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Inspired by a Child, Runners Raise Money for Programs Helping Premature Infants

A team of nurses in the Hood To Coast Relay raises funds for preemies

Portland, Ore. – Nurses are accustomed to being on their feet. But on August 22, a team of nurses and friends from the Doernbecher Neonatal Care Center at Oregon Health & Science University will be pounding 197 miles of pavement to raise money to help premature infants at Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

It's the first time DNCC nurses have run together in the Nike Hood To Coast Relay. Known by runners as "The Mother of All Relays," the event stretches from Timberline Lodge on Oregon's highest peak — Mt. Hood — to the coastal town of Seaside.

"It will be such a bonding experience to run with my colleagues," said Dana Welty, a nurse at the DNCC. "And I'm really excited about the money being raised."

The idea was inspired by Ashleigh Mackay, who was born at 27 ½ weeks, weighing just over one pound. After a thriving start, she lost part of her intestine to necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), a disease common in premature infants. Her health declined quickly. When Ashleigh passed away in February 2001 after 13 months of fighting, "It was clear that she had touched a tremendous amount of people," says her father, Richard Aldersea. "I knew we needed to do something. It was a call for us to focus on the preemie community."

That focus came in the form of the Ashleigh Mackay Memorial Fund, a donor-advised fund at the Doernbecher Children's Hospital Foundation established by Ashleigh's parents to support preterm infants and their parents, educate caregivers and invest in research into the preventable causes of premature birth. Since 2001, gifts from families and friends have grown the fund to \$100,000, supporting a milk bank, a parent support group, and the preemie graduate picnic, which involves more than 100 families. The fund also sponsored "Preemie for a Day" training for 90 Doernbecher staff members.

Aldersea coordinated other Hood To Coast teams for three years to raise money for Ashleigh's fund. This year, he's raising the stakes. Aldersea will underwrite the costs for the team, but each runner is encouraged to collect \$1,000 to participate. The goal is to bring in \$35,000 per year over the next five years to fund an educational program for neonatal nursing staff by Children's Medical Ventures. Completing the developmental care program, which focuses on improving the environment for



preterm infants and improving outcomes, would make Doernbecher one of a handful of “Wee Care®” certified care centers in the United States and the only one in the Pacific Northwest.

“Our babies are really deserving of this,” said Yvonne Gordon, clinical nurse manager at the DNCC. Gordon says the unit has already implemented some changes toward the developmental care initiative — such as limiting “touch times” by physicians and staff to twice a day — and seen encouraging results. “It helps their brains mature better, helps their muscles grow, helps with feeding and increases the bonding between the mother and child.” Studies have shown that developmental care reduces retinopathy of prematurity, reduces the time spent on a ventilator and allows a child to go home sooner. “To parents of preterm children,” Gordon said, “nothing’s better than going home.”

For more information about the Ashleigh Mackay Memorial Advised Fund, go to www.manuforti.org. To make a donation online, please visit www.doernbecherfoundation.org and include “Ashleigh Mackay Donor Advised Fund” in the comments field of the giving form.

About the Doernbecher Foundation

The Doernbecher Children's Hospital Foundation supports Doernbecher Children's Hospital at Oregon Health & Science University by raising funds from individuals, companies, foundations, trusts and organizations, and managing those funds in accordance with donors' wishes.