

Precious Milk for Precious Babies:

Seventy years of breastmilk banking at one hospital is deserving of a celebration! So is one hundred years since the start of milk banking. Both of these anniversaries fell in 2009 and a party was planned for breastmilk donors and their families as well as for parents and children who have benefited from donor milk. The date was set for September 2009.

UKAMB, Best Beginnings and Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital (home to the world's longest continually operating milk bank) joined forces to provide a fun afternoon as well as highlight the important role that donor breastmilk has played in the lives of thousands of premature and sick babies in West London. That was until the predicted H1N1 (Swine Flu) epidemic was expected to coincide with children returning to school – ie September 2009. The wisdom of bringing together a large number of young children at this time was questioned and the event was postponed until the following spring.



Now 71 years since the start of a milk bank sounds like an unusual anniversary to celebrate but happily, 2010 would also be the year when the St Neot's Quads, the first recipients of donor milk from the then Queen Charlotte's Hospital, would be 75 and so the postponed 70th anniversary celebrations turned into a 75th birthday party!! The event was given the title 'Precious Milk for Precious Babies' and on Sunday May 16th, the new W12 Conference Centre located behind Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital in West London became the venue for an afternoon of fun and laughter, songs and celebration. With a minimal budget (this was being hosted by charities and a milk bank!) it was decided that refreshments would be in the form of cup cakes lovingly made and donated by staff at the hospital and then decorated at the event by the children themselves. Amazingly, the conference centre staff were happy to facilitate this and didn't seem to mind the prospect of cake decorations finding their way throughout this beautiful and spacious facility as all of the conference centres numerous rooms were taken over for the day.

To ensure everyone knew exactly what milk banking was and is all about, displays about milk banking in the 1930's were to be found alongside exhibits showing how donors are recruited and breastmilk banked in 2010. Carolyn Westcott brought her fascinating collection of breast pumps and baby feeding paraphernalia through the ages together with a selection of jewellery to sell on behalf of UKAMB including the 'Every Drop Counts' silver range designed and made by her sister Hilary Bowen. Anthropologist and mother of a child who received donor milk, Dr Tanya Cassidy contributed to the educational theme of the afternoon by providing a slideshow about the early days of milk banking and the start of the bank at Queen Charlotte's. The slides ran on a continual loop in the 'History Room' and were of special interest to the milk bankers at the party. BLISS, the Multiple Birth Foundation and Best Beginnings provided information about the services and support they offer to families and Sam Baum, son of Professor David Baum, had designed a poster to pay tribute to his father's important contribution to the development of milk banking in the 1980's.



Alison Baum (of Best Beginnings) and Jessica Kingsley (of Magical Quests), both nieces of Professor David Baum, in front of the poster designed by Sam Baum

The world famous breastfeeding expert Chloe Fisher, who worked with Professor Baum at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, spoke of Professor Baum's influence and the work they carried out over 30 years ago. To ensure a balance was maintained between education and fun (there weren't many youngsters captivated by the historical stuff) a band of volunteers, including milk bank and neonatal unit health professionals, painted children's faces (and hands and arms) and helped them make and decorate windmills and construct buildings out of plastic bricks.

A highlight of the afternoon for the children (and many adults) was provided by the very talented Jessica Kingsley and her small band of actors. Jessica's company 'Magical Quests' stages themed and specially written drama events for children's (and adults') parties. The lucky youngsters at this party event were asked to help solve a terrible crime. It appeared that someone had stolen all the precious milk from the Milk Bank and kidnapped one of the important 'baby' doctors!! How could this have happened and what would become of the poorly babies if these crimes couldn't be solved? No-one need have feared though; a tableau that unfolded in several of the W12's rooms that had been turned into special sets for the afternoon, included spectacularly costumed

mermaids, a breastfeeding merbaby, pirates and even King Neptune himself. The children helped solve the crime as this drama unfolded before their eyes. Consultant Neonatologist Dr Alan Groves was found (in a cleaning cupboard!) and rescued and the precious donor breastmilk was saved (presumably before it had had time to start defrosting – the new NICE guideline is very 'hot' on maintaining the condition of donor milk whilst out of a freezer.....)

