ISSUE #03 APRIL 2025

# Quarterly Newsletter

## Welcome to our Spring newsletter!

This edition is going to be slightly different to our usual one, because with only six months to go before our big Mount Kilimanjaro fundraising trek we thought it was time to introduce the team. There are so many of them they need a dedicated newsletter all to themselves!

Over the next few weeks, I will be returning to the Gynocare hospital in Eldoret with volunteer, and new trustee, Liz Hinds. We will be carrying out lots of outreach work and facilitating some workshops for new ostomates. We are looking forward to sharing our work with you all in our summer edition.

As always, thank you to you for your support. We simply would not exist without it.

I hope that you enjoy meeting our team of intrepid trekkers!

Gill Castle
CEO

We want to say a **big** *thank you!*



With a fundraising goal of **£50,000**, you've helped us raise **£11,000** so far!

In this newsletter you can expect:

**Mount Kilimanjaro special!**

**In-depth with Lisa & Max**

**The Stoma Ladies**

**The Birth Trauma Ladies**

**Charity Supporters**

**The American Contingent**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

**On 5th October 2025, 20 women will begin climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa. For five days they will ascend up to almost 6,000 metres, through savannah, jungles and the snowy peak. An intense two day descent will complete the adventure of a lifetime.**

The team has been specially selected from applicants across the country. Most of the team either have ostomies, or childbirth trauma history – with three team members having both. The remainder of the team are key supporters and advocates for the charity. Ageing in range from 20's to 60's, with members from Wales, Cumbria, Kent, London, Northumberland and even America, it promises to be an epic group.

The group of adventurers will have lots of personal challenges to face – not only in their training, but on the trek itself. For those with ostomies, there will be the additional complexity of managing their stomas on Africa's highest mountain, all while climbing at high altitude in thinning air.

The motto of the group is the Kenyan national motto of "Harambee", which means "All pull together". We will pull together as one to complete this mammoth task and raise as much money as possible to build the new stoma and continence wing at the Gynocare Hospital. Many of the group are flying to the hospital after the trek to see where the wing will be built, and to celebrate their climbing achievement with locals.

We hope that you will follow our adventure and support our participants.
Gill



# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## In-depth with Lisa and Max

### Lisa Murphy



On 2nd July 2021, I found myself listening to the words nobody ever wants to hear. The biopsies taken during my Caesarean Section were secondary Cancer. At that moment my blood ran cold, and I felt like the bottom had fallen out of my world. Staring at our beautiful 7-day old baby I wondered if I'dstill be here at Christmas.

The months that followed were filled with tests and Chemotherapy while different specialists and oncologists tried, without luck, to find my Primary Cancer. I lost my hair, I lost my identity and I lost precious time with my baby. What should have been the happiest time of my life was tainted by a black cloud of uncertainty.



In March 2022 I got my first glimmer of hope, I was called in to The Christie to see Mr Sutton, my Colorectal and Peritoneal Surgeon. Chemotherapy had stabilised my cancer and they could operate.

The next month I was admitted for what is known as the mother of all surgeries. Cytoreductive surgery with HIPEC - a heated chemotherapy circulated round the stomach cavity. An operation only two Hospitals in the whole of the UK perform. This resulted in me having a Stoma, a small price to pay for still being here. It was the start of a very long road to recovery, but I was determined to get back to normal. The day before I was discharged from hospital, I missed my daughter crawling for the first time, but I hoped I'd be around for all the other special milestones if her life. At this stage my prognosis was still uncertain until my Pathology results came back.



A few weeks later I got the best phone call I could have ever hoped for, all the disease had been removed and I eventually had a diagnosis. I had an extremely rare cancer called Pseudomyxoma Peritonei (PMP), which began as a slow-growing tumour in my appendix. The tumour then broke through the wall of the appendix and spread mucous-like tumour cells into the lining of my stomach and round my organs.

Our daughter is too young to understand yet, but she is the reason I'm still here, she saved my life.

Here I am, almost 4 years on, disease-free, stronger, fitter and more open to new challenges.

