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Runners race for men's health

WHILE the Mates 500 Relay ended in Manjimup last Thursday, its impact will continue into the future.

The event was an 11-day, 1500km run from Mukinbudin to Manjimup to raise money and awareness for the Regional Men's Health Initiative and Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia.

Mates 500 Relay Chairman Paul Omodei said the runners felt many emotions when they arrived at the finishing line at Fonty's Pool.

"It was a mixture of relief and satisfaction and a sense that 'we've done it'," he said.

"There was also a sense of achievement because we went further than we would in terms of recognition from the community."

Mr Omodei said the runners had pulled up "generally well" after the long journey.

"When you think about runners like Wayne Barnden and Matt Johnston, who each ran 250km over the 11 days, it's a lot of effort," he said.

"The hardest thing was the sleep deprivation.

"But there are no major injuries like pulled muscles and most of the boys will be playing football this weekend."

Mr Omodei said the community support they received in the 40 regional towns they visited was fantastic.

"A lot of IGA stores donated food and different towns had civic re-

ceptions for us, which was very humbling," he said.

Mr Omodei said while they had not worked out the final total of money raised, he was confident it was over \$80,000.

"There is still money from the past two or three functions which we need to add to the total," he said.

"We are still taking donations until the end of April.

"While the money is important, raising awareness about sensitive issues like men's mental health and prostate cancer is equally important."

Mr Omodei said it was pleasing that high-profile sportspeople like

former Australian cricketer Bruce Yardley travelled the whole journey with the runners.

"David Parkin was another great supporter," he said.

"He was truly inspirational and a genuine person.

"West Coast Eagles players Dean Cox and Nic Naitanui attracted a large crowd in Merredin, which is no surprise."

Mr Omodei said Brendan Barrows and Bali bombing survivor Peter Hughes were two of the most inspirational speakers.

For more information about the Mates 500 Relay, visit the website at www.mates500relay.org.au.

► To see more pictures from the rally go to info.com.au/go

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Mates 500 Relay Chairman Paul Omodei is embraced by friends and family. PICTURE: MAREE HODGSON