

Rapunzel fundraiser – the big chop

Jillian Connaughton from Dublin has many reasons to be proud of her children, Jack and Emily Jones. She has watched Jack handle his 2019 diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes “brilliantly” and during the summer of 2020, Emily decided to raise money for three charities, including Diabetes Ireland, by cutting her long hair off.

Jack, who is now 13, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in December 2019 when he was in 6th class of primary school. His only symptoms were excessive thirst and going to the toilet a lot, however his dad also has the condition, so the family were aware of it. Suspecting something was amiss, his dad did a finger prick test, which revealed a worryingly high blood glucose level. Jack was taken to Temple Street Children’s Hospital.

“Within a few minutes in Temple Street, they knew it was diabetes. Jack stayed there from Sunday to Thursday and he now attends every three months. The staff have been absolutely amazing. They touched base with me from the very beginning nearly every week to make sure we were managing,” Jillian explains.

She admits that while they had a bit of a honeymoon period in the first nine-12 months, Jack’s transition into secondary school in September 2020 proved to be a bit trickier. However, she emphasises that he has “handled it all brilliantly”.

“He became very independent very quickly and has injected himself from the very beginning. He’s also great at counting carbs and knowing his ratios. He is currently waiting for a pump, so he still injects, but he uses the Dexcom sensor, which gives me a lot of peace of mind because I can see the results very quickly,” she explains.

Going short

In the summer of 2020, Jack’s 12-year-old sister, Emily, decided she would like to have short hair. Her hair had grown longer than usual during the Covid



Emily getting her hair cut and raising money for three charities on her 12th birthday, while also donating her hair to Rapunzel, a charity that works to improve the lives of those living with hair loss (alopecia) through fundraising as well as through hair raising



pandemic because hairdressers had been closed for so long. However, rather than just going to the hairdresser and having it cut, she decided to donate it to the Rapunzel Foundation, which works to improve the lives of people living with hair loss.

Furthermore, she decided to ask people to sponsor her for doing this, with three charities benefitting – Diabetes Ireland, the Irish Kidney Association and the Irish Cancer Society.

Her hair was cut on the weekend of her 12th birthday, so the cut coincided with a small Covid-friendly birthday party. Jillian recalls that Emily was “excited but nervous” on the big day. In total, 16.5 inches of hair were donated to Rapunzel and Emily managed to raise over €2,200 – €1,495 of which went to Diabetes Ireland.

“I am really proud of her. She could have just gone and got her hair cut, but



the fact that she was willing to do it for charity meant so much to all of us. She is a very kind person who always thinks of others,” Jillian notes, before adding that Emily “loves her short hair”.

– Deborah Condon

Type 1 awareness and fundraising party

When Emma Croke's son, Noah, turned two in March 2020, the world was only just beginning to come to terms with the seriousness of Covid-19. However, just four months later, Noah would face an altogether different serious health condition – he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

Emma, who lives in Santry in Dublin, recalls that three or four weeks before the diagnosis, she started seeing mood changes in Noah, but she thought it was the 'terrible twos'.

Then, about two weeks before the diagnosis, she noticed some signs, which she now knows to be typical of Type 1 diabetes, such as excessive thirst and going to the toilet a lot. Noah would also have bursts of energy, but would then feel "absolutely drained".

"He had also lost weight, but it wasn't until after he was diagnosed and I looked back on photos that I noticed just how much he had lost," she explains.

Emma was no stranger to Type 1 diabetes – her father had the condition. However, she did not think a child could develop it so young. Noah was diagnosed on a Tuesday in July 2020. That Sunday, he had been attending a birthday party, however the usually active little boy ignored the bouncy castle at the party and instead spent the day sitting on his dad's lap drinking juice.

On the Tuesday, she did not send him to crèche and asked her mother to mind him while she worked. She booked an appointment with her GP, however this had to be over the phone because of Covid. The GP said it sounded viral and to give him 48 hours.

"It wasn't the GP's fault – obviously they couldn't do a finger prick or urine test over the phone. I got home about two hours after the consultation, but Noah didn't even get up and run to me. That is not like him at all, so I brought him into Temple Street Children's Hospital," she recalls.

Emma says that "within seconds" of



doing a finger prick test, she was told that Noah more than likely had diabetes.

"I remember bursting into tears and saying 'he is only two, he is too young to get that'. He was put straight into ICU after a few more tests, but even then, I was convinced they would come back and say they had got it wrong."

He needed to be monitored as his ketones had risen to 6.6mmol/L, putting him at risk of developing diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). However, he only had to spend one night in ICU. He was kept in hospital for a week.

"Surprisingly, he liked hospital and loved the nurses and the attention he got, which made it easier," Emma says.

Noah has been on a pump since March 2021 and also has a Dexcom, which he calls his "superpower".

"He wears it on the back of his arm, so a few kids in pre-school were asking him what it was and he told them, 'that's my superpower'. There are kids there now wearing plasters on the back of their arms because they want superpowers too!"

Emma says she felt very strongly when Noah was first diagnosed that this wasn't something they would hide.

"If we were going anywhere like a restaurant, I didn't want him thinking that we have to hide to inject his insulin. I wanted him to be able to see that there



Pictured above is Noah Croke at his fundraising party and left with Bumblebee

is nothing wrong with having to inject yourself, that it's normal," she explains.

However, she notes that in the beginning, she didn't realise how serious the condition was and felt very uneducated. This prompted her to organise a fundraiser aimed at raising both funds and awareness. She asked friends on social media who had their own businesses to donate prizes for a raffle. Twenty-two prizes were donated, which Emma was thrilled with.

The raffle was held on July 7, 2021, the one-year anniversary of Noah's diagnosis. Emma had also set up a JustGiving page if people wanted to donate. Between this and the raffle, over €2,600 was raised for Diabetes Ireland.

"I was absolutely delighted and so was Noah. We had a little party for the kids on the road and had someone in a Bumblebee Transformer costume attend, which they all loved," she recalls.

While there is still a lot to learn, almost a year-and-a-half later, Noah is doing really well.

"Myself and Noah's dad Robert are very grateful for the support we have received from Diabetes Ireland and Temple Street since Noah's diagnosis in July 2020. We encourage other parents to know the signs of Type 1 diabetes and even if your child is only showing one or two signs, get them checked," Emma adds.

– Deborah Condon