Ronni Ancona backs brain tumour campaign

Actress pledges help after death of 11-year-old family friend

ACTRESS Ronni Ancona is backing a drive to raise brain tumour awareness after a young family friend lost his life to the disease.

Ronni - best-known to TV audiences for her celebrity impressions and her role in BBC drama *Last Tango in Halifax* - is urging people to don a specially-designed bandana and Wear it out! on 6 March, Bandanas for Brain Tumours Day.

The event is organised annually by The Brain Tumour Charity as part of Brain Tumour Awareness Month.

Ronni witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by brain tumours after the nephew of a close friend was diagnosed with a highly aggressive form of the disease.

Eleven-year-old Silas Pullen died in December 2013 at his family home in Kent, 17 months after he was diagnosed with an incurable high-grade glioma.

Ronni, who has two young daughters, met Silas in the summer before his death when her family and the Pullens spent the day together.

Silas's parents, Ben and Sarah, knew at that stage he had only a few months left but wanted to make life as normal as possible for their cricket-mad son.

Ronni – former star of TV show The Big Impression - said: *"Silas was an incredibly brave, strong and kind boy. It was almost impossible to believe when I watched him playing with my girls that day that he was fighting a brain tumour, and that there was nothing anyone could do.*

"When Ben and Sarah asked if I would help The Brain Tumour Charity raise awareness of the disease – and the need for more research to save children like Silas in the future – I didn't have to think about it.

"Wearing a bandana on 6 March is a simple way for anyone to show their support for such an important cause."

Ronni has made a video encouraging people to Wear it out! on Bandana Day, which can be seen at www.thebraintumourcharity.org/bandanas-for-brain-tumours

Ben Pullen said his family's day with Ronni and her daughters was a precious one.

"It was just a great family day, mucking around in the garden at my sister's house.

"Ronni's younger daughter took a shine to Silas," he said. *"Silas was always very good with younger children and he spent a lot of time with her.*

"When we asked Ronni if she would help by supporting The Brain Tumour Charity's Bandanas for Brain Tumours Day, she didn't hesitate. She said she would do whatever she could."

Since Silas died, the Pullens – who have three other sons aged 15, 14 and ten – have vowed to do as much as possible to spare other families similar heartbreak.

The Silas Pullen Fund has already raised more than £175,000 for The Brain Tumour Charity, all of which will go towards research into more effective treatments for childhood brain tumours.

Sarah said: "*We don't want other parents to hear the same words as we did when Silas was first diagnosed: "There is nothing we can do - your son will die in 12-18 months.*

"We want them to be given some hope however small."

Sarah Lindsell, chief executive of The Brain Tumour Charity, said: "We are immensely grateful to Ronni Ancona for her support.

"Brain tumours kill more children and adults under 40 in the UK than any other cancer but receive relatively little public attention or research funding.

"To have Ronni backing Bandanas for Brain Tumours Day will make a real difference to the campaign and what we can achieve in terms of raising awareness of the disease."

Polly Newton, PR and Media Manager, The Brain Tumour Charity.

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About The Brain Tumour Charity
Registered Charity No. 1150054 (England and Wales) SC045081 (Scotland)

The Brain Tumour Charity is at the forefront of the fight to defeat brain tumours and is making a difference every day to the lives of people with a brain tumour and their families.

They fund pioneering research to increase survival and improve treatment options and raise awareness of the symptoms and effects of brain tumours to get earlier diagnosis and to help families cope with everything that the diagnosis of a brain tumour brings. They provide support for everyone affected so that they can live as full a life as possible, with the best quality of life.

They fund and promote the UK-wide HeadSmart campaign, raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of brain tumours in children and young people to make earlier diagnosis a reality. Earlier diagnosis will reduce long term disabilities and save lives. In just thee years, HeadSmart has reduced average diagnosis time from 9.1 weeks to 6.7 weeks.

Find out more at: **www.thebraintumourcharity.org**

Members of the Association of Medical Research Charities, The Information Standard, The Helplines Partnership and the Fundraising Standards Board.

Brain tumours – the facts

Brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of children and adults under 40.

Over 9,300 people are diagnosed each year with a primary brain tumour, including 500 children and young people – that's 25 people every day.

Almost 5,000 people lose their lives to a brain tumour each year.

Thousands more are diagnosed with secondary brain tumours, which are not recorded.

Brain tumours reduce life expectancy by on average 20 years – the highest of any cancer.

Just 14% of adults survive for five years after diagnosis.

Brain tumours are the largest cause of preventable or treatable blindness in children.

Childhood brain tumour survivors are 10 times more likely to suffer long term disability than well children.

This accounts for 20,000 additional disabled life years for all the children who are diagnosed each year.

Research offers the only real hope of dramatic improvements in the management and treatment of brain tumours.

Over £500m is spent on cancer research in the UK every year, yet less than 2% is spent on brain tumours.