



# Northern Ireland Leukaemia Research Fund



Spring 2012

## Three Peaks Challenge

Have you ever thought of taking part in a charity challenge for NILRF?

**Ryan Warwick** decided he would like to raise some money for us by taking part in the **Three Peaks Challenge** on 26 June 2011. This challenge involved climbing the three highest mountains in Scotland, England and Wales within 24 hours. Ryan completed the challenge along with some friends by climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in an amazing 21 hours. Ryan created a fundraising page on JustGiving.com and raised £400 for the Fund!



**Pictured above:** members of the Challenge Team on Ben Nevis (Ryan pictured second from left, sitting)

If this story has inspired you to take part in your own challenge for the NILRF please contact us for further information. Alternatively take a look on the Charity Challenge website for some ideas: <http://www.charitychallenge.com>!

## Annual Sponsored Walk at Portrush

The 23rd Annual Sponsored Walk at Portrush took place last year on Tuesday 27 December. This popular fundraising event starts at the Harbour Bar, walking to Whiterocks and back again. The Walk attracts people of all ages and abilities and has proven to be a popular way of working off the Christmas excesses! The event has been organised in recent years by Jill Adams and Janet Leighton, who took over the planning from their parents Ella and Garth Giffin who organised the first Walk over twenty years ago.



Our thanks goes to Jill, Janet and everyone who took part in the event. This year's event has raised £4000 to date with donations still coming in!

**Website:** [www.leukaemia-ni.org](http://www.leukaemia-ni.org)

**Tel:** (028) 9097 2928

**Email:** [admin@leukaemia-ni.org](mailto:admin@leukaemia-ni.org)

## Christmas Fundraisers

Our supporters were busy over the Christmas season raising much needed funds with a variety of events and fundraisers! **Do you have a good fundraising idea?** Maybe you would like to organise a special event in your workplace or community to raise funds for NILRF? Please get in touch with us by telephone (028 9097 2928) or by email (admin@leukaemia-ni.org).

**Thompson Dawson MBE** set up a Christmas stand outside Tesco's at the Northcott Centre, Glengormley, for a week during December. The stand proved to be very popular with shoppers who donated a fantastic £3800! Our thanks goes to Thompson for his hard work with this fundraising project.



**Maghera Primary School** held their Christmas Carol Concert on Thursday 15 December, with the proceeds going to NILRF. Caroline Crothers and Susan Price went along on the night to collect a donation for £200! Our thanks goes to teacher Mrs Jameson who suggested supporting NILRF.



The **Glengormley branch of the Nationwide** organised a ballot for a hamper and other prizes in aid of the NILRF before Christmas. The Fund's Public Relations Officer Frances Parker went along to the branch on 15 December to collect a cheque for £370. This amount was raised with the help of Nationwide staff including Michelle Cunningham (pictured left) and Faith Porter (pictured far right). Our congratulations and thanks goes to everyone at the Nationwide who contributed to the success of the ballot.

**Pictured left:** members of staff from the Glengormley branch with Frances Parker (second from left)

The annual **Christmas Craft Fair at Whitehead** took place at Whitehead Presbyterian Church on Saturday 19 November. There was a great turnout with a range of stalls on the day selling various crafts, jewellery and food, as well as the ever-popular tombola! Well done to members of the **East Antrim Branch** who raised £1800 with this event. Our thanks also goes to Whitehead Presbyterian Church for allowing us to use their church halls.



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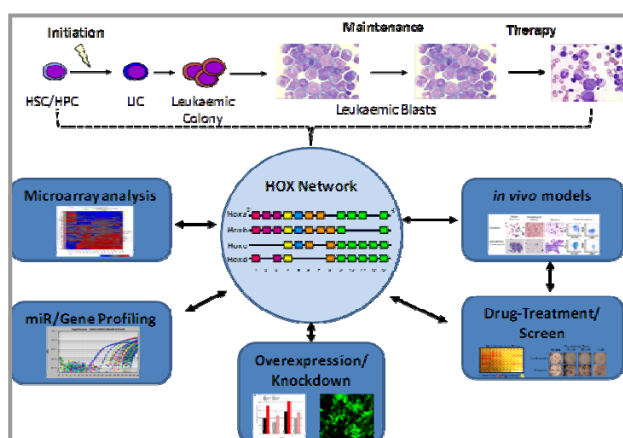


## Focus on Research

In this edition of the Newsletter **Dr Alex Thompson** (pictured right) from the **Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology (CCRCB)** at Queen's University Belfast outlines his research into **the HOX code in leukaemia initiation and maintenance**. Dr Thompson was funded by NILRF as a postdoctoral fellow to work in the laboratory of Prof. Terry Lappin in 1999. At that time, accurate measurement of gene expression was greatly improved by a new technology, the **Quantitative Real Time PCR (Q-PCR)**.



