



POPULAR BROADCASTER BOB WILSON LAUNCHES NATIONAL CHARITY IN MEMORY OF HIS DAUGHTER

Bob and Megs Wilson launch Willow Foundation in memory of their daughter Anna

October 4th 2005: Bob Wilson, former Arsenal and Scotland international goalkeeper and BBC and ITV sports broadcaster, today launched his charity as a national organisation to help the estimated *12,500 people in the UK, aged 16-40, who are diagnosed every year with a life threatening illness.

The Willow Foundation was founded in memory of Bob and Megs Wilson's daughter Anna, who lost her spirited fight with cancer at the age of 31. The Foundation aims to provide other seriously ill young adults in the UK with a Special Day: a carefree day of the recipient's choosing that is a complete break away from the everyday upset of illness and treatment that can dominate their lives.

"When Anna was ill, some of the most memorable moments we had together as a family were from treats and days out. These special days gave Anna the determination to fight on for what she most valued – quality of life, quality of time and to be treated as normal," commented Bob Wilson.

"After Anna died, we decided that if special days worked for her they would work for others. These days give everybody - the recipients, their families and friends, and even the medical professionals involved in their care - a break from the pervasiveness of illness. They give each recipient a day of normality where the illness does not feature at all - a complete break from the routine of illness, hospitals and treatments, a time when loved ones can relax together and enjoy each others company."

Until today, the Willow Foundation has operated predominantly in Hertfordshire and the South East but, thanks to a huge fundraising drive by the Wilsons, the charity is now able to accept applications from anywhere in the UK.

Special days to date have included spa weekends, pop concerts with back stage passes, football matches, sky-diving and trips to the Grand Prix. The most popular request, however, is for a family trip to London including a flight on the London Eye, a West End show and river cruise along the Thames.

“Whilst these days are very special and full of lots of treats, they are basically very normal things to do, and a world away from hospitals and illness. The benefit from each day lasts long beyond the day itself and it’s incredibly humbling to see how much difference each day can make,” commented Megs Wilson.

Celebrities sometimes take part in special days with recipients meeting pop stars and sports personalities. Friends from the world of show business and sport are patrons of the Willow Foundation and supported Bob and Megs with the launch day. They include Sam Kane, Natasha Kaplinsky, Richard Keys, Linda Lusardi, Gary Mabbutt MBE, Jim Rosenthal and David Seaman MBE.

“Our research has demonstrated that there is a real need for the work of Willow. A diagnosis can devastate a whole family, not just the recipient. Our team can help to give the family something to look forward to, a focus for working together, and we’re looking forward to helping thousands of families all over the UK in the coming years, “ ended Bob Wilson.

The Willow Foundation can be contacted on 01707 259777. More information can be found at www.willowfoundation.org.uk

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photo caption

The photograph shows Bob and Megs Wilson with special day recipient Eloise Clarke.

Eloise is 28 and has been diagnosed with breast cancer. She enjoyed a weekend of ‘R&R’ with her partner in the Cotswolds for her special day out. “During the worst of my treatment all I wanted to do was to escape to a luxury hotel to be alone, rest and pamper myself. It means a great deal to me that I was finally given the opportunity to do this – but with the added bonus of sharing my day with my partner – which I never dreamed would be possible this time last year. I feel extremely lucky, not a word normally associated with someone in my position, to have been treated to such a fabulous weekend.”

*** Statistics:** Serious illness is defined as any condition that is potentially life-threatening and includes amongst others: cancer, motor neurone disease, cystic fibrosis, organ failure and muscular dystrophy. The statistic used in this press release was taken from the Office for National Statistics for England, Scotland and Wales – registrations of cancer diagnosed in 2002.

The Foundation’s other patrons are Pat Jennings, Simon McCoy and Mary Nightingale.