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Media Release

Festival of Lilly celebrates a true preemie powerhouse

Friday, 16 November 2018

Jo and Troy Mellow believe in miracles. When their daughter Lilly was born in October 2008 at 15 weeks premature and weighing just 520g, they had to.

Last week Lilly celebrated her 10th birthday, and while the weekend was full of family and fun, it also provided Jo and Troy an opportunity to remember Lilly's very difficult beginning to life and the people and places which have left an indelible mark on their lives.

Saturday, 17 November marks World Prematurity Day and is a chance to raise awareness of this complication of pregnancy which currently sees more than 3000 WA babies born too soon each year.

"At my 20 week scan we found out there was something very wrong. I had an amnio and tests were done which would confirm that mine would be a very high risk pregnancy," Jo said.

"I was told by my obstetrician that I had to get to a least 24 weeks then there would be options. We were comforted somewhat to learn that King Eddies was one of the best places to be born prem."

At birth Lilly would weigh just 520g, and at her smallest, was a mere 396g.

"The early days were very challenging. Constant oxygen saturations and blood loss from so many blood tests," she said.

"I remember being reassured that weight loss was normal - that even term babies lose weight. I pointed out that her loss wasn't 10% but 25%! I remember the face I got on that."

In total, Lilly would spend 18 weeks and 2 days in the King Edward Memorial Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and it was here that the couple were lucky enough to meet some exceptional people.

"Many of the little things stay very clear in my mind. Things such as having a photo of her already in my room when I returned from delivery," Jo explains.

"We still have that photo. I'm still emotional thinking of how thoughtful it was that the photo was there, when she was far below in the nursery covered in bubble wrap and tubes.

"The work of the doctors, nurses and midwives, to help us, talk to us, prepare us, coach us, the care they gave Lilly in the hospital and in the years that followed, is still absolutely unbelievable."

Jo also recalls the amazing contributions of volunteers and the kindness, empathy and care which are the hallmarks of the Women & Infants Research Foundation's Volunteer Program.

"I still have the vivid memory of volunteers making beanies and humidicrib covers. Lilly has one in her room, the High Dependency Unit name tag painted by a nurse is still on her bedroom door, four houses later," she said.

Today, Lilly is a happy 10 year old who loves her dancing, swimming, hockey, and her little sister, Eva.

Now living in Geraldton, Jo and Troy still count their lucky stars, and they know just how lucky they really were.



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“In reality, Lilly’s life is a celebration. We jokingly called her 10th birthday weekend the “Festival of Lilly”.

“She still has some challenges and is currently being given growth hormone to get her to where she needs to be but she has been an absolute superstar.

“When you’re at the NICU every day the future seems very far away.”

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Background:

The Women and Infants Research Foundation

The Women & Infants Research Foundation is one of Australia’s leading independent research institutes dedicated to improving the health of women and infants.

We focus our research and programs across three principal areas: the prevention of preterm birth, gynaecological cancers, and women’s mental health. This research and programs have directly contributed to a number of improved clinical practices and health outcomes.

Through the WA Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative, WIRF has reduced the rate of preterm birth in WA by 7.6%. That same year, preterm births rose in every other Australian State and Territory.

Our pioneering work into the prevention of preterm birth is improving outcomes, saving the lives and untold heartache for WA families.