

PRESS RELEASE

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Three Peaks challenge ahead for Bedford High School girls raising funds for Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity

The Wednesday & Thursday of 29th-30th June is going to put five Bedford High School girls to the test when they embark on the Three Peaks Challenge, to raise funds for Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity.

The five 14 year olds: Robyn Armstrong, Hannah Selvey, Amber Stewart, Lydia Watt and Harry Lusty will be endeavouring to scale the three highest peaks in the UK – Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in 24 hours, one of which will be climbed in the middle of the night.

The girls and their support team are raising funds for Sands as the charity helped Robyn's aunt (Candida Evans) so much following the death of one of Candida's twin babies, Summer, in 2008.

Robyn, who lives in Clophill, explains why she persuaded her friends to take up the challenge, 'My cousin, Summer, died when my aunt was 7 months pregnant with twins. Summer had a condition called 'gastroschisis' which is a type of bowel hernia and we were told this could be treated after she was born, with a 95% chance of survival. Sadly this was not the case and my Aunt Candy had to deliver both Summer and Georgie, which was truly devastating. Sands helped my aunt so much and until Summer died I had no idea how many babies die every day in the UK.'

Robyn's aunt, Candida Evans, continues the story, 'My husband and I both struggled badly for weeks and weeks after and then I contacted Sands. They were brilliant, they just listened. Just to know that you could talk to someone any time was so comforting. I still sometimes contact them now just for a chat. Everyone you talk to at Sands has also gone through a similar experience which makes it a little easier too. It's still a very low time in my life right now and I desperately want my baby Summer back but Sands really pulled me out of a very dark place.'

The girls and their support team (Kevan & Rachel Armstrong (Robyn's Mum & dad and both ex-international rowers), Candy Evans (Summer's mum), Clare Cooper (Candy's twin sister) and family friend Mark Gray) have already been pledged over £2,700 of their £4,000 target, but are determined to beat the fundraising goal they've set themselves.

Kevan Armstrong, Robyn's dad, says of the girls' efforts, 'We're all incredibly proud of the girls as to complete the Three Peaks Challenge is no mean feat. Several of them are serious rowers and so we hope this will stand them in good stead, but the weekend will test them all, both mentally and physically.'

'I was shocked when I learnt that 17 babies die every day in the UK – 11 are stillborn and 6 die shortly after birth. Having seen how Summer's death has devastated the whole of our family we are committed to raising as much money as possible to help fund vital research into why so many babies are still dying and to enable Sands to provide other families the level of support and care they have given Candy.'

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For further information, please contact:

Lyn Peters – 01394 385865

or

Lisa Wardle – 07554 454309

Key Information about Sands:

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, was established by bereaved parents in 1978 and obtained charity status in 1981.

Sands core aims are to:

- Support anyone affected by the death of a baby;
- To work in partnership with health professionals to improve the quality of care and services offered to bereaved families; and
- To promote research and changes in practice that could help to reduce the loss of babies' lives

Helpline: 020 7436 5881

Office: 020 7436 7940

Web: www.uk-sands.org

E mail: info@uk-sands.org

Sands Why 17? campaign:

Sands Why17? campaign asks a simple question. Why in spite of medical advances, do 17 babies die every day in the UK? For some of these deaths we simply do not yet know enough to be able to say why. Further research is needed.

The Facts today:

- 17 babies die every day in the UK (11 are stillbirths, 6 are neonatal deaths) totalling almost 6,500 baby deaths a year - the equivalent of 16 jumbo jets crashing every year with no survivors.
- This is four times the number of people who die every year of MRSA (1,593 MRSA deaths in 2007, UK Statistics Authority).
- This is double the number of adults who lose their lives on Britain's roads every year (2007 – 2,940 people were killed on the roads, Department of Transport).
- Ten times more babies are stillborn than die of cot death every year in the UK.
- The stillbirth rate has remained almost unchanged in the UK for the past 10 years. (CEMACH)
- Stillbirth is when a baby is born dead after 24 completed weeks of a pregnancy
- Neonatal death is when a baby is born alive but dies within the first 28 days of life

But increasingly, Sands believes that many of these deaths are potentially avoidable. The devastating impact of the death of a baby on the parents and their families and friends could be prevented.

What is needed is better antenatal care, increased funding for maternity services, more midwives and increased funding for research.

Sands Why17? campaign is seeking to raise £3million over the next 5 years to;

1. Focus public awareness on why, tragically, 17 babies a day in the UK are stillborn or die within the first twenty eight days of life;
2. Promote changes in antenatal practice that could prevent babies from dying;
3. Identify and support key research which could provide further information on why so many babies are dying