I am doing this trek to raise money and awareness of the most wonderful Charity, Chameleon Buddies. Hopefully I can inspire people who have been touched by cancer or been through a traumatic experience and give them the confidence to follow their dreams.

**You can support Lisa here: www.justgiving.com/page/lisa-murphy-1711106888745**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## Max Redhall



Hi, my name is Max, and I am part of the group climbing Kilimanjaro in October this year to raise funds for Chameleon Buddies.

In December 2019, my life took an unexpected and dramatic turn. One moment, I was driving down the M1 during rush hour; the next, I was fighting for my life with a perforated bowel. Emergency surgery saved me, but it left me with a colostomy—a temporary measure that, due to COVID lockdowns and restricted elective surgeries, became permanent. Since then, I've also developed Crohn's/Colitis. Now, my 'piggy-nosed snout' and I are in this for the long haul, but I refuse to let it define me.

Searching for others living with a stoma led me to Gill and Chameleon Buddies. When she started training for her Channel swim, I followed her journey closely—especially since open water swimming would terrify me, stoma or not! Watching her take on challenges and achieve her goals inspired me to tackle my own stoma struggles. I was totally hooked.

As I approach my 60th birthday this May, I wanted a challenge that would push me out of my comfort zone—something that mirrored my work helping women build confidence and take control of their lives. I had nearly signed up for a Vietnam-to-Cambodia cycle ride when Gill mentioned Kilimanjaro. Instantly, I knew: this was it!

Coming to terms with my stoma hasn't been easy. While I've always been pragmatic and got on with life, I secretly hoped for a reversal. Learning about the women in Kenya who live with their stomas in far more challenging conditions was humbling. While I can order supplies with a simple text, they often lack even the most basic resources. This climb is my opportunity to stand in solidarity with them and provide tangible support. I can't wait to meet some of these incredible women after our climb and see firsthand the impact Chameleon Buddies has had.

Now, my days are filled with strength training at the gym, slow jogs to build endurance, and scouting new hills to keep my legs strong. I love feeling fitter, having a purpose, and being part of a supportive community of like-minded women—even if most of us have only met virtually so far.

Being part of this climb is already opening doors to new adventures, introducing me to incredible people, and immersing me in new environments—and we haven't even reached Tanzania yet!

If you have a stoma, know that you are not alone. You don't have to climb mountains, but having a stoma doesn't mean you can't chase your dreams, push your limits, and live life on your terms. You are capable of more than you think, and your stoma should never hold you back.

**You can support Max here: www.justgiving.com/page/maxine-redhall-1711127827633**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## The Birth trauma ladies

### Harriet Green

*"While my birth trauma didn't result in long term physical issues, there is still an emotional gap from the time of my sons birth. After a mismanaged 3rd stage, I suffered a significant haemorrhage, which was also mismanaged, 2 subsequent miscarriages and a mistrust for the NHS. Thankfully I went on to have a healthy pregnancy and gave birth to my daughter in the pool, at home, with no complications. For me, this challenge is about raising awareness for birth trauma, helping people to step away from the "at least your baby is healthy" response so there is better support for those who need it. To be sharing this all with some very inspiring ladies, each with their own story, while also raising money for a wonderful charity, is just epic, and I am so excited. What a challenge it is going to be!"*



**You can support Harriet here: www.justgiving.com/page/harriet-green-climbs-kili**

### Jessica Pinder

I'm Jess, I am 29 and a proud Mum to two beautiful children, Jax 4 & Jacie who is almost 2.

I had a very traumatic birth with Jax back in 2019 causing injuries to Jax as well as severe psychological and emotional trauma to myself, leading to a diagnosis of PTSD.

I am proud to volunteer for the Birth Trauma Association and work closely with the team to promote and raise awareness around birth trauma.

I find talking to other mums who have experienced traumatic births both affirming and validating. It feels positive knowing I can help / offer support to other women. I hope that by sharing my story I can assure those who have endured birth trauma realise that they are not alone. I want to instil hope that it is possible to rediscover your sense of self, and to move beyond the impact of birth trauma, finding a new way of life where PTSD no longer controls your thoughts, feelings and actions.

