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By Cllr Christine Mills

Doncaster Council's Cabinet Member for the Environment and Waste

The Gift of Christmas and Community

It's that time of year again when I'm always amazed at how generous and giving people are. Not only did people across Doncaster raise thousands of pounds for the Movember movement, but we've also seen an outpouring of generosity and kindness following the recent tragic events in the Philippines.

It's truly moving to see how people can give so much when they themselves might not have a lot. And that's exactly what makes Doncaster who we are. It's what our communities are built on.

It sounds cliché- but there is nothing greater than watching someone you love open the Christmas gift you've bought them knowing it's an instant hit. That feeling is so special.

So it's at this time of year I look around and see all the people in our great town who are giving a part of themselves every day. The ladies in the St James Tenants and Residents Group who spend the year knitting bobble hats to send to babies overseas. The staff at our local stores who give bread they won't sell to the hostels and shelters. Community groups working tirelessly to put on events and activities for young people.

It's these selfless acts which make up the fabric of our society.

So why not give a unique gift this Christmas for the people of Doncaster?

You can become a snow warden, ready to help your local community when the flakes start to fall. You can visit an elderly person in your local area by coming an Independent Age volunteer. Or you can give a few pennies to the Salvation Army, or The Samaritans or countless other hard working charities when you see them in town.

Whatever it is, you know that the feeling you get when you've given that gift will be priceless.

Enjoy the countdown to Christmas.

For more details please contact:

Independent Age volunteering

<http://www.independentage.org/volunteer/become-a-volunteer/>

Snow Warden volunteering 01302 736000

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PIONEERING SURGERY TO USE THE VEIN OF A COW HELPS YOUNGSTER

When medics said their daughter was unlikely to live long

SISTERS DEFEY DEATH WITH BRAVE HEARTS

FEATURE

By GAEIL STIGANT

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Met Hannah Roberts - the teenage girl whose heart was mended by the vein of a cow

When she was an unborn baby, doctors had advised her parents to consider a termination after scans revealed she was at the worst end of the scale for a life-threatening heart condition. But mum Frederika and dad Simon refused - instead opting for Hannah to take part in a clinical trial to have a cow's artery and valve put into her chest in the place of her missing pulmonary artery.

Fast-forward to the present day and the 14-year-old lives her life to the full - netting goals in school hockey matches, treading the boards with her drama club and doing what all teenage girls do best...arguing with her older sister.

Hannah and her older sister Charlie, 16, seem just like your average teenage sisters. But the matching scars they have running down their chests reveal there is more to their story.

Both girls, who attend Hill House School and live with their parents in Windsor Court, Dunsville, were born with serious heart conditions. And both have come close to death, only to bounce back with tremendous bravery and strength. "We are immensely proud of Charlie and Hannah - of how far they've both come and the maturity, much beyond their years, with which they have overcome all the obstacles life has thrown in their paths," says Frederika, 41.

Problems first emerged when Fred had

'HEY SAID THERE WAS NOBODY OVER THE AGE OF 20 THAT HAD SURVIVED HER CONDITION IN THE WORLD'

a scan while pregnant with Charlie.

Medics were unable to see parts of Charlie's heart properly and when she was born, she was blue.

"Something wasn't right," Fred explains.

"She was diagnosed with multiple heart conditions which explained why they couldn't see parts of her heart. Her valves and chambers were wrong - wrong shape, wrong size, wrong place.

"When we brought her home

she was always a shade of purple - she had turquoise nails and purple lips."

At age five, Charlie had successful surgery to change the 'plumbing' of her heart. Meanwhile, Fred had become pregnant again with Hannah and doctors had bad news - she too had a heart condition.

"They told us she had pulmonary atresia - she didn't have a pulmonary artery," says Fred.

"At the time - this was nearly 15 years ago - they said there was nobody over the age of 20 that had survived in the world with her condition.

