

Media Release

Holly Running for Nika's Reason

27 March 2015

Holly Thomas, of Atwell, will be completing a half marathon in this year's HBF Run for a Reason for her daughter Nika, who was born almost three months premature.

Born at 29 weeks in April 2008, and weighing just 1395 grams, Nika is one of nearly 3000 babies born prematurely in Western Australia each year.

Nika's mum Holly is thankful that Perth's Women and Infants Research Foundation (WIRF) are researching how to prevent the early delivery of babies. Holly will be raising funds from her half marathon for the Foundation.

Holly was just 24 weeks pregnant with Nika when her waters broke (also known as PROM – premature rupture of the membranes). She was taken to King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH) and placed on bed rest to try and prolong the pregnancy. "Being away from my 19 month old son while I was in hospital was incredibly hard", said Holly.

By 29 weeks Holly had become sick with chorioamnionitis and delivered Nika via Caesarean section. "Nika spent eight weeks in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, before being well enough to come home in June", said Holly. "It was a traumatic time, leaving my very tiny baby at the hospital while also caring for my son at home". Holly's ordeal continued with additional gynaecological surgery and another hospital admission from a subsequent infection, later that year.

Thankfully, Holly and Nika are both now healthy and well. "Nika is a normal seven-year old attending grade two, and shows no signs of her premature arrival", said Holly.

The Research Foundation, which is based at KEMH and is the charity for the State's only maternity hospital, is working to discover what causes premature birth and how it can be prevented.

Much of WIRF's research focuses on discovering new ways of fighting infection and inflammation in utero, which is known to be a major cause of birth prior to 32 weeks gestation. WIRF's Professor Jeffrey Keelan said, "We are testing new antibiotic drugs which are showing to be more effective in treating intrauterine infection than current medications. We are also developing a test to identify women who may be at high risk of developing intrauterine infection during pregnancy".

The Foundation has recently launched the WA Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative (PTBPI), a statewide program combining research with clinical care, aimed at raising awareness and safely lowering the rate of premature birth in WA. The Foundation is seeking community support to run the PTBPI and will benefit from funds raised at the HBF Run for a Reason. More information on the PTBPI can be found at www.thewholeninemonths.com.au

Holly is urging the public to give to WIRF's preterm birth research. "Please give any funds that you can spare to this great cause", said Holly. "I'm eternally grateful to Professor Jan Dickinson, Dr Steve Harding and the staff at KEMH who looked after my daughter and I so well". You can support Holly for doing her run by visiting her fundraising page at <https://hbfrun2015.everydayhero.com/au/holly-1>

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