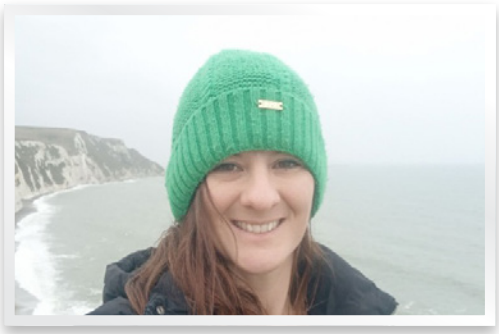


I am truly passionate about raising awareness for Birth Trauma & Birth Injuries. I cannot wait to take on this incredible challenge with so many inspirational women. I aim to raise as much money as possible to support Chameleon Buddies, in their mission to build a new hospital wing. This will be providing essential health care to women affected by birth injuries, at the Gynocare & Women's Fistula Hospital in Eldoret, Kenya.

**You can support Jessica here: www.justgiving.com/page/jessica-pinder-1714680585304**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## Natalie Perrett



I'm climbing Kili for this amazing cause, after going through child birth trauma at the age of 26, resulting in surgeries and finally a hysterectomy 8 years later.

I want women to see that we can't be limited despite our traumas and more importantly help to fund this much needed hospital wing for woman in Kenya and support Gill's fabulous charity, Chameleon Buddies.

**You can support Natalie here: www.justgiving.com/page/natalie-perrett-1714479659405**

## The Stoma Ladies

### Max Redhall, Lisa Murphy and...
### Liz Hinds, Trustee of Chameleon Buddies



I'm Liz and I live in Alnwick with my husband Chris . I have suffered with Crohn's disease over 20 years and I have had x3 major operations and now have a permanent ileostomy. This continues to be a challenge in addition to other medical conditions. I joined the chameleon buddies support group last year and now will be assisting in leading a monthly group in Alnwick . When the opportunity to raise money for a hospital in Kenya to support women with stomas I really wanted to be involved in funding for this . Though nervous I'm excited to be part of this amazing challenge to fund raise for the hospital. I look forward to forming new friendships in this challenge for this charity.

**You can support Liz here: www.justgiving.com/page/liz-hinds-1711354316195**

### Sophie Excell, Trustee of Chameleon Buddies



I'm staff nurse from Kent, who lives with her husband and cat, and absolutely loves harry potter and goats! I've had a stoma since 2012 due to Crohn's. In 2023 I had Barbie butt surgery but it was a very long recovery and it was while I was off that I followed Gills channel swim. I found it absolutely awe inspiring and when I saw her mention Kilimanjaro, I just couldn't get it out of my head! There is no doubt this will be a big challenge for me, I have never done anything like this before, let alone even done any real sort of exercise except a bit of cycling - going on the tandem with my husband is my favourite thing to do, aswell as a bit of roller skating! I want to push myself to achieve something amazing and show people that you can still achieve anything you want, even with a stoma fitted! I count myself lucky to live in the UK and have access to all the medical care and treatment I need , so I hope as a team we can raise lots of money for the new centre in Kenya to ensure others can too!!

**You can support Sophie here: www.justgiving.com/page/sophie-excell-1714461165623**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## Kelly Simpson



I'm climbing Kilimanjaro to show myself and others that no matter what life throws at you there is always someone who understands and that it never needs to stop you achieving amazing things.

I also want to help chameleon buddies raise the much needed awareness and funds to build a new stoma wing at the hospital in Kenya. Chameleon buddies helped me so much as I was going through my own stoma journey so to be able to do this for them shows what a full circle my journey has become.

**You can support Kelly here: www.justgiving.com/page/kelly-simpson-1709967254272**

## The Ladies with both!

### Gill Castle and...
### Jo Prance



Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to make a difference 4 – 12th October 2025

I'm Jo, a Fitness Consultant and a proud mum to a 25-year-old son. Supporting and advocating for women affected by severe childbirth injuries is a cause close to my heart.

I'm excited to team up with Chameleon Buddies in fundraising for Kenyan women & girls with stomas following childbirth injuries. Severe childbirth injuries have a significant impact on both physical and psychological quality of life, they are life changing.

