

40 YEARS OF HOPE



Message from the Branch coordinator

With CHOC celebrating its 40th anniversary this year we are excited for what lies ahead. 2018 was a successful year for CHOC Port Elizabeth and we believe, with your support, we will continue to give families hope in a time of crisis.

2018 saw Port Elizabeth appoint a programme coordinator, Portia Jodwana, tasked with running a support and skills programme for the mothers/guardians of the patients. The group meets weekly at the CHOC office, they are imparted a skill and served a light lunch. This programme was made possible by funding received from the Ezethu Development Trust.

Earlier this year we welcomed long-standing volunteer Mawethu Bell as the newly-appointed social worker. Mawethu will be based at the paediatric oncology unit at Provincial Hospital providing psychosocial support to children diagnosed with cancer and life-threatening blood disorders, and their families.

A special mention has to be made on one of the fundraising initiatives for the previous year - the hosting of two gift wrapping stands for the festive period. Pick 'n Pay Hyper (William Moffett) and Moffett on Main Lifestyle Centre made it possible for us to raise funds to support children battling cancer. Thank you to our dedicated volunteers who gave up days to wrap hundreds of presents and to every shopper that wrapped a special gift at our stand – we were able to raise over R21 000 from this campaign.

On Friday 7 December 50 children and a parent were whisked away on Santa's sleigh to John Dory's Summerstrand for the annual Christmas party. There was excited chatter in the air as the children called for Father Christmas to make his appearance. Each child received a teddy, blanket, Christmas themed beanie, wrapped gift, meal and cupcake. Thank you to John Dory's Summerstrand for hosting us, DA Women's Network and every individual donor for making Christmas extra special.

Without the generous donations and support from individuals and organisations, the work and impact we have on families will not be possible. Thank you to each and every one of our donors for "Keeping more than hope alive"!



*Lynne Gadd-Claxton,
Branch coordinator*

Upcoming plans

- Support the CHOC stand at St. Dominic's Priory Fair on Saturday 25 May.
- We are planning a 40th celebration cheese and wine event for September - if you would like to get involved contact the office at pe@choc.org.za or (041) 464 0005
- Mother's Day is on 12 May. Every year we spoil our moms with a movie morning. Donations are needed for the goodie bags. These treats can include Cappuccino sachets, chocolate, hand lotion, lipstick, scarf, etc.
- If you would like to host an event in aid of CHOC contact us today.



Santa and his helper making a girl's Christmas wish come true. Thank you to Lezane Willemsse Photography for capturing the festive moments.

The Big “C” that changed our entire lives



Stephan and his mom Lydia before Stephan received a bone marrow transplant.

On 26 October 2017 Stephan constantly complained about stomach pains and, as any good mother would do, I took him to the doctor who diagnosed him as having a spastic colon. The pain was so strange that we thought it was his appendix. We were referred to Port Elizabeth for a second opinion where x-rays were done and a spastic colon diagnosis confirmed. We returned to Somerset East with relieved hearts and loads of meds but then Stephan's condition started to worsen – he was always tired and would not eat or drink anything. I did everything that the doctor told me to do but in 14 days my child lost 12kg.

On the 17th of November I phoned the doctor and scheduled an appointment for Monday, 20 November at a paediatrician in PE. However Stephan could not wait till that Monday to see the doctor.

Our nightmare began the Saturday before his scheduled appointment. Stephan lay on my lap telling me how much he loves me. “Please don't leave me mommy, hold me tighter mommy,” he kept saying. Stephan fell asleep peacefully.

At 4:20am I was awoken with a chilling scream from Stephan. He was standing on the couch in the lounge screaming, “I cannot see, mommy!

Help me!” I had gotten the fright of my life – his eyes were rolling. I carried Stephan to my bed because he was complaining he was still tired and wants to sleep. My initial thought was that my child was pulling faces – not something uncommon for a silly 6-year old boy. However this was not a time of being silly. We later discovered he was actually having fits.

There was a little voice in my head telling me there is something seriously wrong with my child. At 8am I rushed through to the Andries Vosloo Hospital. I carried my lifeless little Stephan to the outpatient department calling for help. Stephan was struggling to breathe. He was no longer holding me around the neck as he used to do; he was no longer reacting to my voice. The doctors were asking me questions about his symptoms and I explained to them what his treatment and symptoms were for the last 23 days. I was told to go home and pack a bag of essentials as we were going to be raced to PE in an ambulance and that there was nothing they could do for Stephan there.

