

Tearfund Supporters Send Up Balloons Of Hope

25 Pembrokeshire supporters of UK Christian relief and development agency Tearfund, sent out a message of hope to TB sufferers on Saturday 15th July in an event organised by Pembrokeshire Baptist Association's Youth Committee. 3 Christian families from Deer Park Church in Tenby, 7 Christians from Broadhaven Baptist Church, 3 supporters from Neyland and 2 teenagers from Kilgetty joined forces in raising over £300 for Tearfund's KILLER TB campaign, by walking up to 7 ½ miles around Llys-Y-Fran Dam, in the scorching heat last Saturday. The walk was followed by a BBQ, presentation and the grand finale was a release of 30 + helium filled, red 'Balloons Of Hope'.

Many of the walkers felt the heat of the day and were out of breath, helping them to empathise with six year old Mejahr. When Mejahr walks, she becomes weak and breathless and has to sit down. Its like she's in high altitude. In fact her town, in the Sindh province of Pakistan, is not at all high. It's near the sea. Mejahr has a deadly disease that kills up to 2 million people every year, it is the world's biggest killer: Tuberculosis. TB is curable, but a patient needs to complete the full 8 month course of treatment or the disease can mutate into a deadly and incurable strain of TB, resulting in death. TB sufferers can easily loose hope.

'Hope is a powerful thing' says Sharron Hardwick, Tearfund's Voluntary Media Officer for Pembrokeshire. 'It enables 6 year old TB sufferer Mejahr and her Grandfather to walk a 10 mile round trip, to get her free treatment from Tearfund's Partner the Diocese of Hyderabad, in Pakistan. They are too poor to afford the bus fare and must repeat the hike over the next 8 months' continues Sharron.

Dr. Bill Mckelvie, head of Tearfund partner the Diocese of Hyderabad TB control programme, says of TB patients, 'Hope is really important because if you have no hope you aren't willing to put yourself into the treatment and won't make the effort. You get people who lose hope and say "What's the use?" If we can instil in them a sense of hope that if they just manage to complete the course, then this disease is curable.'

After their 7 ½ mile sponsored walk, the Tearfund supporters travelled to Bethlehem Baptist Church, near Spittal, where they refreshed themselves with cool drinks and a BBQ, cooked by Dene from Deer Park in Tenby.

A presentation led by Tearfund's Sharron Hardwick, consisting of a TB fact quiz and slide show, which presented to all, information of where their hard earned fund raising efforts would be going.

'We saw in the TB presentation, that TB sufferers are in great need of hope. As Christians we have amazing hope in the love of Jesus. He calls us to put our hope and love into action. This is what the group did today, they turned Christian love into a message of hope. God says he has 'great plans for us all, for hope and a good future.' I thank the walkers and their sponsors, for their action against the despair of the TB sufferers.' says Sharron Hardwick

To conclude the event, each person had a balloon filled with helium gas, with a hope card attached. The card includes a message of hope to the finder, Tearfund's address and a contact mobile telephone number.

'These balloons were released as a sign of hope for TB sufferers and if anyone reading this article finds a TB hope balloon, please call the number on the hope card to let us know how far it has travelled.' Says Sharron Hardwick

The total of funds raised will be calculated as soon as possible, if you would like to make a donation please call Sharron on 07791646076. The final amount raised and the balloon that has travelled the furthest will be featured in the near future.

Tearfund would like to thank Wendy from Bethlehem for all of her help with this event, and all of the walkers and sponsors.

This event proves that: together we can make a difference.



