

Strength in Unity

The 3rd annual Cliona Ring Foundation social evening will take place in Bulgaden Castle on Saturday 16th January and once again it promises to be a night to remember, filled with laughter and fun amongst friends and neighbours – all key elements to Cliona's life. The foundation is named after Cliona from Lough Gur and Bruff who lost her very bravely fought battle against illness in December 2006. After being diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour in 1998 her parents, Brendan and Terry discovered that in addition to the emotional drain on families in their situation, even families with good medical coverage find that lodging, food and other "hidden" non medical expenses can prove quite a hardship during an already traumatic time and it is to fund these "hidden costs" that the foundation was established in 2007.

The Cliona Ring Foundation provides financial assistance to families from Ireland who have children undergoing long-term medical treatment for serious illness. Funds raised are not used to pay for the child's actual medical care; instead they are used to defray the non-medical and miscellaneous expenses associated with hospital visits. The ultimate goal of the foundation is to assist families in remaining intact and functional during their crisis and to endeavour that all family members, friends and family affected by serious childhood illness are helped and supported at this very difficult time.

Cliona was a wonderfully warm person who faced her illness and it's treatment with courage and good humour and was an inspiration to all. Her family decided that her gifts of inspiring and helping others should continue and this motivated them to establish the foundation in 2007 with the help of friends and neighbours.

Tom Tierney, friend of the family says that "over the last two years approximately €180k has been raised for the foundation with nearly all of the events which have been organised bringing the whole community of Bruff and Lough Gur together in a fun way which is exactly what Cliona did while she was with us" The theme for this years event is "Strength in Unity" and Brendan, Cliona's dad explains that "during Cliona's illness and after her death the whole community rallied around and it was through this unity that we all, family, friends and neighbours found the strength to get us through."

2009 was no different with locals rallying around to raise funds for this very worthy cause and on Saturday 16th January a number of cheques will be presented to the foundation for various fund-raising events which took place throughout 2009. These include:

- The annual Cliona Ring cycle
- Ann O'Loughlin and Maurice Hehir who both ran the Dublin city marathon
- Breda Ryan and staff from Tipp Mid-West radio who took part in the Ladies mini marathon in Dublin
- Rosaleen & Martin Hartnett who took part in the Budapest marathon
- Friends and neighbours who participated in the ladies mini marathon, Limerick

Cliona's mother Terry explained: "there is so much good will in the community to help out whenever a fundraising event is suggested." Breda Tierney continued "Everyone gets involved – the Cliona Ring cycle was a huge undertaking but everyone helped out. From the cyclists who took part and sourced sponsorship, the bucket collectors who stood in the cold to collect throughout the city and county to those who provided refreshments in the Honey Fitz after the cycle, it was a wonderful community effort and we had great laughs during the day!"

Of course there will also be lots of laughs and fun in Bulgaden Castle on 16th January as this is essentially a family night with a special raffle just for the children present on the night. One of the very first fund raisers was the launch of a CD called "Just for Cliona" and Jean Tierney and Debbie Carroll who featured on the CD explained that "during the social evening on the 16th January, we will perform a number of the songs from the CD which were special to Cliona in so many ways." CDs will also be on sale during the night with all proceeds going directly to the foundation. Nightfall will provide the music and as usual a good night is guaranteed by this very popular local band. There will also be a raffle for the adults – with plenty of hampers to be won and finally there will be an appearance from a mystery celebrity guest but the foundation are being very secretive about his/her identity!!

All of these funds have been dispersed to families of children diagnosed with serious illness. This has allowed them to focus on giving their sick child the emotional support that he/she needs rather than worrying unnecessarily about rising costs of bringing their child to hospital.

Examples of how the Foundation has helped families include (without revealing their identity and respecting their confidentiality):

- * A donation was made to a family who had to make numerous trips from Munster to Dublin for rehabilitation for their sick child.
- A donation allowed a family to bring their sick child, from a hospital in Dublin, home to be fully treated and cared in his own home, thus reducing the amount of time he had to spend in hospital.
- One family were able to have a family holiday in Trabolgan.
- Another family decided to have professional photographs taken.
- One family used the funds for travel between Our Ladys Hospital for Sick Children Crumlin and home during treatment for their sick child.
- A new pink mobile phone was purchased for a young girl who has spent quite some time in and out of hospital to enable her to stay in contact with her family and friends.

On the night, information will also be given to the public on how their money has been spent helping families of children with life threatening illnesses. Tickets at €10 are available from Brendan on (087) 2518949 or from Bruff Post Office, Bruff Credit Union or Ryans Foodstore, Holycross but will also be available on the door at Bulgaden on Saturday night 16th January from 9pm.

For more information or to make a donation visit www.clionaringfoundation.com