When Gill Castle, founder of Chameleon Buddies, invited me to join her 'Climb Kili' 2025 team supporting these women, I felt honoured, privileged and I was eager to accept a place on this amazing adventure.

This challenge has personal significance for me as I have a stoma and became an ostomate in 2019 after living with the debilitating effects of a traumatic childbirth injury for over 20 years. Without my colostomy, I wouldn't have been able to consider taking on a challenge like this. My stoma has given me freedom and a chance to live life as fully as possible.

I aim to inspire fellow ostomates to pursue their ambitions, smash stigmas, and assist Chameleon Buddies in raising crucial funds for their stoma clinic project in Kenya, providing essential support to women in need. The money raised will be used to help build a dedicated stoma and continence wing at the Gynocare and Women's Fistula Hospital at Eldoret, Kenya.

**You can support Jo here: www.justgiving.com/page/jo-prance-climbs-kilimanjaro-4-chameleonbuddies**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## Julia Robinson



I live in Northumberland with my husband James, children Jacob (6), Felicity (4) and Jack Russell, Scamp!

I had emergency surgery to create a stoma in 2021 due to severe ulcerative colitis. Since surgery I have followed and been inspired by Gill, her commitment to the Chameleon Buddies and amazing achievement of swimming the English Channel.

I taught in a farm school in South Africa after school, and ever since Africa has a special place in my heart. I gave birth to a stillborn son in 2015 so birth trauma also strikes a chord.

After a tough few years, losing my Mum to cancer in 2023 and the prospect of turning 40 in 2025, I would love to achieve something great for myself but to do so climbing Kilimanjaro while raising funds for the amazing cause of providing hospital facilities for ladies in Kenya with birth trauma and stomas just seemed perfect.

**You can support Julia here: /www.justgiving.com/page/julia-robinson-1714506898492**

## Charity Supporters are the best!

### Joanna Lonsdale



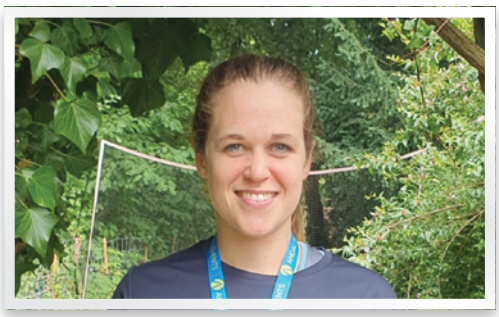
I first met Gill years ago at our local Tri club and we did a half Ironman together. (She has a stoma and she still beat me by miles!)  As I work for the BBC, I have covered her story and campaign, for work too.

Last year when she swam the Channel myself and a colleague made a podcast The Stoma Swimmer which helped get her story wider coverage across the BBC and in other media outlets.

Gill has never allowed what happened to her to define her and she's becoming a voice and advocate for thousands of women who are marginalised and forgotten. I feel very lucky to have helped in a very small way to get her story heard and to share in her mission to improve the lives of women damaged by birth.

**You can support Jo here: www.justgiving.com/page/joanna-lonsdale-1711193274222**

### Priteni Horning



A huge supporter of our charity who was featured for her Kili trek inclusion in our newsletter last year!

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

## Amy K



I'm taking part in the 2025 Kilimanjaro Climb to raise awareness of the women who have suffered with child birth injuries resulting in Stoma.

I feel privileged to be part of a team incredible woman who have shown such strength and courage having experienced first hand the impact of living with Stoma.

The stories of the woman in Kenya are so inspiring that I decided to join Chameleon Buddies to support the cause to raise enough money to help build a dedicated stoma and continence wing at the Gynocare and Women's Fitsula Hospital at Eldoret in Kenya.

This is an opportunity to help change woman's lives and help provide facilities where they can be medically treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve. .

