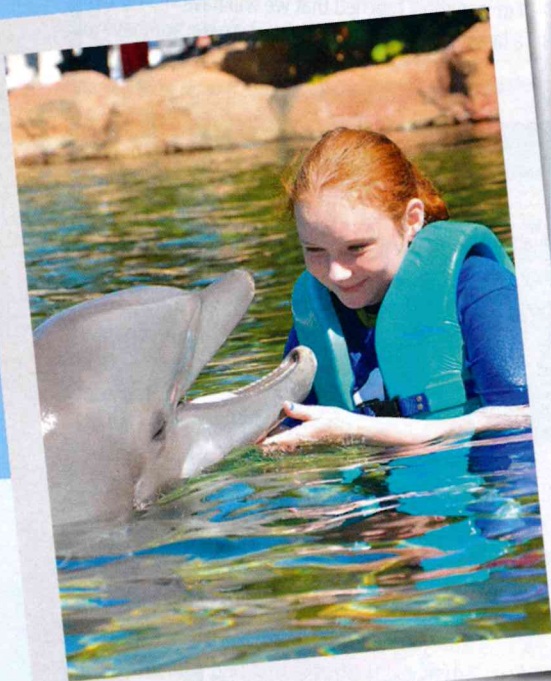


"IT WAS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE"

Michelle Gibb, 39, shares how her daughter, Kirsty, 14, enjoyed her first solo trip away from home and returned with a real sense of achievement



BIG GIVE
2017

Candis

Dreamflight

TOTAL RAISED
£56,674

THE FACTS

- Dreamflight raises money to take children with serious illnesses on an amazing holiday to Orlando, Florida.
- The ten-day trip costs around £3,500, but is free to the child – including travel, accommodation, medical expenses, food, theme park entry, a dolphin swim and reunion parties. It's an opportunity for children with disabilities to have fun, build confidence and develop lifelong friendships.
- See dreamflight.org for more details and information

Kirsty was born with hydrocephalus (a build-up of fluid on the brain) and a severe form of spina bifida where her spinal column was outside her body.

At just a day old, she had surgery to close her back and had further surgery a few weeks later to fit a shunt to drain the fluid on her brain, both of which

were successful. This meant that, despite a variety of complications, such as her lower legs and feet being turned in, causing her to trip often, Kirsty was able to lead a full and varied life, attending mainstream school and taking up several hobbies, including horse riding and swimming, even winning a place on a disability swim team – the Border Barracudas.

Three years ago, aged 11, Kirsty had corrective surgery to rotate her ankles and pin her legs so her feet faced forward. She still needs to wear splints, but can now walk without tripping.

Many everyday tasks we take for granted are a challenge for her, but she is very stubborn and determined. If the doctors tell her she can't achieve something, she will go all out to prove them wrong and achieve her goals. She's a real fighter.

When we received a letter from Dreamflight last May, inviting Kirsty to join them on their next trip to Florida, we were over the moon for her. As a family, we've been to Disneyland Paris, but a trip to Walt Disney World in America is beyond our reach financially, so it was a real dream come true.

The nurses at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh, had nominated Kirsty for the trip. They said they've always admired her fighting spirit and understand the challenges she's overcome and those she will endure in the future.

When I called the hospital to tell them the exciting news, they told me that they'd been nominating Kirsty for the last three years and were so thrilled that she'd been accepted. We



Kirsty's Dreamflight experience in Florida has given her memories she will never forget

were surprised and proud, and couldn't thank them enough!

The holiday was booked for October 2016 and I took Kirsty to Edinburgh Airport for her to fly to London to meet the others. At just 13, she was in floods of tears and very nervous about being away from home with strangers. It was stressful for us both. I wanted her to have the time of her life, but I knew I'd miss her dreadfully and would worry about her care.

But I needn't have worried as Dreamflight had everything taken care of. An escort accompanied her on the flight from Scotland and took care of Kirsty throughout the entire trip. They were taken to the Hilton T5 Hotel, Heathrow, where Harry Potter, Hagrid and *Star Wars* characters, as well as police dogs and handlers were waiting. There were 192 children attending, with an escort for every two children. The party in the evening at the hotel was hosted by TV stars Dick and Dom.

Kirsty was particularly thrilled to meet Paralympian swimmers Stephanie Millward, Liz Johnson and Nyree and Sascha Kindred – Nyree having also been a Dreamflight child herself. At the hangar the next day, British Airways had

arranged for Mylene Klass to give them a warm send-off – no detail had been missed. In Orlando, the party was given a police escort to the hotel. They even closed the roads to provide a proper VIP experience. It was so exciting for the children and it's something they'll never forget!

