

14 February, 2014

Have the chat that saves lives during DonateLife Week

St George Hospital intensive care nurse Kimberley Livingstone is alive today because of the kindness of a stranger. Mrs Livingstone was born with cystic fibrosis and had a lung transplant in 2009. She is helping St George and Sutherland Hospitals promote DonateLife Week (23 February to 2 March, 2014).

During DonateLife Week, Australians are being urged to discover the facts about organ and tissue donation and to register their donation decision on the Australian Organ Donor Register. Most importantly, everyone is being asked to 'have the chat' with loved ones to make sure their donation decision is known.

"Transplant saved my life. I was drowning, stuck in a body that wouldn't work and completely dependent on oxygen, not a life for anyone let alone a 27 year old," Mrs Livingstone said.

She was newly married when she was listed for a double lung transplant.

"My husband, Ben, had to do everything for me including washing my hair. I had to get around in a wheelchair, as the effort required to walk was far too great.

"After 13 long months of waiting the most amazing phone call arrived. Days after the transplant I was breathing easily on my own, walking the hospital ward and ready to take on the world. I received the greatest gift someone could ever give – Life."

More than four years after her transplant, Mrs Livingstone has completed two City 2 Surfs, walked from Cronulla to Wagga with friends for charity and travelled the world. Recently she completed a Masters in Education and has started teaching nursing students.

"I took great delight in returning to nursing just three months after my transplant – nursing is my passion, my way of giving back.

"My greatest achievement though was having my beautiful daughter 18 months ago, something that wasn't even feasible prior to transplant. I am and will always be grateful not only to my donor but to all the donors out there. Organ donation saves lives, I am living proof. "

Lisa O'Reilly, Organ and Tissue Donation Coordinator, St George and Sutherland Hospitals, said in the same way that we discuss what we want to have happen in the event of our death, we also need to talk about whether we would like to become an organ and tissue donor.

"It's a conversation we can have today, that helps prepare our loved ones should they be offered the opportunity to proceed with organ and tissue donation," Ms O'Reilly said.

"With one organ and tissue donor able to transform the lives of 10 or more people, it's a conversation that could one day save lives."

In Australia, the family will always be asked to confirm the donation decision of the deceased before donation for transplantation can proceed. Families that have discussed and know each other's donation decisions are much more likely to support organ and tissue donation proceeding.

“Even if you have previously made a decision about organ and tissue donation, DonateLife Week is a great opportunity to remind your family about your donation decision, and to ask and know their decision.”

For more information visit www.donatelife.gov.au