



LIVING NORTH changing LIVES

Living North continues its series highlighting the invaluable work of smaller charities and individuals in the North East

For most children, hopes and dreams are about summer holidays, the latest gadgets, or watching their favourite football team play in the cup final. But for one local eight year-old, his wish is simply to walk. Since being diagnosed with cerebral palsy aged 18 months, Callum Brown has been unable to walk, run and play like the rest of his friends. Because of an injury to his brain, Callum is not able to use some of his muscles in the normal way; his legs are stiff and painful and he is unable to walk on his own.

Cerebral palsy is neither progressive nor communicable. It is also not curable in the accepted sense, although education, therapy and applied technology can help people with cerebral palsy lead productive lives. For Callum, hope lies in a pioneering procedure called Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy which stops the wrong signals being sent to muscles, meaning they are no longer painful. Performed in St Louis, USA, the operation and necessary post op therapy will cost an incredible £70,000 – a daunting figure for his parents, Sharon and Neil.

Luckily, an inspiring group of locals were keen to help. After hearing of Callum's condition, North East mum and Team GB triathlete Joanna Reed set about boosting the target of Callum's Wish To Walk, a fund set up by Sharon and Neil which is supported by umbrella charity Angels of the North. No stranger to fundraising, Joanna completed an Ironman challenge last year to raise money for Tiny Lives, a charity close to her heart as her twins were born prematurely at 29 weeks. On top of completing the challenge, writing a blog, being a mum of three and training, Joanna then went on to qualify in her age group in a sprint triathlon for Great Britain. With all this under her belt, a fundraising event for Callum's Wish To Walk needed to be something special. 'Out on a solo bike ride I was thinking about how lucky I am to do the things I do. I am also really lucky that my twins are fit healthy nine year-olds, their story could have been so different, and at that point "Reason To" came into my head,' Joanna explains. Reason To is about people

coming together to make a difference and in this case it was about a group of people using their legs so a young boy can make use of his.

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The plan was a staggering 200 mile bike ride which would take a group of 14 cyclists from Edinburgh to Newcastle in less than a day. 'When I came up with the concept I had no idea what I was about to embark on; for me it was about doing a long bike ride, raising some money and altering a child's future. It turned out there was an awful lot more to it!' With a team of four women, ten men, and three support vehicles, the group set off at 4am on 8th July from the cold and dark Scottish capital. It wasn't long before the rain started; road rash blighted two of the cyclists and there were even a couple of falls. Determined, despite the bad weather and physical strain, the group carried on and spirits remained high. Some 17 hours later they reached their destination; David Lloyd gym in Newcastle, elated and exhausted. 'I was so proud of them all, the group really pulled together and to be honest the hours we were out on the road flew past. I got so much more out of the ride than I thought I would; I witnessed some of the riders realising that with the right mental attitude, anything is possible. Some of the riders now want to do an Ironman or run a marathon, it feels great to have inspired some people and to have made a difference to a child's future.'

For Callum's mum Sharon, the event has made a huge contribution towards reaching their total of £70,000. 'When Joanna approached me last year about Reason To I could not believe that a person would be so willing to put herself to all this trouble for somebody she didn't know. Over the months we have become good friends and I will never be able to thank her enough for all she has done. She is a wonderful person with a heart of gold and I will always be grateful to her.'

GET INVOLVED

At the time of writing, Callum's fund is close to £50,000. To find out more about Callum's Wish To Walk, or to donate, visit www.callumswishtowalk.co.uk. For more information on Reason To events, call Joanna Reed on 07703 4998686