

# Changing LIVES

Living North continues its series highlighting inspirational people and charities from across Yorkshire, meeting Bethany Hare from Horsforth, who has created a unique Charlie Chaplin style film, organised walks involving hundreds of people and raised almost £20,000 for Martin House Hospice – and she's only 12 years old

**M**ost 12 year-olds spend their weekends socialising with friends, their evenings on social media sites and their pocket money on new games and clothes. For Bethany Hare however, her priorities are slightly different, as the year seven Horsforth School pupil dedicates her spare time to fundraising, raising tens of thousands of pounds for Martin House Hospice and children with life-limiting and life-threatening illnesses outside the hospice environment.

Bethany's story began when her drama school put on a show to raise money for Martin House Children's Hospice, and pupils were asked to find a poem or reading that could be used to encourage people to donate. Taking the project one step further, Bethany borrowed a copy of the hospice's own book, *A Place To Be*, which is written by children staying at Martin House and their siblings. Touched by the entries and the comments commending the hospice, she decided to buy her own copy, and read it from cover to cover. But the book didn't just stir Bethany's emotions, it taught her a few things too, and she soon discovered that it costs the hospice over £11,000 per day to stay open.



Determined to do something to help, Bethany came up with an idea. With a passion for performing arts, she had always spent a lot of time dancing, singing and acting, and recently performed the song *Smile* as a surprise at her granddad's 70th birthday (having spent weeks perfecting the performance after he said she was a little out of tune when they were singing it together on Christmas Day)! Taking the performance one step further, Bethany decided to make a short film and began researching Charlie Chaplin, spending hours watching him online, learning his actions and his stories, paying particular attention to the white flower that appeared in many of his films. 'Making the film was great fun,' says Bethany. 'I used the wages I earned as an extra on *Emmerdale* to pay for the hire of Abbey House Museum for two hours and this is where most of the film was set. I asked my dad to knock on a farmer's door in Collingham to see if I could use his cornfield. We also filmed outside a pub in Calverley and outside the gates of Martin House Children's Hospice, but we had to film there very early one Sunday morning as they were expecting a family arriving later that day with very difficult circumstances.'

Bethany's hard work quickly paid off, as when the video went online it became a worldwide phenomena, attracting the support of Michael Jackson fans, the official Charlie Chaplin Foundation and the general public, raising £8,400. This smashed Bethany's original target of £5,500, the amount of money needed to run the hospice for half a day, so she increased it to £11,000. When the copyright permission for the use of the song *Smile* expired, American composer Ben Model of *Silent Clowns in New York* offered to write a unique piano score for the silent film. Bethany then set about organising her next fundraising challenge: *The Walk of Smiles*.

The event took place in Horsforth on 10th September last year when over 250 people joined the walk, and over 200 spectated and supported. Bethany adds, 'I was very nervous as I didn't know if anyone would turn up! I had been into a couple of local schools to talk about my walk before the summer holidays but there wasn't much time to hand out flyers. In the end it was a great success and an amazing experience. The sun shone all day, the entertainment was fantastic and we raised over £10,000 for Martin House.'

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It was the success of the event, the growing total of money raised – which at this point was £18,400 – and Bethany's newfound love for fundraising that inspired her to set up her own charity, *Bethany's Smile*. MP for Pudsey Stuart Andrew became Chair of the Trustees and actor Matthew Lewis (who plays Neville Longbottom in the *Harry Potter* series) a patron. The charity also received support from the Chaplin family, who gave permission to use an image of Charlie Chaplin on the charity logo and mascot, and Gary Barlow even gave permission to use the song *'Greatest Day'* on 500 DVDs of the *Walk of Smiles 2011*. 'The charity allows us to help other hospices and support the care of children with life-limiting illnesses outside the hospice environment,' adds Bethany. The first event after the new charity's inception was the *Walk of Smiles* in Harrogate, which raised over £3,000, and plans are now underway for the next one in Horsforth, on Saturday 8th September. Entertainment begins at 10.30am and the 10km walk will begin at 11.30am. As well as free refreshments for all the walkers at Kirkstall Abbey, on return to The Old Ball pub there will be an after party incorporating a barbecue, entertainment on an outdoor stage, a raffle, tombola, face painting and much more, plus everyone who takes part will receive a signed certificate from patron Matthew Lewis. Other plans in the pipeline include a charity ball at Headingley Stadium on 20th October, and a fashion show at the same venue on 1st November.

Always looking for a new challenge, Bethany has also set up a separate fundraising target of £300,000 to buy 'Smile Cottage'. Her vision is of a small house looking out to sea, where families can go and spend quality time and

build happy memories when they are faced with the unbearable news that their child has a very short life expectancy. 'I have a brother and two sisters and I can't imagine what it would be like if any of them were to become ill,' says Bethany. 'I feel so sorry for families who have children with life threatening illnesses and believe that everyone should do as much as they can to help them, as none of us would want to be in their situation.'

Bethany's determination and motivation is enviable, and it's not just the general public who recognise this. The charity has been chosen by the family of one of the nation's best loved personalities, Sir Jimmy Savile, to be supported by events held in his name, such as *Savile Walks* and documentaries, and any fees paid to the family for media interviews are donated to either Bethany's *Smile* or *Little Sisters Of The Poor*, a charity supported by the family for over 100 years. The charity will also receive 50 pence from each copy of the new official *Sir Jimmy Savile Biography* which is sold at RRP. It is thought the family chose Bethany's *Smile* due to the fact it was the last charity Savile, who hailed from Roundhay near Leeds, was in touch with before he passed away (he called Bethany on 30th August last year to apologise for not being able to make the *Walk of Smiles*), and that he was also 10 years old – like Bethany – when he started fundraising.

For many parents a sense of pride is a common emotion, but how do you feel when your 12 year-old daughter is helping hundreds of suffering children? 'It's difficult to explain in words really,' says Bethany's mum Yvonne. 'She amazes me with how she just gets on with things. She's always thinking of new ideas and although she often gets nervous at various events, she never complains. The whole family are very proud of her, especially her six year-old sister who she's very close to.'

Having spent just two years fundraising, Bethany's already smashed her original targets, won awards and been internationally recognised for her selflessness. Many people may wonder what makes her keep going? And the answer, it seems, is very similar to that of most 12 year-olds, when asked why they do something. 'I really enjoy it, and it's great fun! When I first began I had no idea how fun it would be, I just wanted to help, but I can honestly say that my fundraising journey so far has been amazing. I have met some very inspirational people and met other fundraisers who are all very special people.'

But despite having changed lives of children all over Yorkshire, Bethany remains modest and ironically she's still adamant that she's the 'lucky one.'

**GET INVOLVED**  
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