Music, including community singing were high on the list of attractions for the afternoon as Lactation Consultant Alison Blenkinsop quickly tutored a group of volunteer mothers and staff to sing a specially written version of 'Oh What a Beautiful Morning' accompanied by guitarist and milk bank supporter Sedleigh. 'Oh What a Precious Donation' was sung with great aplomb as Alison's mastery of comic as well as informative and moving lyrics unfolded.

Local West London Singer/Songwriter Sedleigh has spent many weeks writing, co-producing and recording 'Every Drop Counts' a single that he has donated to UKAMB to help raise awareness of milk banking as well as much needed funds for the charity that shares its logo with the title of his song. Sedleigh, who was born in Queen Charlotte's Hospital, gave an emotional first performance of his song that is now available as a download or CD in response to every donation to UKAMB via the specially created Every Drop Counts JustGiving site. A link from the UKAMB website www.ukamb.org will take you to a page where you can read more about the work of Sedleigh and his small team of generous and talented creative artists.



Chair of UKAMB and event organiser Gillian Weaver, manager of the Milk Bank at Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital with St Neot's Quad Ann Browning who will be 75 years old later this year.

Specially invited guests at this unique party included some of the 400 babies a year who have benefited in recent years from the donor milk from Queen Charlotte's Hospital Milk Bank as well as one very special recipient of breastmilk 75 years ago this year.

Ann Browning had come along as a VIP guest to the event. Ann is one of the set of quads who started the milk banking tradition in the UK by receiving breastmilk from the hospital, all organised at the time by the then matron Edith Dare. Ann's three brothers were unable to attend due to location (one lives in South Africa and one was away on holiday) and family commitments but Ann enjoyed showing off her family photographs from the 1930's and meeting some of the latest children to benefit. A more recent set of quads to benefit from the bank were identical quads born four years ago at Queen Charlotte's. They are one of only two sets of identical quads in the world and coincidentally live close to the Bedfordshire home of Ann Browning. The four year old girls perplexed onlookers who weren't expecting to see four identical young, and very lovely faces. Their parents Julie and Jose had kindly agreed to make the journey to Queen Charlotte's to help demonstrate the importance of donor milk as support for mothers of multiples who understandably can often struggle to provide enough of their own breastmilk, especially in the early days following a premature birth.

Steve Haberfield cycled to the event and spent the afternoon explaining to onlookers about his fund raising challenge later this summer on behalf of UKAMB. Steve, a hairdresser from Whitton, will be swapping his scissors and clippers for the open road in August as he attempts to cycle from John O'Groats to Lands End via a number of UK milk banks, a journey of over 1000 miles and one which he has to complete in 10 days. Steve (pictured) will be accompanied by wife Katrina and his daughters in a specially hired camper van and will be raising awareness

West London hairdresser Steve Haberfield with daughter Lily. Steve will be cycling 'End to End for Milk Banking' from 2nd August 2010. Please go to www.justgiving.com/stevehaberfield for more details and to sponsor Steve on his mammoth journey on behalf of UKAMB



of milk banking as well as hopefully funds to help support the valuable work that UKAMB does throughout the UK.

Gillian Weaver, planned and co-ordinated the day with assistance from Maleeha Nusrat and Jennifer Sangalang, her Milk Bank colleagues as well as invaluable help from Alison Baum of Best Beginnings. Fellow UKAMB Trustees Theresa Alexander, Paula Blanchette, Karen Lewis and Carolyn Westcott were on hand to provide much needed help on the day and UKAMB supporters Sam Heaney and Henry Lewis gave up their Sunday to help as did family and friends of all of the organisers. Further support and help on the day was provided by staff from the Neonatal Unit at Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital, including nurses, doctors and other health professionals. Staff brought their own families along to help and join in and gain an insight into the work that their parents do in the pursuit of optimal health and excellent care for some of the countries sickest and most premature babies. However the abiding memories for many will be the sight of all those children, faces painted and happy, as they watched Sedleigh play and sing, saw BBC TV Sports Presenter Amanda Davies speak on film of her gratitude to the Milk Bank that helped her baby daughter Molly, and watched a baby mermaid being breastfed in the W12 Conference Centre.