Things got extremely confusing. I was in a fog. I felt lost, confused, empty and powerless! All the thoughts that run through a parent's mind at that stage: What did I do wrong? Why my child, God? Why did I not take my child to a doctor sooner? God, why? Why are you putting me through this God? What are You using me for, why my child, my only son for whom I prayed all my life and now You want to take him. How unfair is this life, Lord. Take me instead and not my precious child.

40 minutes after arriving at the hospital we were en-route to PE. Once in the ambulance Stephan opened his eyes and said, “Mama, promise me you won't leave me alone and that you will always be by my side.” I made that promise to my son, no matter if he was asleep or awake, I will always be there. He responded that he was tired and I put him at ease that he could sleep. Little did I know that he would not wake as he slipped into a coma.

I spoke to my child begging him to become responsive. “My angel, where are you? Please come back to mommy, open your eyes, and see mommy is here”. But there was no response, only the small body of my child lying on the stretcher.

At that point I started praying, negotiating with, and begging God. I remained powerless. “God my son needs you now”.

The road to PE felt like it was never-ending. When we arrived at Greenacres the trauma unit was ready for us with Dr Wickens in the doorway waiting for his little patient. There was medical personnel everywhere I looked. I struggled to calm myself – I just wanted to hold my boy. The paramedics who brought us through were finished handing over and came to me, gave me a tight

hug, promising to keep Stephan in their prayers. They were amazing.

“Mrs. Fourie we think your child has cancer” No, no, no I screamed. The doctors were thinking it could be brain, lymph or stomach cancer and needed to do more tests and a biopsy as soon as Stephan stabilised. I was shattered, in shock!

The biopsy was done the Wednesday and we received confirmation of any parent’s worst nightmare – our child was diagnosed with neuroblastoma. Stephan underwent 24 sessions of chemo in PE, 3 more in Cape Town, a bone marrow transplant on 7 June 2018, and 3 weeks of radiation treatment in PE.

I lost myself, I lost my work – I lost my individuality. How could I be a dedicated mom, a loving wife, a friend when my entire life was revolving around my son? I took a knock, my faith waivered. But I realised that God is there even in our darkest and lowest moments. Everything fell into place even if there were moments of darkness. God asked me to stand up and believe.

Stephan and I embarked on this cancer journey with so much uncertainty, venturing into the unknown, especially the first time we had to go to Cape Town. We received such a warm welcome from the minute we were received at CHOC in Cape Town and PE. We were welcomed with open arms and we immediately felt comfortable.

CHOC is a house of care and love when a mom’s heart is feeling empty, alone and lost. Many of the mummies coming to CHOC are from afar carrying an overweight suitcase of emotions. The support, love, respect, loyalty and confidentiality we experienced were amazing.

As parents, we supported each other. At CHOC you learn what family is – it is love and an unbreakable bond.

Lynne and her team are unbelievably precious and caring people. They will always go a little further and ensure that we are well taken care of. We have laughed, relaxed, been spoilt by the team – there is no time to feel negative when you are at CHOC PE.

We cannot thank CHOC PE enough because words cannot equate to everything that they do for the families. They work extremely hard to ensure that our lives are a little easier. Thank you CHOC, without you, we as parents and our children would not be able to make it. CHOC PE you are the best!

To see more about Stephan and his family follow his Facebook page Stephan Fourie 6 Jaar Oud.



Stephan is currently in remission and is doing very well. He is being home-schooled by his mom and life is returning to normal for the Fourie family.

Story as told by Lydia Fourie, translated by Lynne Gadd-Claxton

CHOC relies on donations from corporates and individuals. We welcome any form of support.

Debit order: Become a monthly donor by downloading the CHOC Debit order agreement form from www.choc.org.za.

EFT: Make an electronic transfer into our bank account.

Bequests: Leave a legacy to CHOC Childhood Cancer Foundation.

Corporate Partnership: Get involved, monetary or in-kind donations, or volunteering. We tailor our partnership to meet the goals of each corporate donor.

For further information, please contact Lynne at coordinatorpe@choc.org.za or at 041 464 0005

Bank Details: CHOC PE
Standard Bank
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Branch: 007205