

John Michael Mouskos

The Breathing Life Trust and the man who makes a difference...

There is the time of the year that we all put our hands in our pockets to take out whatever we can afford to give to those in need.

We bring this story to you, in case you care to lend a hand...

After John Michael Mouskos, a businessman, an artist and a mountaineer, first reached the tip of some of the highest mountains on Earth, he realised what it means not to be able to breathe with ease. He formed the Breathing Life Trust, a registered charity in Cyprus, that helps children suffering from life threatening respiratory illnesses and improves the quality of life for children with breathing disorders. He made it his life's purpose to offer children who need it, the facilities to breathe, and so far he is doing very well...

In one breath, enthusiastic Mouskos reports that since 2004, he and his associates have been raising awareness and campaigning for a dedicated state of the art children's lung centre, which will be named The Breathing Life Lung Centre for Children and will serve the needs of children in Cyprus and the whole region.

The Centre will be a 21st century state of the art respiratory facility of comparable standard to the world renowned Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, a facility saves the lives of children with severe respiratory illness and give support to the many families who have to bear the pain of seeing their children suffering without hope.

Why did you choose to begin this charity?

The Breathing Life Lung Centre must be attributed to the early endeavours of Doctors Yiallourous, Pipis and Hadjidemetriou, who established the Paediatric Respiratory Unit at the Makarios Hospital in Nicosia.

Their facility, albeit on a small scale, devoid of sophisticated lung function equipment, offers treatment to children with breathing disorders, and I just felt the desire to help them with their work in treating seriously ill children. It was at this time that I formulated the idea of creating a charitable trust to raise funds for this purpose and thus The Breathing Life Trust was born.

You have selected an impressive but dangerous way to raise funds for your charity. You climb up to the peaks of some of the highest mountains in the world.

Strategic partners in this endeavour are the Ministry of Health of Cyprus, the Directors of the Makarios III Hospital in Cyprus and London's Great Ormond Street Hospital.

The Ministry of Health will provide the support and space required for the new centre, coordinating the whole programme and ensuring that there is the political will to see the project through to the end as well as ensuring its long term sustainability.

The Directors of the Makarios III Hospital will coordinate the day to day functions and management of the new centre and specialists from Great Ormond Street Hospital will provide the expertise and training to ensure a raising of the bar in terms of the standards of respiratory treatment and care within the new centre.

Donations towards the purchasing of equipment for the new centre have been received from several corporate and individual benefactors and «we have been overwhelmed with wonderful letters of support and encouragement». However, donations are still needed to acquire the remaining pieces of equipment for the new centre and hope to achieve the fundraising target by the end of March 2009 so that all of the lung function equipment can be ordered in time for the opening of the centre in June 2009.

With financial and equipment donations, The Breathing Life Trust Appeal has so far raised in excess of €190 000.

For more information or donations or obtaining more information on The Breathing Life Trust visit www.breathinglife.org.

We needed a way to attract attention and send out a message. My trips into the rarefied atmosphere that exists at the summits of the great wonders of nature has brought attention to our cause and raised significant funds. These epic journeys have given me a greater insight into the loneliness, fear and emotion of children unable to breathe freely and made me understand the precious nature's gift of breathing.

What impacted the progress of the project the most?

What really made an impact to the progress of our appeal was a film I wrote and produced. In the film "Breathe Me", which followed my journey to high mountains, I brought together the different worlds of high altitude mountaineers

and children with breathing disorders. A particularly poignant sentiment in the film was "Imagine being alone, in the dark, helpless, with only your dreams to comfort you, for high altitude mountaineers breathless in the thin air going higher into uncertainty as the push for the summit, for the children unable to breathe alone in their isolated world. The mountaineer and the child, connected by an immense will to survive in the face of unimaginable suffering and love".

The film was inspired by love, a love for children and for mountains and it was made to support the creation of the much needed lung centre in Cyprus. During 2007 and 2008, "Breathe Me" became the most broadcasted film on Cyprus television and Cyprus Satellite Television.

