



Watts a girl!

Kirsty Watts is helping children gain a future through her foundation

Robbie Stammers

Daughter of South African television icon Derek Watts, Kirsty is not your average girl next door. After surviving a brain tumour at the tender age of 14, she knew she wanted to help others in the same predicament and started her own charitable foundation.

It happened very suddenly in October 2007. After simply feeling dizzy for a couple of days, her parents took her to see a doctor at Mediclinic Sandton.

“The doctor sent me to have a CT (or CAT – computerised axial tomography) scan, saying that it was just a precaution; but as I walked out of the X-ray room, I could feel the nurses treating me differently. I just knew that something wasn’t right,” Kirsty relates. “I was left alone in a ward while the doctor spoke to my mom and dad.”

Sadly, the results showed that she had a malignant brain tumour. “Nothing can prepare you for the shock of being told that you have a brain tumour!” Kirsty says. “Soon the doctor was holding up the scans and telling me how I needed a seven-hour operation. It felt like a dream. Well, more of a nightmare, to be honest!”

After the operation, six months of chemotherapy and a month of radiation therapy – a time she says she would not wish on her worst enemy – the brave teen and her family were relieved to find out she had miraculously beaten the odds.

With the relief, however, came the realisation that many children in South Africa are not as fortunate: many never receive the same high level of medical care, nor enjoy

the same support she received through her long months to recovery.

“The support of others can change your perspective on life and inspire you to have hope,” says Kirsty, now 17. “My whole life I have always wanted to help those who are less fortunate. That was my reason for starting the Kirsty Watts Foundation – to better the lives of other children.”

Losing her hair was one of the toughest things for a teenage girl to cope with, particularly since she had long, flowing locks originally; but through meeting many children in the same predicament, Kirsty realised that she was, in fact, one of the fortunate ones.

“I realised I was being treated by the most amazing doctors at the best hospitals and treatment centres in the country,” she admits. “I had a huge support base from my school, Brescia House, my friends, and especially my family – but many do not have such a privilege.”

Showing wisdom way beyond her years, Kirsty believed in “kids helping kids” and felt that since she was fortunate to receive incredible support and medical care, she would like to assist children less fortunate than herself.

“Many kids in our country don’t get the opportunity to receive the kind of treatment and support that I’ve had. Others live in poverty and squalor and don’t even have sufficient nutrition to feed their sick bodies,” she notes.

Through her father’s connections, Kirsty started making inroads among some generous and willing supporters of her cause.



One of the first to raise his hand was ex-Springbok John Allen from the South African Rugby Legends Association.

The Kirsty Watts Foundation starting doing so well that Kirsty's mother, Belinda, took on the cause with as much passion as her daughter and quit her job to work full-time at the organisation.

Through golf days, poker evenings and motivational speaking events as well as corporate and personal donations, the Kirsty Watts Foundation has raised and

continues to raise incredible funds for designated children's charities.

Whether ongoing projects or ad hoc donations, Kirsty, Belinda and their team attempt to locate small and unknown cases where they can make a real difference to children's lives.

And with the characteristic vigour of youth, Kirsty has ensured she and the foundation have made a difference in a great many children's lives. Such as the R100 000 donation in 2010 to the TLC

Home for Abandoned Babies, and now the renovation of the home to accommodate 26 children who cannot be adopted due to their physical disability or HIV status. Or supplying batches of the specially fitted wheelchairs known as "Madiba buggies" to children at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital Cerebral Palsy Clinic – 10 last year, with more to come this year.

The Kirsty Watts Foundation sponsors accommodation at Nicus Lodge for parents and siblings of children undergoing cancer treatment at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital; provides wheelchairs and prostheses for children; and helps fund the expensive bone marrow match searching that is required before kids can find a suitable donor.

And then, of course, there was the new playground equipment and toys for the Jungletots playgroup in Diepsloot, and the Easter and Christmas cheer brought to the child patients at the Village Safe Haven, and at the Charlotte Maxeke, Chris Hani Baragwanath and Steve Biko hospitals.

Many people have not made this much of a difference in a lifetime; and with the support of those such as the guests at the recent Charity Poker Challenge, Kirsty knows she will be able to do even more before she is even out of her teens.

Big-hearted South African corporates, individuals and celebrities – including Joel Stransky, Kurt Darren and Danny K – all sat down at the poker tables to help make life a little easier for sick children.

More than 150 players, including rugby legends Ray Mordt and Dick Muir, competed for bragging rights to the evening as well as numerous spot prizes. Graeme Joffe acted as Master of Ceremonies, and *SuperSport* was on hand to capture the action.

This year, the Charity Poker Challenge raised over R180 000 for the "kids helping kids" charity.

The brainchild of a 14-year-old cancer survivor, the foundation not only gives some of South Africa's sick and abandoned children the funds, and medical equipment and facilities they so critically need, but it also gives them hope.

And behind it all is one remarkable young lady – Kirsty Watts. Is it not amazing what one can do if one puts one's mind and soul into it?

For more information or for donations, visit www.kirstywattsfoundation.org.za.