With the help of NILRF, Prof. Lappin's group were the first in Northern Ireland to have a Q-PCR machine and Dr Thompson wasted no time in using this technology to measure the expression of **leukaemia associated genes**. His focus was on a family of genes (**HOX**) involved in normal development but associated with leukaemia when deregulated. Dr Thompson demonstrated that low HOX expression was associated with more favourable subtypes of leukaemia and high expression with intermediate or unfavourable subtypes.



Since then continued research into leukaemic HOX genes, including visits to world-class facilities in Montreal, has led to Dr Thompson developing relevant pre-clinical models of **Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML)** in Belfast for testing of novel therapies. Work related to these models was presented at the American Society for Hematology Annual Meeting in Orlando 2010 and more recently in San Diego 2011.

HOX proteins are potent master regulators. HOX-induced leukaemias exhibit measurable changes in key pathways involved in proliferation, differentiation and self-renewal that make them different from normal blood stem cells.

The group is currently evaluating the need for continual HOX expression in paediatric and adult leukaemia maintenance and challenging HOX pathways with novel drugs and inhibitors to eradicate leukaemic stem cells. Dr Thompson says 'It is hoped that with support from NILRF we will be able to test the effectiveness of new drugs alone and in combination in relevant pre-clinical models prior to translation into Clinical Trials.'



**Pictured above:** Laura Kettle, Dr Thompson's PhD student




## Update from NILRF's Co-ordinator



'Hello everyone, I am pleased to be part of the first newsletter of 2012! I have been with NILRF for about 4 months now and thanks to Frances and Katie I have settled in well and feel part of the NILRF team. My two main aims are to **'raise more money'** and **'raise awareness of the charity'** and already some positive changes are happening. I have met with some of you so far and look forward to meeting more of you in the coming months. Look out for events in your area this year and I am here to support you with any ideas or activities.'

Please feel free to **contact me** on 028 9097 2928 or [caroline.crothers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.crothers@qub.ac.uk)

## Research News

-  PhD students Gemma Logan and Jodie Hay were supported by the NILRF to attend the ESH-EHA Scientific Workshop on "Acute Myeloid Leukaemia - Molecular" at Mandelieu La Napoule, NILRF, France in October 2011. They presented their research data on ASB proteins and HDAC inhibitors respectively.
-  Professor Ken Mills recently attended the American Society for Hematology in San Diego, where he was co-presenter on several presentations including one on the relevance of MSI1 as a marker of disease progression.
-  Professor Mary Frances McMullin is hosting a meeting of the EU COST Action on Myeloproliferative Neoplasms in Belfast in March. This meeting will be attended by scientific and clinical experts in this disease from across Europe.

## NILRF Supporting Student Scientists

The NILRF have confirmed funding in 2012 for four summer studentships. The eight week studentships based at the CCRCB, Queen's University Belfast, are aimed at students who are interested in a career in leukaemia research.

In the past, students from all over the Province and beyond have benefitted from this opportunity, and the summer studentships have proven to be a springboard for young people interested in pursuing a career in leukaemia research. 2010 summer studentship recipient Jodie Hay has gone on to undertake a PhD with the Haematology Research Group and is now in her second year. Laura Kettle, who was awarded a summer studentship last year, has also recently started her PhD under the supervision of Dr Alex Thompson. **If you would like more information about our support for student scientists please contact us (028) 9097 2928 / [admin@leukaemia-ni.org](mailto:admin@leukaemia-ni.org)**



**Pictured above:** Laura Kettle (first left) and Jodie Hay (second left) have gone on to undertake PhDs following a successful NILRF summer studentship

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## Rugby Raffle Winners

A framed Ulster rugby memento signed by three of Ulster and Ireland's 'Number 10's' (Jack Kyle, Mike Gibson and David Humphreys) was recently raffled in aid of the NILRF. The draw was made at the end of November and the lucky winner was **Henry Johnston**, a keen Ulster fan from South Armagh. Henry's daughters Katherine and Emma received the prize on their dad's behalf from Ken Arthur, a Biomedical Scientist at the CCRCB who kindly donated the prize.



