Meagan Bebenek Foundation and Myah?s Wings partner on fundraiser for paediatric brain tumour research

By Riley Murphy

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Meagan Bebenek Foundation and Myah's Wings, two local organizations fundraising for pediatric brain tumour research, are partnering with Christopher Belaoussoff from Mount Alverno Luxury Resorts to bring a night of fundraising fun in support of a great cause.

On May 23, from 7.30 p.m. ? 12 midnight, the Bet on Hope fundraiser, in honour of Myah's Wings, will run at Mount Alverno Luxury Resorts in support of the foundation.

This charity fundraiser will be an evening filled with entertainment and impact, featuring an open bar, food stations, and a faux casino, all while guests dance to a live DJ.

All proceeds raised during the event will help fund critical research and bring families one step closer to ?better treatments, better outcomes.?

The Meagan Bebenek Foundation runs many programs, events, and funding opportunities to better support, raise awareness, and provide critical funds for further research on pediatric brain tumours.

Myah's Wings holds yearly fundraisers in honour of Myah Windham, a young girl from Orangeville who battled with Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma (DIPG), an aggressive and inoperable brain tumour.

Myah passed away in 2015, but her legacy lives on through Myah's Wings and the community that continues to fight for better outcomes for children facing brain cancer.

Now, organizations are working together to fight for a future in which no child should have to endure what Myah did.

Kara Simpson, Director of Operations with the Meagan Bebenek Foundation, explains that through the Canadian government's cancer funding budget, only about seven percent of it is dedicated to pediatric cancer research.

?Then take an even smaller sliver of that for brain tumors,? says Simpson. ?That's why these fundraisers are so important, it's private philanthropy, private foundation, private money that's helping move the needle.?

?This has been our model for 25 years, we've seen some amazing results come to the table and come to fruition, but there's still so much more to go,? she adds. ?No child should be having to walk this path, let alone have a death sentence because of it.?

The foundation is celebrating its 25th year in 2026, and to mark the occasion, they have committed to funding 25 research projects this year alone, each valued at $25,000.

Myah's Wings hopes to raise $25,000 on its own to support one of these projects.

Myah's Wings and the foundation have a long history together, and it all began with a hug.

26 years ago, the founder of the Meagan Bebenek Foundation, Denise Bebenek, established the organization following the passing of her five-year-old daughter, Meagan, to a rare and inoperable brain tumour.

?She felt gratitude for the doctors, the researchers, and everybody who had helped them along the journey with Meagan,? explains Simpson. ?When Meagan passed, and they were leaving the hospital, she had this vision of hugging the hospital and just wrapping arms around everybody who had helped her, but everybody who was also going through something similar.?

And so, the human HUG around the hospital that had treated Meagan began, and it grew into a year-round movement.

Simpson explains that Myah herself was a patient at the hospital, and she and her family participated in the hugs and Meagan's Walk.

She adds that when Myah passed, her family wanted to continue that legacy and build the memory of Myah.

They have now been long supporters of the foundation, and attend the hug every year,since Maya has passed. They also do a lot of work locally in Orangeville to fundraise.

?They've been supporting us from inception, Myah's Wings is one of our MBF families, and one of our family teams who does this fundraising, and so it is full circle,? says Simpson. ?We're all about community, nobody can go through a journey like this alone so to see community come together, that's where something special happens.?

?It's a fun night, an amazing price point for what you're getting, but just all in support of this little girl's story,? she says.

Nichola Windrim says they always try to promote and include the community in what they're doing, not just for fundraising, but also for awareness.

She explains that many are unaware of the limited funding pediatric brain tumour research receives.

?It's so important and especially when we've had to live it and deal with the loss and the tragedy,? says Windrim. ?The reality of a doctor looking at you and saying there's no hope, we can't do anything, go home and enjoy your time, it's not okay. We know the researchers and doctors work hard, but it's not fair. It's not fair to the kids and it's not fair to the families.?

Windrim adds that since Myah was diagnosed in 2011, there is still no different treatment to this day.

Even when Myah was diagnosed, Windrim says there had been no change in treatment since the 1960s when Neil Armstrong's daughter, Karen Armstrong, was diagnosed with DIPG.

?Treatment has not changed,? says Windrim. ?Because of the foundation, there's some trials and there's some really positive things that are coming, but it's because of Denise and the foundation that a lot of these things are happening.?

During their annual fundraising events, Myah's Wings has raised $16,000 for the foundation, from her birthday to her angel day.

?She was a very special little girl, and she continues to be some crazy special light that people are connected to, and she helps us,? says Windrim.

Looking at the event, Windrim says she's unsure how much will be raised, but even if it raises awareness among a few more people, it's ?considered a success because the more people know, then the further the word goes.?

She says the night will be a celebration of hope.

Tickets are $100, and the event has a capacity of 150 people, so the foundation encourages you to get your tickets early.

To donate or purchase a ticket, visit meaganshug.crowdchange.ca/146838.