"From what they could tell she was at the worst end of the scale and we were told to consider a termination." But Fred, a business owner and speaker, and Simon, 42, a chemical engineer, didn't give up and instead made contact with a highly-respected surgeon at Birmingham Children's Hospital. She was born and then at ten and a half months old was strong enough to undergo surgery to have a bovine artery and valve fitted in her chest.

"She just went up and



SURVIVE SERIOUS CONDITION

parents took the brave decision to opt for a clinical trial



Fred, Simon, Hannah and Charlie Roberts

up," Fred recalls. "She started getting chubby cheeks and thriving. Before long she was up and walking and doing everything. "They thought that with the amount of growth from being a baby, to starting school, to being a teenager she would need it changing but so far so good.

"I don't know how many were in the clinical trial but she was in the first batch of kids to have that. The clinical trial has clearly been a huge success and hopefully a lot more kids have it now." But the Roberts family drama didn't end there. On a Saturday morning in February 2010, Charlie was in bed and didn't wake up. She had suffered a cardiac arrest and was rushed to Doncaster Royal Infirmary. "They did ask us the question of whether we wanted them to let her die," says Fred.

"I think they were under the impression that she had had a bad life and had always suffered. But she hasn't - she's had a really good life." Once again, Charlie bounced back. She was unable to have a standard pace maker due to the abnormal

'plumbing' of her heart but became one of the youngest people ever to have a special device fitted under her skin that does a similar job. Things have settled down for now and both girls have thrown themselves into their hobbies and studies. Charlie aspires to study his-

tory at Cambridge University before becoming an author. Meanwhile, Hannah wants to focus on sciences and maths with a view to becoming a doctor specialising in paediatric cardio-thoracic surgery - the same kind of surgery which saved her

life.

Both Charlie and Hannah say they are conscious of the scars on their chests but they're there because they tell a story.

Charlie says: "I don't mind my scars but I don't like people asking about it.

"It's quite funny really because the scars get me out of cross country

- after I've done one lap the PE teachers say, 'That's it now, don't do any more, we don't want anything to happen to you.'"

Fred says: "We have gone through all of this but on a day to day basis we still get frustrated at the typical teenage stuff like the girls leaving their bags in the lounge, not bringing their uniforms down to be washed and shouting at each other.

"To me we are just living a normal life and we are a normal family."

● Frederika shares her essential ingredients for a fulfilled and happy life in her new book, *Recipe for Happiness*, which is out now and available at www.recipe-for-happiness.co.uk.

She is hosting a Meet the author event at Barclays Bank from 11am to 2pm on Friday, December 13.



09/1/10



Charlie Roberts cuddles her new baby sister, Hannah



Charlie and Hannah (pictured above) in intensive care at Birmingham Children's Hospital after surgery

'THE CLINICAL TRIAL HAS CLEARLY BEEN A HUGE SUCCESS AND HOPEFULLY A LOT MORE KIDS HAVE IT'

Hospital inspectors happy with care

Inspectors who visited Doncaster Royal Infirmary say it provides a good standard of care, particularly for the elderly.

The unannounced inspection report by the Care Quality Commission highlighted praise from patients, and staff who feel engaged and well supported by managers.

A large team of inspectors from the CQC, which regulates organisations providing health and social care in England, visited DRI in late September and early October to look at the quality of care being provided. They were particularly interested in the care of older people who are admitted to hospital after breaking a hip.

Their conclusion was that DRI is providing a good standard of healthcare and

the inspectors had no concerns about the care and welfare of people using the hospital or the way the trust that runs it seeks patients' consent to treatment, cooperates with other providers, supports staff and assesses the quality of its services.

Patients praised the care being provided, with one saying 'the staff are superb'.

Inspectors noted that staff said there was now a very transparent culture where they could raise issues and felt well supported by managers in getting them resolved. A number commented that the senior team, including the chief executive, were interested, approachable and listened to what they said.

The CQC also inspected Montagu Hospital in Mexborough and reported similarly positive findings.

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