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# Big walk for our tiny babies

Megan Denby's son Huon weighed just one kilogram when he was born and spent the first 13 weeks of his life in a Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit. It was five days before she even got to hold her tiny newborn baby.

The annual Walk for Prems has a special significance for this Phillip Island Mum.

On October 28, across Australia people walked to support sick and premature babies. This was the ninth year for the walk which has so far raised \$1.4 million to provide vital support services for families in need.

The walk is the major fundraiser for the Life's Little Treasures Foundation, Australia's leading charity dedicated to supporting the families of babies born sick or prior to 37 weeks gestation.

Raising awareness of the issues faced by these tiny babies and their families was a key motivator for Megan to support this year's walk.

"I know I felt really alone when Huon was born, and I guess a lot of other preemie mums would too," said Megan.

"No one understands what you're going through. It's obviously a horrible period in your life, but I think it always helps to talk about it."

Even though Megan was classified as a high-risk pregnancy, she had never really considered that Huon could end up in the Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). But at her 20-week scan, the doctors saw some problems.

"Huon had stopped growing and there were issues with the placenta. I had to stop working and move up to Melbourne, because they didn't want me going into labour," explained Megan.

"I stayed with friends in Clayton for three weeks. Every day I'd go to the hospital and they'd do an ultrasound, and look at blood flow, his movements and his growth. They

also gave me steroid injections which help the baby's lungs develop."

The doctors warned Megan that any changes in the baby's movements could indicate that he was in distress and she would need to come straight into the hospital. One night, Megan said Huon stopped moving.

"He started moving again as soon as we got to the hospital, but the

doctors decided they'd pushed it far enough. The next day I had a caesarean."

This was the start of the family's NICU journey.

With high-tech, state-of-the-art equipment, the unit resembled something from a science fiction

movie.

The babies are kept in big plastic units, or incubators called Isolettes that look like spaceships and provide controlled temperature, humidity and oxygen levels.

"They have to stay in the Isolettes until they reach a certain weight, because they can't maintain their body temperature," explained Megan.

"There are all these tiny babies, with a million and one chords hanging out of them. Sometimes you can't even see the baby from a distance."

Because any movement or touching can affect the baby's heart-rate, Megan was not even able to touch Huon at first.

"They want the baby to be stable before you touch them. It's a really fine balance. Sometimes getting the baby out of the Isolette causes them distress."

Once the babies are stable, parents do 'kangaroo care', which involves putting the baby direct onto the chest – skin on skin.

"If your baby is stable, that's supposed to be really good for their heart rate and their breathing," Megan said.

Confronting the issues of a sick or premature baby is a challenge for every parent. However, Megan said being a trained nurse helped her navigate the medical system.

"I'd never worked with babies, I'd always worked in aged care, but I understood everything they were talking about," said Megan.

"I knew how to deal with the doctors. I knew how the health care system worked. I knew I needed to be his advocate.

"Everyone deals with it differently. A lot of the mums you'd barely even see in there, whereas I was in there all the time. I would say to the doctors, what's happening with this? What are we doing about that? They were great, and we worked really well together. I think that got the best possible outcome for him."

During Huon's time in NICU, Megan said the Little Treasures Foundation provided a lot of support.

"They gave information folders, held morning teas for support and education, and distributed gifts for the parents and babies at Christmas time."

Huon is now a happy two-year old, but Megan and the doctors keep a close eye on his progress.

"I am vigilant because he is susceptible to getting sick. He goes to day care and does all the things that a normal kid does. I think that's important. But you just need to be that little bit careful because if he gets sick, things can deteriorate quite quickly."

On October 28th, Walk for Prems held events across the state, including Albert Park Lake in Melbourne and Brooker Park in Warragul.

Life's Little Treasures Foundation's support for families includes playgroups, parent and grandparent support networks, NICU survival guides, parent resources, hospital reading programs, child-care, nappy packs and tips for friends and family.

You can still make a donation at [www.walkforprems.org.au](http://www.walkforprems.org.au), or Life's Little Treasure Foundation [www.lifessmalltreasures.org.au](http://www.lifessmalltreasures.org.au).



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**Now a happy two-year old, Huon spent the first 13 weeks of his life in a Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit.**



**Megan and Huon were supported by Life's Little Treasures during their time in NICU. Walk for Prems has raised \$1.4 million to provide support for families of sick and premature babies.**