



# Teentalk

The newsletter for teenage members of The Birthmark Support Group

Issue number 2, February 2006

email: [teentalk@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:teentalk@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk)

## About the BSG

The Birthmark Support Group aims to provide information and support to anyone who has a birthmark. We do this by arranging activities, circulating newsletters, attending medical events and raising money to further research into birthmarks.

We are a registered charity, but unfortunately we do not receive any official funding. So we need help from all our members, including you! Any money that you raise, or things that you do to raise awareness of our charity, goes a long way towards helping our important cause.

And remember, charity does not have to be boring! You can have lots of fun raising money and awareness. You could organise a party or have a sponsored camping trip, swim, climb, sleepover, shop, dance, football match – or whatever it is that takes your fancy!

If you would like to raise money for the group, please contact our Funding Co-ordinator, on [funding@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:funding@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk)



Or for more information on The Birthmark Support Group, you can refer to our website:

[www.birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk)

## It's not all bad!

When it comes to having a birthmark, there is often a tendency for many of us to think of ourselves as unlucky and to focus on it as a bad thing. But, when you think about it, there are lots of good things that result from having a birthmark.

For one thing, I believe we tend to be nicer people! This is because we understand that you cannot judge people based on what they look like and we know the importance of treating others well. Another benefit of having a birthmark is that when you meet someone else who has one, you can quickly strike up a really close friendship because you have a bond\*.

There are also more direct bonuses. For instance, last year, my birthmark led to me being photographed by an award-winning photographer. He had developed an interest in birthmarks and was doing a project on them. So I went along to his studio in London and had a thoroughly enjoyable time.

So you see, it's not all bad! And I'd love to hear from you about all the positive things that have come from your birthmark. Perhaps it makes you feel unique or maybe it has led to you getting a new girlfriend or a boyfriend...

Email me at 'Teentalk' with your good experiences. (Your name will not appear on the newsletter if you do not want it to)

\*The BSG can help put you in touch with someone with a birthmark in your local area. Email me at 'Teentalk' with your details and we will try our best to match you with someone

*Maddy Burgess, Editor*

## Q+A

Because birthmarks are unusual, we rarely get to ask others how they feel about it or about all things that go with it. For this reason, every issue of the Teentalk newsletter will feature your questions and the answers to your questions.

Next issue's question will be:

What sort of activities would you like to see the BSG organise for its teenage members?

Please send your answers to this question to Maddy at 'Teentalk'. You can also send in the questions that you would like to be answered. Remember, they can be on anything to do with having a birthmark!

## **Merger of The Birthmark Support Group and Caring Matters Now**

In January 2006 the Birthmark Support Group merged with Caring Matters Now, a support group for those with a distinctive brown coloured birthmark known as a Congenital Melanocytic Naevus (CMN). We therefore welcome all CMN members to the BSG and their first edition of Teentalk and, in particular Jodi Unsworth, the founder of CMN.

### **A word from Jodi:**

My name is Jodi Unsworth. I am 25 years old and have a large CMN which covers 80% of my body. For the first 15 years of my life I was lead to believe that I was the only person to suffer with CMN and my parents and I were not even told what the condition was called! During the first 15 years of my life I had undertaken 30 plus operations and I guess you could say that I was treated like a guinea pig, as the doctors didn't really know what kind of treatment would remove the CMN.

During my school days I experienced bullying and feeling isolated from all my peers. I had good friends throughout school, but there was always a group of children, young people and even adults who would react to the skin condition in an unkind manner. On one occasion a bus driver wouldn't let me on the bus in case my skin condition was contagious. However, the story ended positively as all my friends and other young people from my school got back off the bus and told the driver that he was very unpleasant!

Throughout my teenage years I had good times and difficult times. The difficult times were due to peer pressure and the constant battle in wanting to look like my friends. As most teenage girls I bought magazines and watched teen programmes and this would upset me as I would want to look like all the other girls in the magazines and on television. I always remember thinking that I would never be successful in life because I didn't have the stereotypical looks.

However...I can now look back at those difficult times and realise that my life has been blessed due to having the CMN skin condition.

