

Who Run the World? Girls!

The Charity Chicks on Life, Love and Giving Back

“A man’s true wealth is the good he does in this world.” – Muhammad (570-632 CE)

September, 2013 will be yet another busy month for Kelly, Tracey and Madhuvanti (Maddy), the powerful trio behind the Charity Chicks. As a registered charity and emerging local powerhouse, the Charity Chicks have successfully raised awareness and funds for numerous initiatives across Barbados while also rallying a significant number of volunteers. In September alone, they will be providing sponsorship for the Globeathon, a Walk to End Women’s Cancer, on September 29th, as well as organising a group to participate in Clean Up Barbados, on September 21st.

The team at Diabetes Today first met with the Charity Chicks a little over a year ago in the lead up to the second installment of their major annual event, Tickled Pink. In order to capture all three busy women we sat in on one of their weekly lunch dates; their time to catch up on each other’s families, find a few minutes to take a break and plot to save the world, one volunteer at a time – Amazing, we know!

It is immediately evident that these three are firm friends and they credit this as one of the reasons why Charity Chicks has been such a tremendous success. They share the belief that volunteering and giving back are responsibilities and part of who they are as women. Each one has been actively involved in charitable projects from an early age and it is this background that continues to shape their lives.

Maddy hails her mother as an inspiration, explaining that she was very passionate about working with women and children. With her encouragement Maddy has worked with survivors of domestic violence, recovering drug addicts and troubled teenagers both in Trinidad and New York. She is now a lecturer in Public Health at the University of the West Indies Faculty of Medical Sciences, Cave Hill Campus and, upon moving to Barbados, sought ways to get involved in charitable work.

Like Maddy, Kelly was also motivated by her mother and from an early age she was involved in the preparation of Thanksgiving baskets and the provision of school supplies for underprivileged families. She also worked in a food and clothing pantry, an experience that ignited a lifelong passion and commitment to helping others.

Attending a Quaker school between the ages of 10-18 left an indelible impression on Tracey, the third member of the group, as volunteerism was an integral part of the school’s curriculum. She taught English as a second language, assisted primary school children and volunteered at a weekly neighbourhood soup kitchen. Tracey continued her charitable activities through university and found it difficult to maintain her level of hands-on volunteering when she returned to Barbados.

Each woman possesses a level of enthusiasm for philanthropy and by what some may call a stroke of fate or destiny; they became friends and soon, partners.

In 2008, Kelly’s mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. This traumatic experience was compounded by the fact that Kelly could not be by her side during the treatment in Texas. Fueled by the desire to

honour her mother's battle, Kelly envisioned an all-women's cocktail party to raise funds. She searched for like-minded women to help with the event and Tickled Pink was born. This marquee event became the catalyst for the formal establishment of the Charity Chicks.

Now in its third year, Tickled Pink has become a highly anticipated fixture on the local social calendar. The inaugural Tickled Pink was held in 2010 in support of The Gift Foundation, an organisation that supports women with breast cancer. This was a cause that was close to the hearts of all the women as they share an admiration and deep respect for Gail Skeete, founder of The Gift Foundation and a breast cancer survivor. According to Tracey, "Gail is an inspiring woman who exemplifies the extraordinary difference one person can make in the lives of so many." The event was held at The Crane Residential Resort in the Town Hall and featured unique touches including makeup and spa stations, raffle prizes, pink ribbon cookies and an army of 'Men in Pink,' male volunteers who have become a permanent fixture at every Tickled Pink since. The night was a tremendous success and the Charity Chicks raised a phenomenal \$22,700 for the Foundation.

Building on that momentum, the ladies made strides in 2011 participating in numerous charitable events across the island. Plans were being made for an even bigger and better second installment of Tickled Pink and in February 2012 the trio hosted 'Charity Chicktails,' a precursor to the main event. The ladies were blown away by the response and this intimate gathering was great preparation for Tickled Pink 2012. Following the trend of supporting a charity that holds a personal meaning for the women, a number of charities were shortlisted to be Tickled Pink beneficiaries and Camp Pride, a summer camp for children with Type 1 diabetes, soon emerged as the frontrunner.

As Tracey explains, the camp was an initiative that a very dear friend, Darren Eastmond, was returning to Barbados to support. Darren tragically passed away in 2010 due to diabetic complications and Tracey was inspired by the efforts of his family and friends to raise awareness and funds for a cause that meant so much to him. "Darren was a lovely person and was in no way defined by his illness. Following his passing, his girlfriend at the time climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and hosted a series of charity dinners in his memory. I was very moved and approached Kelly and Maddy about supporting Camp Pride through Tickled Pink."

The ladies then met with Krystal Boyea, Ambassador to Youth with Diabetes at the Diabetes Association of Barbados. They instantly connected with her and the decision was unanimous. For Maddy especially, the decision was very emotional. Sadly, a few days before the inaugural Tickled Pink her father had passed away due to complications with diabetes and she knows firsthand the toll that a chronic illness can have on entire families. "The first event was almost an 'easy fit' as many people are supportive of fundraising efforts related to cancer. Diabetes is a bit tougher as it does not always get the same kind of attention, particularly juvenile diabetes and I was happy to be able to shine some light on this issue through the Charity Chicks and Tickled Pink."

The second Tickled Pink took place on the rooftop of the Limegrove Lifestyle Centre. In collaboration with title sponsor, Ryall Fitness, the event was spectacular. Attendees came out in full pink attire and the rooftop was professionally decorated to create a pink paradise. Highlights included the ever present

'Men in Pink,' a photo booth with crazy props, pink cocktail shakers for each person, delectable cupcakes and two raffles with platinum prizes like a stay at a luxury resort. The Charity Chicks raised an incredible \$33,000; \$25,000 to support Camp Pride's growth and \$8,000 for other local charities and projects.

Since our initial meeting with the Charity Chicks, Diabetes Today has continued to follow the progress of this outstanding trio. 2013 has been another great year, kicking off with Chicktails in February and Tickled Pink in April. In the midst of a global recession and tough year for local charities, the Charity Chicks were still able to raise \$6,000 for Jumpstart!, a mentorship program and summer camp for Barbadian children.

There seems to be nothing stopping these women and we had to ask how they find the time to balance work, charity and family. Kelly admits that it is difficult but it is their shared passion that continues to motivate them. "There were more women initially but, as we can attest, running a charity is like another full time job. The three of us are blessed to have the support of our families and we just try to make it work how best we can." The women are quick to heap praise on their fantastic support networks and Tickled Pink as well as all other Charity Chicks events have indeed become family affairs – Maddy's youngest son, a toddler, was right in the mix of Tickled Pink preparation!

It is clear that these 'Chicks' are on a mission and there seem to be no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Kelly, Tracey and Maddy are truly an inspiration and we applaud them for their unwavering commitment to volunteerism. *"We only have what we give," (Isabel Allende)* – and these women are giving it all they've got.

For more information or to become a volunteer contact [charitychicksbarbados](https://www.facebook.com/charitychicksbarbados) on facebook or email info@charitychicks.com