**You can support Amy here: www.justgiving.com/page/amyk**

## **Charlotte Watson,** Founding Trustee of Chameleon Buddies



Charlotte is a local Alnwick businesswoman and organiser extraordinaire, and was our first charity Treasurer. Gill asked her to be a founding trustee as Charlotte was getting on a plane on one of her many holidays - travel is one of Charlotte's passions. She loves to contribute to her community and helping raise money and awareness for worthy causes. In 2022, she and her husband Leo raised £5,000 for Chameleon Buddies with their annual Halloween House, when they turn their home into a Halloween delight for locals and visitors alike. The year before, Charlotte completed the National Three Peaks in 24 hours with Gill, and last year she was the first across the line in the marathon distance The Mighty Hike, raising money for Cancer Research.

In November 2023, Charlotte came to the Gynocare & Fistula Hospital for the first time, and created the most incredible stock room for our stoma products. Watch her on The Stoma Swimmer documentary on BBC iplayer - every team needs a Charlotte! With her straight talking no nonsense approach, she certainly gets the job done.

Fun facts about Charlotte! She was chosen for England's U16's England rugby team, but glandular fever prevented her from playing on the squad. In true Charlotte style, she organised her wedding in Thailand in under 24 hours notice, and has NEVER had a cup of tea! She says "Kili really is going to be an EPIC experience. I already know the group is full of truly wonderful women, without even meeting half of them! Now let's raise as much money as possible for our little charity, Chameleon Buddies. WE CAN DO THIS!"

**You can support Charlotte here: www.justgiving.com/page/charlotte-watson-kilimanjaro**

# Mount Kilimanjaro special!

**Nicola Napier,** Number One Volunteer and Gill's Kenya Support Group Co-host!



Nicola has been a friend of the charity since the start, most memorably spontaneously agreeing to accompany Gill on their first ever trip to Kenya in July 2022, weeks after the charity was registered - while sitting chatting on a train in rainy England! Ever since, Nicola has been Gill's dedicated, passionate and relentlessly cheerful side kick, her years of experience in the continence industry fuelling her experience and compassion for our ladies and girls in Kenya. Nicola is brimming with ideas and creativity, her enthusiasm for bringing to life our peer support groups and determination to make a real difference to empowering the ladies to live a dignified life with their ostomies is clear for all to see.

Nicola's partner in crime, apart from Gill (who she crewed for on the Channel swim, and who was the first to have a watery, messy hug on the beach in France) is Clover the sproodle. There is nothing that Nicola likes best than chucking on a pair of jeans and taking a walk on the beach with her bouncy dog. Behind the scenes, Nicola is helping Gill to co-ordinate the fabulous group of adventurous women on this epic challenge, having completed her London Landmarks Half Marathon last year to raise more funds for us! She is currently training for the Edinburgh Marathon at the end of May – once more, for our lucky charity. Nicola says "I can't wait to meet everyone on the team - Harambee!!"

**You can support Nicola here: www.justgiving.com/page/nicola-napier-1711355855862**

We are also being joined by **Rebecca Davenport**, a stoma nurse with many years of experience, but who is coming with us on her own personal journey!

## The American contingent



**Dr Debbie Matityahu,** Founder and Director of our sister charity, Beyond Fistula (left)

*"I'm doing this trip to raise awareness about birth trauma, to support the amazing work of Gill and our sister charity chameleon buddies. Also to support the empowerment of women and women with stomas. If they can climb Kili, they can do anything."*

**Val Nicoletti** (middle)

*"Over my 31 year career as an Emergency Physician from western Massachusetts, I've encountered numerous patients suffering with medical conditions necessitating stomas. Despite the life-saving or life-altering nature of these procedures, they need not limit one's lifestyle. Gill Castle has exemplified this beautifully. Invited by Deb Matityahu, the founder of Beyond Fistula, I gladly joined to support Gill and her nonprofit, Chameleon Buddies, as we unite to summit Kilimanjaro. I never pass up an opportunity to empower women!"*

**Support Debbie and Val here: www.justgiving.com/page/valerie-nicoletti-1714666672163**

# Chameleon Buddies outreach programme

## Empowering ostomates in Eldoret, Kenya to adapt to life after stoma surgery







Scan to donate

Chameleon Buddies

***Together we can make a difference***
***Your donations change lives***




*Thank you for reading*

**You can help support our ladies from as little as £2/month.**

Please visit our website for details:
**www.chameleonbuddies.org.uk**

Chameleon Buddies