

Press release

February 2012

Local parents launch new Bath Sands support group for bereaved parents

With 17 babies stillborn or dying shortly after birth every day in the UK, bereaved local mum Ceri Shaw is one of a group of Bath-based parents on a mission to provide support to fellow bereaved parents.

Working with Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, Ceri and fellow bereaved mums and dads are launching the Bath Sands group on Tuesday 7 February and are calling upon people who live locally and who have been affected by the death of a baby to come along. The meetings will be held at St Stephen's Church, Lansdown from 7pm – 9pm. Thereafter meetings will be held on the first Tuesday of every month at the same time and place.

Ceri says of her resolve to set up the group: 'We estimate that over 100 families have been affected by the death of a baby in the area within the last 12 months and at present there is no equivalent facility to support families when faced with this tragedy.'

A key aim of the new group is to raise money for the running costs involved in running local support meetings, as well as train volunteer 'befrienders' who facilitate the meetings and provide the very special memory boxes to every bereaved parent at Bath Royal United Hospital.

"Memory Boxes are offered to parents in the immediate aftermath of losing a baby when families are faced with just moments to make a life time of memories with their beloved child. At a time when parents may be overwhelmed by emotion they have the chance to take some foot & hand prints as well as some well thought out keepsakes and helpful information for the weeks and months ahead."

Ceri adds "Our son, Wilfie was born at 30 weeks and lived for just six hours. We had known for several weeks that the pregnancy was not going well and our worst nightmares were realised five hours after his birth when the doctors told us that his lungs hadn't developed properly and that he wouldn't survive.

Wilfie fought as hard as he could, but as soon as we'd said hello we had to say goodbye and our world came crashing down. While we were in the hospital we got to spend a small amount of time with our little boy and were able to take photos and create some memories to take away with us. It wasn't enough

and nothing seemed real. Receiving the memory box on that day is a little hazy, but in the days and weeks that followed, when we felt ready, we were able to look through the box, at the keepsakes that had so thoughtfully been put together by someone who had really known what it was like to lose a child.'

The newly formed group is also appealing to volunteer knitters as hand-knitted keepsake blankets are urgently needed for inclusion in the memory boxes. People interested in knitting a blanket, please visit www.bathsands.org for pattern details.

Ceri concludes : 'We just hope the new group will help other parents locally at such a devastating time, especially as many parents feel that although people can sympathise with their loss, it's others who have experienced the death of a baby that can offer real understanding and empathy for what they're are going through.'

If you would like to find out more about Sands and the new Bath group please visit www.bathsands.org

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

ENDS

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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