**

— Sarah

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**'As you get older and you kind of get a bit better at just, just owning it, saying no, putting priorities in place, that doesn't mean that you have to always say no and you can definitely still have a social life and still have that balance, but occasionally you are going to have to say no and put your running first and just trust that it's going to pay off in the long run.'**

— Aoibhe

## Asking For Help

HELLO, IT'S ME AGAIN, ORNA!

THIS IS THE ADVICE AND SUPPORT I WISH I COULD HAVE GIVEN TO MY TEENAGE SELF. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WE ALL FACE CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS IN LIFE THAT CAN SOMETIMES FEEL OVERWHELMING.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT ASKING FOR HELP IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS, BUT A STRENGTH. WHETHER IT'S DEALING WITH SCHOOL PRESSURES, NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS, OR TRAINING STRUGGLES, REACHING OUT FOR HELP CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE.

AS TEENAGE GIRLS, YOU HAVE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES, AND YOUR FEELINGS AND CONCERNS ARE VALID. THAT BEING SAID YOU DON'T HAVE TO FACE EVERYTHING ALONE. WHETHER IT'S SEEKING SUPPORT FROM TRUSTED FRIENDS, FAMILY, OR YOUR ATHLETICS COMMUNITY, ASKING FOR SUPPORT IS A POWERFUL TOOL THAT CAN EMPOWER YOU TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES AND GROW STRONGER IN THE PROCESS. IT TAKES COURAGE TO ADMIT WHEN THINGS FEEL OVERWHELMING AND TO ASK FOR HELP. REMEMBER, IN ATHLETICS AND IN LIFE, WE ALL NEED A HELPING HAND FROM TIME TO TIME.

I AM EXCITED FOR ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES, THE LAUGHS AND THE ADVENTURES YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ARE GOING TO HAVE OVER THE COMING YEARS! REMEMBER TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND HAVE AS MUCH FUN ALONG THE WAY AS POSSIBLE.

YOURS TRULY IN SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT,

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