



my time

Stonnington Leader

Cover story: Early treasures



Treasury of experiences

Giving birth prematurely inspired Shusannah Morris to help other mums of prem babies

WATCHING her baby fight for life for four months in neonatal intensive care left Shusannah Morris weak, worn and wanting to support other parents going through the same ordeal.

Mrs Morris, of Malvern East, gave birth to her daughter Molly-Rose after only 26 weeks.

Molly-Rose had chronic lung disease, sight problems and weighed 880g.

Mrs Morris and husband David haunted the corridors of Carlton's Royal Women's Hospital for eight weeks before little Molly-Rose was transferred to the Friends of Perry House, where she spent a further two months.

"It was a difficult and emotional time for us both," Mrs Morris said.

"But the hospital staff were excellent and made things as easy as possible."

It was at the hospital, during anxious hours, that Mrs Morris met three other mothers with whom she would establish Life's Little Treasures two years later.

"Life's Little Treasures is a support network for parents of ex-prem babies," Mrs Morris said.

"It's a group parents can turn to for information and advice, or simply to get in touch with others who have had the same experience."

The Morris'es' story would have been significantly different had Life's Little Treasures existed when Molly-Rose was born.

"It was not a Johnson and Johnson champagne and chocolate celebration at all," Mrs Morris said. "Molly was born in February 2008, we only got to take her home in June. As she was our first baby, it was incredibly scary."

Mrs Morris said it was the time immediately after Molly's extended hospital stay that proved most trying.

"The hospital staff become like family and you get used to the beeps and machines," she said.

"Then you finally get to take her home and that support structure is gone and you have no one to talk to.

"It's like stepping out of one world and into an entirely different one, and it's terribly lonely."

Mrs Morris said the emotional rollercoaster left her alienated from other mothers whose babies had reached full term.

"When you're in and out of hospital it becomes difficult to relate to mothers who have not shared your experience.

"While they are discussing what their kids are wearing, ex-prem parents are organising their next hospital appointment."

One of Life's Little Treasures' most successful jobs has been running social events and playgroups exclusively for ex-prems and their parents.

"Kids get to play together while mothers have time to meet and share their stories and anxieties," Mrs Morris said.

The not-for-profit organisation is run by six core members - all mothers of ex-prem babies.

Mrs Morris said it had been well supported since it began in November last year.

She said interest across Victoria had grown and she hoped Life's Little Treasures would become the first place parents turned to when they had a premature baby.

WORDS

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Ex-prem mums Shusanna Morris with Molly-Rose, left, and Parool Shah-Harrington with son Luke, 4.

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"The idea is for mothers who have premature babies to be directed to Life's Little Treasures and come to us for assistance," Mrs Morris said.

"Most maternal nurses now have our flyers and know of our 24-hour support line.

"What Life's Little Treasures is doing is so important

"I remember finding it desperately difficult to find useful information when I had Molly-Rose.

"No one should have to go through what we did."

Today, Molly-Rose is like any other sparkling, cheeky two-year-old.

She will undergo an operation later in the year to correct her retinopathy of prematurity (crossed eyes).

"She was an IVF baby and premature, which means she has been pushing the envelope from the very start," Mrs Morris said with a chuckle.

"Molly-Rose is a wonderful miracle child."

“It’s like stepping out of one world and into an entirely different one, and it’s terribly lonely

— Shusannah Morris

Life's Little Treasures meets fortnightly in Stonnington and Sunbury.

The next major event takes place in Armadale on Friday, October 21, at 10.30am.

» For more details phone 0437 254 360 or email lifeslittle-treasures@yahoo.com.au

