50 mums and dads run to raise money for Neuroblastoma UK and Shooting Star Children's Hospices

Tuesday 7 July, 2020

A group of 50 family, friends and teachers from across Surrey, Sussex and Ireland raise money to fund vital research and hospice care to remember 5-year-old cancer patient Grace.

This October, an incredible team of FIFTY will be taking part in the Beachy Head Marathon in East Sussex, one of the biggest off-road marathons in the UK. The group of friends, ranging in age from 18 to 60 (**from Surrey, Sussex and Co. Kildare, Co.Kilkenny and Co. Carlow in Ireland)** are running in dedication to a little girl called Grace, who sadly passed away in September 2019.

Grace was two years old when she was diagnosed with stage 4 neuroblastoma, a rare childhood cancer, in 2017. She needed intensive cancer treatment immediately including chemotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy to fight the cancer and lived a normal, happy life for nearly two years. But in May 2019, a bruise appeared near her eye and began to get bigger. Her parents Catriona and Simon knew that Grace's cancer had returned. They made the hard decision to not continue with any more harsh treatment, to give Grace the best quality of life whilst they could. Grace sadly passed away in September 2019 when she was just five years old, leaving behind her parents Catriona and Simon and two older siblings.

The team of mostly female non-runners, including Grace's family in Ireland and Sussex, along with parents and teachers from Grace's school (St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Leatherhead) are calling their run 'Race for Grace'. For most, this will be their first-ever marathon.

They are aiming to raise £25,000 for Neuroblastoma UK and Christopher's, a Shooting Star Children's Hospice in Guildford, to say thank you for the care and support that Grace received during her treatment and beyond. So far they have raised over £3,500.

Grace's mum and team member Catriona said "*Grace was an amazing daughter and the life and soul of our home. She was a beautiful, fun loving and cheeky little girl who was sadly taken away from us after a long fight with neuroblastoma, an aggressive childhood cancer. Running Beachy Head Marathon has given me a goal to focus on over the next few months, and training with all these amazing friends and family helps me get through each day. All of these women (and some men!) are so glad to be part of something special to remember Grace. We've all become really good friends and it's amazing to see everyone giving up their time to raise money and raise awareness of such a cruel disease.*"

The money raised will help Neuroblastoma UK to fund vital research into neuroblastoma, to help improve diagnosis and treatment for children with the disease. It will also enable Shooting Star Children's Hospices to provide care for children with life-limiting conditions in London and Surrey.

Catriona continued, "A*s Grace's family, we wish to reciprocate the support that we received by fundraising for Neuroblastoma UK and Shooting Star Children's Hospices, two charities who urgently need our help right now. We can't stop thinking about the other children who are going through what our Grace experienced - we really want to help Neuroblastoma UK fund more important research to make these treatments kinder and more effective. You don't really realise what hospices actually do until you're there, but everyone at Christopher's, Shooting Star Children's Hospices Guildford hospice, was so kind and caring throughout Grace's stay so this is our way of saying thank you.*"

Team Race for Grace are hopeful that the race will go ahead in October but if it is cancelled, they have plans to run a circular route to Christopher's and back. The team has been really innovative with their training efforts during lockdown, including virtual training sessions via Zoom, squat and stair challenges and a virtual relay race. The local community have even chalked messages of support on roads around their training routes!

Mel Sang, a fitness instructor from Ashtead in Surrey who has volunteered to train the group, said, "*Our group is made up of around 90% non-runners. Some of us have only ever run a bath so a marathon is a huge challenge! The memory of Grace is really spurring us all on. Training for this special event has brought us all much closer together - we're more than just mums at the school gates. We're supporting each other on runs, training sessions and moral support. We can't train together anymore which is really sad, but we're completing virtual training sessions, running 5ks in our gardens,*

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doing home yoga and boxing sessions, running with family members and following social distancing guidelines to train as much as we can! It all adds to the massive challenge but we're having fun and are committed to supporting two fantastic charities."

Katherine Mobey, Fundraising Manager at Neuroblastoma UK said, "*Around two children are diagnosed with neuroblastoma every week in the UK. That's around 100 children just like Grace every year. Most children diagnosed with neuroblastoma are under the age of five. Thanks to the support of Grace's family and friends, we can help scientists search for new and kinder treatments for children with neuroblastoma. We are so grateful to Team Race for Grace and admire their dedication, innovativeness and resilience to carry on training despite all the obvious challenges!"*

"As a charity, we receive no government funding so we are truly grateful to Catriona, Mel and all of Team Race for Grace for choosing to support Neuroblastoma UK. We urgently need more people to raise money at home, school or work, and help us continue funding much-needed research into this rare and aggressive cancer."

Alexa Dizon, Head of Challenge Events at Shooting Star Children's Hospices said, *"Shooting Star Children's Hospices aim to make every moment count, supporting families' during the most unimaginably difficult times. By providing end-of-life care at our hospices, we can give families a chance to make lasting memories, be together and simply say goodbye. Amazing fundraisers, like Team Race for Grace make this possible. We only receive 10% of our funding from the government, which means we rely on our supporters' generosity to continue to provide our vital care and support - which is needed now more than ever.*

"Team Race for Grace have been so inspiring with the ways they have managed to continue their training throughout this challenging time and everyone at Shooting Star Children's Hospices is so appreciative and wishing them so much luck for the training and the amazing challenge ahead!"

To support Race for Grace, visit their fundraising page at https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/RaceForGrace2020 or read updates on their Facebook page: fb.me/RaceForGrace2020

To organise your own fundraising event and support Neuroblastoma UK, visit neuroblastoma.org.uk/community-fundraising

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