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Home Archive Tragedy and hope lie behind the Living Pink Balloon

# Tragedy and hope lie behind the Living Pink Balloon

By CECILIA NASMITH Northumberland Today.com  
Updated 6 months ago

**ALDERVILLE** - The loss of one little girl and the illness of another have galvanized the Alderville community to try to make a difference to other children affected by brain trauma.

The girls were the inspiration behind last year's Living Pink Balloon event that set a goal of raising \$10,000 for the SickKids Foundation for Brain and Behavioural Research. The event ended up raising \$12,000, a success media coordinator Chris Pelletier hopes to see repeated this year on Sept. 18.

Participants purchase a pink T-shirt and then arrange themselves in a balloon shape (similar to the way supporters form a Living Green Ribbon for the Trillium Gift of Life Foundation), Pelletier explained. The deadline to pre-register for the event this year is Sept. 9, which allows plenty of time to arrange the T-shirts.

Organizers hope to gather 500 participants this year as a symbol of solidarity in support of the SickKids Foundation - and in honour of young Hollie Gray and Brenna Crowe.

On Sept. 1, 2008 (four days before her 11th birthday), Hollie was rushed to Northumberland Hills Hospital after her parents found her unresponsive. The only symptoms she had displayed were a mild headache and nausea.

Her heart stopped on the way to the hospital. They started it again at the Cobourg hospital and, after finding a mass on her brain, dispatched her to the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. There, they determined her brain had swelled and Hollie was clinically brain-dead. They kept her alive long enough for her family to come and say their final goodbyes.

The Gray family honoured Hollie's giving nature by donating organs that saved five lives, and are determined to support the kind of brain-trauma research that might have saved Hollie's life.

Brenna began displaying disturbing symptoms at the age of three, including lethargy, vomiting and headaches. In spite of many trips to the hospital, however, no firm diagnosis was made.

Her symptoms escalated to seizures and, when she stopped breathing during a trip to the hospital, they gave her a CT scan that showed a mass on her brain. She was airlifted to Sick Kids in Toronto for surgery to relieve the pressure on her brain.

Brenna has been diagnosed with a brain tumour that had grown to the size of a lime and was blocking the normal drainage pathways of her brain, as well as some ventricles.

Surgery and chemotherapy at Sick Kids have given her a chance at life, though her family must watch for a recurrence of the tumour and other problems that could stem from her hormone levels (such as eyesight problems). But the Crowe family are grateful that Brenna can continue to have as normal a life as possible.

Both families have helped to organize the Living Pink Balloon as a way to give back for the compassionate care Sick Kids offered.

The event has been an extraordinary success their first year, Pelletier said, largely because of the connection so many members of the community feel with the girls and their families.

Organizers are asking participants to register by Sept. 9 at \$20 for adults and \$10 for youths at Herbal Magic in Cobourg, or at The Scissors Edge, Our House Snack 'n' Go or Trails End in Alderville (or online at [www.livingpinkballoon.org](http://www.livingpinkballoon.org)). T-shirts will be ordered Sept. 10.

Living Pink Balloon day is Sept. 18 at the Alderville First Nation ball diamond (5555 Minnetonka Rd., Roseneath), with a rain date of Sept. 25.

An opening ceremony is planned for 10 a.m., followed by sign-ins until 12:45 p.m. -- during which time a variety of

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family activities are planned. Pelletier listed a barbecue, kids' area, balloons, jumping castles, face painting, horse-and-carriage rides, prizes and raffles.

At 1 p.m., they form the living balloon. They got photos of the living balloon last year from a Skyjack and from another person who flew overhead in an airplane. The Skyjack will be back for the second annual photo.

Anyone who wishes to support the campaign but cannot attend is welcome to make a donation at any Scotiabank branch, transit number 95562 Account # 0427128. Taxdeductible receipts are available for donations over \$20.

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