**Pictured above:** Katherine (left) and Emma Johnston being presented with the raffle prize by Ken Arthur from CCRCB

Many thanks to everyone who bought tickets, which helped to raised over £100 for the NILRF!




## NILRF Christmas Coffee Morning



Frances Parker held the annual NILRF Christmas Coffee and Book Sale on 1 December at the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology (CCRCB). Researchers from the Haematology Research Group got busy baking and ballot tickets were also sold on the day, helping to raise a fantastic total of £502.96 so far! **Could you run a coffee morning for NILRF in your workplace?**

## 'In Memory'

We receive many donations from the friends, family and work colleagues of loved ones who have sadly passed away from leukaemia and other blood cancers. Often these funds are raised by organising special events or making donations in lieu of birthday gifts.

-  **Patricia Herron** from Newtownabbey held a party where donations were made to NILRF in memory of her good friend Janice Orr. A brilliant total of £2710 was raised.
-  **Jenna Smyth** from Newtownhamilton organised a joint birthday party with her cousin Simon and her nana. Family and friends made a donation to NILRF instead of buying birthday presents and raised an impressive £1235. These donations were made in memory of Jenna's mum who sadly passed away in October 2010.
-  **Gary Thompson** organised a special disco at Wellington Football Club, Larne, in memory of his sister Patricia Hobbs. Following the event NILRF Secretary Hazel Black collected a cheque from Gary for a fantastic £3164.

You can now create your own 'In Memory' fundraising page on [www.justgiving.com/nilrf](http://www.justgiving.com/nilrf)

 mydonate






[www.btplc.com/mydonate](http://www.btplc.com/mydonate)

Donate to NILRF or start a fundraising page on:

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## Fundraising Update

-  **Carol Barr and friends** raised a fantastic £1019 with a charity abseil from the Europa Hotel on Saturday 17 September.
-  **John Grant** ran the Liverpool Marathon on 9 October and raised £440 by setting up his own JustGiving fundraising page.
-  **Andrew Russell** from Dromore took part in the 'Lap of the Lough' cycle ride, raising £329.
-  The annual **McFaul Golf Competition** on 3 September at Bushfoot Golf Club raised £400.
-  **Paddy and Gemma Toner** from **The Thatch Bar** in Cookstown hosted a quiz night and raffle which raised £470.

## Haematology Lab Manager Retires



Sadly the lab manager for the CCRCB's haematology research group is retiring this year. **Susan Price** has made a key contribution to research activities as well as being an enthusiastic supporter of the Fund. Susan has played an active role with fundraising activities such as helping with coffee mornings and book sales, selling home made jams, taking part in street collections and making visits to schools on NILRF's behalf. These are just to name a few!



Everyone involved with NILRF would like to thank Susan for her support and wish her a happy and healthy retirement.

**Pictured above:** Susan helping at a recent book sale in CCRCB

## Upcoming Events

-  **The Hanna Sisters** are holding a Charity Concert on **25 February 2012** at the Market Place Theatre, Armagh. Tickets are priced at £10—£15 and are available by phoning the box office on (028) 3752 1821 or visiting [www.marketplacearmagh.com](http://www.marketplacearmagh.com).
-  This year's **Belfast Marathon** is taking place on **Monday 7 May**. Would you like the challenge of running a marathon either by yourself or in a team, while raising vital funds for the NILRF? For details and sponsorship forms please check our website [www.leukaemia-ni.org](http://www.leukaemia-ni.org) or phone (028) 9097 2928.

## Volunteers Wanted!

We are in need of some volunteers, whether you want to organise your own event, take part in a sponsored activity, help with street collections, join a fundraising group or start your own group! Making new friends, working in amazing places and knowing that you're helping a great cause - just three fabulous reasons to get volunteering. **Contact [caroline.crothers@qub.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.crothers@qub.ac.uk) or call (028) 9097 2928.**

**Please send your donations to:**

**NILRF, CCRCB, Queen's University Belfast, 97 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 7BL**