In 1996, when I was sixteen years old, I came into contact with Dr Atherton, the leading CMN skin specialist. He was able to give me a name for my skin condition and tell me that there were actually other children, young people and adults with CMN. I couldn't believe my ears, as I had come to terms with the fact that I was more than likely the only one with this particular skin problem. Dr Atherton asked if I would help support other sufferers of CMN and I agreed straight away, as I didn't want others to go through the same difficult times as I did with operations and bullying. Since agreeing to help support others with CMN I have been in contact with over 100 sufferers and their families. I established a nationwide support group for CMN sufferers and their families called Caring Matters Now (CMN). The support group held family days throughout the year in different part of the country. Eight regional support groups were also formed, which enabled CMN sufferers and their families to develop friendships within their home areas.

Ten years down the line...I won Young Person of the Year Award 1999, have completed a BTEC in Nursery Nursing, a degree at York University in Educational Studies and I now work at Liverpool Football Club as the Disability Liaison Officer (yes, I do get to meet all the good looking footballers!). The Caring Matters Now Support Group merged with the Birthmark Support Group in January 2006 but I still support CMN sufferers and their families through the BSG.

I do believe wholeheartedly that due to my CMN skin condition I have been able to achieve more things in life than have the majority of my friends. It has given me confidence and personality to live my life to the full and not let anyone undermine who I am and what I can achieve. I had to make a decision during my teenage years not to let my CMN skin condition make me a bitter person but instead to make me a better person...you can do it too!

*Jodi is the CMN contact for the BSG and you can contact her at [cmn@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:cmn@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk) or write via the BSG PO Box (see below). Any Teentalk members want to see behind the scenes at Liverpool Football Club? I'm sure Jodi can arrange it sometime!*

## **A slow start for Teentalk...but why you should join us now!**

Like all new clubs it does take a little while to gather members together and really get going. And like any club it is only as good as its members make it!

One of the main aims of Teentalk is to put people in touch with one another who are then able to share similar experiences. But to do this we need as many members as possible, covering as wide an age range and type of birthmark as possible. So whatever your feelings are about living with a birthmark we would like to hear from you and hope that you may be prepared to share these experiences with others. Just because you or your parents are already members of the BSG doesn't automatically make you a member of Teentalk; you need to complete a separate application form available from the BSG website or the BSG PO Box address. So if you are in the age range 11 to 21 (or a bit younger or older) please join us!

If you would like to help in any way (organising events, helping Maddy with the newsletter, helping with a Teentalk webpage on the BSG website or the setting up of a Teentalk 'chatroom', or mentoring younger members, we would particularly like to hear from you! (see 'Meetings for Helpers').

If you are one of the members who joined soon after our launch last April then we are sorry not much has happened since then...but it will!!

## **BSG and Teentalk Events**

We have four Fun Days organised for this year: Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March in Liverpool, Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May in Birmingham, Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September at Chigwell in Essex (easily accessible from the London area), and Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November in Glasgow. These are open to anyone of any age with a birthmark and their family and friends. If we know in advance that members of Teentalk are attending we will make sure that there is something organised specifically for you. Do come along! If there is sufficient demand we are also happy to try and organise events specifically for Teentalk members; just let us know what you would like!

## **Meetings for Helpers**

If you are aged 16 or over and would like to help with the running of Teentalk, in particular the mentoring of younger members, we would like to meet you at one of our Fun Days (see dates above) or at a 'training' day that we are holding at Great Ormond Street Hospital on Saturday March 25<sup>th</sup> from 1130am to 3.30 pm.

It does take particular skills to be able to offer support to others and there will be an introduction to these on this training day. Please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to attend this event; BSG will help with the cost of your travel.

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## **Would you like to be involved? A DVD, the media and emails...**

The BSG is producing a DVD about birthmarks, their treatment and how different people deal with them, to send to every doctor's surgery and secondary school in the UK. It will be introduced by tv presenter Paul Heiney and will include interviews with teenagers with birthmarks. Also, we often get approached by television, magazine and newspaper journalists asking to be put in touch with teenagers who may be willing to be interviewed about their birthmarks. If you would like to be considered for either of these then please let us know.

And finally...we are starting to get members who live in other parts of the world who would like to be put in email contact with others of similar age with a birthmark. Let us know if you would be happy to have your name as a possible contact

*If you are under the age of 16 then it is important that you discuss the above with your parent or guardian before putting your name forward.*

***If you want to contact us about anything in this newsletter, or you would like to join Teentalk, then either email [teentalk@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:teentalk@birthmarksupportgroup.org.uk) or write to Teentalk, BSG, PO Box 327, West Malling, ME19 6WW. Do get in touch!***