Kirsty told us that the staff in Disneyland were fantastic and allowed extra time for the children to board the rides and take off splints or walking aids for the water rides – nothing was too much trouble to ensure the children were happy. The holiday included trips to all the theme parks including Sea World. Kirsty's most memorable experience was swimming with the dolphins. Being in the water with them was her dream come true!

It felt incredibly strange to be separated from Kirsty for ten days. I tried my best not to worry, but I have to admit I did lose a lot of sleep that week. Thankfully my worries proved to be unfounded as the Kirsty I met off the plane was somewhat different to the girl I waved off.

She was naturally very emotional at being reunited with us, but she was so proud of herself at having managed so well. Her confidence was boosted and, ultimately and most importantly, having been around children with such a variety of special needs, she realised it's OK to be different.

Kirsty proved she can make sensible choices and look after herself properly, which has been very reassuring as she grows up and wants to make plans for an independent future.

A few months ago, Kirsty took the initiative and organised a sponsored swim with her swim team, raising almost £500 for Dreamflight. She wanted to swim to Orlando, which is 4,177 miles

from here. Every metre of the pool equalled one mile and it worked out that six team members would swim 28 lengths each.

Kirsty wanted to raise the money so that another child could have the same amazing, life-changing experience as she had enjoyed in Florida. And like so many things in life, she achieved her goal. We couldn't be more proud of our brave, generous daughter and are incredibly grateful to Dreamflight for helping her realise that nothing is impossible to her. *

Kirsty, who returned to her family full of confidence, has raised funds for other children to go to Florida



Money raised will be used to send 16 children from 12 regions of the UK – 192 in total – on a free ten-day all-inclusive trip to Florida.

As told to Sally Evans Photos Richard Walker

DONATIONS TO DATE

We never forget it's **YOUR** subscriptions that enable Candis Club to give huge amounts to charities. Our running total shows how much

£31,620,386

to the Cancer and Polio Research Fund (1962 to 2002)

£4,429,597

to the National Asthma Campaign (1990 to 2002)

£5,500,979

to Marie Curie Cancer Care (1998 to 2012)

£3,304,767

to Macmillan Cancer Support (1993 to 2013)

£3,309,982

to Bliss, the special care baby charity (1990 to 2009)

£2,190,977

to Liverpool University's Cancer Tissue Bank Research Centre (1989 to 1993)

£1,549,998

to the British Heart Foundation (2002 to 2008)

£829,053

to local groups via the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) (1990 to 2009)

£220,000

to ICAN (1989)

£246,876

to Tommy's, the baby charity (2006 to 2009)

£303,774

to Children's Hospices UK (2008 to 2010)

£1,500,000

to charities in The Candis Big Give

TOTAL TO DATE

£55,341,388

Make a difference

We've highlighted some of the big names in The Candis Big Give. For a full list of charities and the life-changing projects they're raising money for, visit candis.co.uk/charity

JDRF

What they do: Diabetes research.

Candis Big Give Project: To fund 'smart insulin' research.

Location: National

Total raised: £92,141

Over The Wall

What they do: Provide camps for seriously ill children.

Candis Big Give project:

To fund four family camps.

Location: National

Total raised: £20,018

PTSD Resolution

What they do: Counsel veterans.

Candis Big Give project: Fund therapy for PTSD sufferers.

Location: National

Total raised: £34,262

The Clatterbridge

Cancer Charity

What they do: Treat around 30,000 cancer patients each year.

Candis Big Give project:

Funds for a Teenage and Young Adult Unit.

Location: Liverpool

Total raised: £21,870

The Lullaby Trust

What they do: Support for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Candis Big Give project: To run a campaign to promote safer sleep.

Location: National

Total raised: £90,772

Theodora's Children's Charity

What they do: Arrange for Gigggle Doctors to visit children in hospital.

Candis Big Give project: To fund hospital visits to 30,000 children.

Location: National

Total raised: £91,419

University of Nottingham Impact Campaign

What they do: Transform lives through education and research.

Candis Big Give project: To fund research into ependymoma.

Location: Nottingham

Total raised: £56,699

HOW BUYING A SUBSCRIPTION HELPS...

In 2017, Candis Club will donate a minimum of £250,000 from members' magazine subscription revenue, via The Big Give, to health charities taking part in The Candis Big Give. Any additional monies will go to charities at the discretion of the General Committee of Candis Club.