British Paralympic wheelchair fencer and triple World Cup winner shares story of premature birth

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The Ickle Pickles Children's Charity is delighted to announce the appointment of Gemma Collis as its new ambassador. A four-time Paralympian and celebrated Wheelchair Fencer for Great Britain, Gemma brings her remarkable journey and inspiring story to support premature babies and their families through the charity's vital work.

Gemma's story is nothing short of extraordinary. Born prematurely at just 29 weeks and weighing a mere 2 pounds 11 ounces, Gemma was an 'Ickle Pickle' herself. Her early arrival into the world was fraught with challenges, as detailed by her mother, Karen. From being transferred to the John Radcliffe Hospital due to an infection outbreak, to overcoming the hurdles of being born with Placenta Previa, Gemma's early life was a testament to resilience and the exceptional care provided by medical professionals.

Reflecting on her journey, Gemma shares, "I am enormously honoured and proud to be named an Ambassador for the Ickle Pickles Children's Charity. The care that my Mum and I received when I was born prematurely has played a crucial role in shaping the life I am fortunate to live today. The work Ickle Pickles does ensures that premature babies like me have the best chance to thrive and achieve their dreams."

Gemma's career is a testament to her determination and talent. In 2018, she became the first British woman to win a Wheelchair Fencing World Cup, a feat she repeated in 2023 when she ascended to the World No. 1 ranking. With over 20 World Cup medals, a Commonwealth Fencing Championships Gold, and a European Championships Silver in 2024, Gemma embodies the spirit of perseverance and excellence.

As Ickle Pickles' new ambassador, Gemma is committed to raising awareness and supporting their epic fundraising challenge, the 28k Incubator Push. "I cannot wait to begin working with the charity to ensure every Ickle Pickle gets the start they deserve," Gemma said enthusiastically.

On Saturday, the 7th of June, the 28K Incubator Push charity event promises an epic day of endurance – 28 laps to raise 28K in honour of the tiniest patients yet the biggest fighters. But this challenge is about more than just raising money for much-needed neonatal equipment; it's about bringing awareness to the challenges faced by sick and premature babies and their families and improving neonatal care for a brighter tomorrow.

Essential equipment like incubators, ventilators, oxygen, brain monitors, and feeding pumps form the backbone of a neonatal unit. But they are pretty expensive. An incubator costs £28,000 and approximately £2000 a day for a baby to be cared for in a neonatal unit. Babies born between 28-31 weeks need to be cared for in a neonatal unit for an average of 44 days, and with one in thirteen babies being born prematurely each year in the UK, Ickle Pickles is on a mission to give every newborn a fighting chance.

“There is no greater fight than ensuring a child has the chance to survive,” says Julie Voong, Head of Peer Support at the Ickle Pickle Children’s Charity. “These ‘ickle pickles,’ as we affectionately call them, need critical care in neonatal units, and specialised equipment is vital for their survival. So, we are calling on you to help us raise essential funds for sick and premature babies.”

The Ickle Pickles Charity invites hospitals, companies, and communities to participate in and support this groundbreaking fundraising initiative. They are honoured that Gemma Collis will start the event at Crystal Palace in London at 10 am and will join a team pushing a road-worthy incubator to help raise 28k for much-needed neonatal equipment. The day is expected to run until approximately 4 pm, and during this time, Gemma will be available for a ‘Meet and Greet’ session with attendees.

With Gemma Collis on board, the charity hopes to rally communities and hospitals nationwide to join its one-of-a-kind fundraiser and inspire teams to sign up for a lap or register a team and take turns to push a road-worthy incubator for 28km around Crystal Palace Park to raise 28k for an incubator and vital neonatal equipment.

To register for the Incubator Push and find out more, please click here.

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For more information about the Ickle Pickles Children's Charity and how you can support their mission, please visit www.icklepickles.org.

Ickle Pickles Children’s Charity
Giving every newborn a chance.
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Notes to editors:

1. Ickle Pickles is the only charity that raises funds to donate intensive and special-care equipment to neonatal units across England and Wales.

2. There are over 90,000 babies born sick or prematurely in the UK every year. We strive to give every newborn a chance by working nationally whilst delivering tangible localised benefits for parents, neonatal units and communities.

3. Since 2009, we have raised over £3.5 million for intensive and special care equipment. We have purchased over 900 pieces of equipment to support over 50 hospitals and three neonatal transport services. Read more about the children and families we have supported: Stories about your Ickle Pickles

4. The Ickle Pickles Children's Charity is funded entirely by voluntary contributions from organisations and individuals.

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