

LITTLE RHYS'S DONOR DELIGHT

ROB.WESTALL@SWWMEDIA.CO.UK

09:00 - 13 July 2007

A Desperate worldwide search has given the chance of life to two South West Wales families. With the seconds ticking away, suitable bone marrow donors have been found for six-year-old Rhys Harris, originally from Winch Wen, and Kidwelly native John O'Neill. Little Rhys Harris is one of only 35 people in the world to suffer from nemo, a disease that destroys the body's immune system.

Now an American donor has been found to save his life. His 42-year-old father Kevin said: "We have a match.

"It's not a perfect match, but it's good enough for the medical team in Newcastle where Rhys will have his treatment."

Mr Harris, his 36-year-old wife Dawn, and four-year-old son Morgan, hope to take Rhys to Disneyland before his treatment begins in September.

Bone marrow from his donor will be flown over a few days before the operation.

The brave youngster, who now lives in Newbridge, Gwent, will then face a nine-month fight for life in an air bubble while his body's defences recover.

"A few days ago, we didn't have a donor for Rhys but at least now we have a fighting chance," said Mr Harris.

"But there are parents of 7,000 other people in the world not so lucky.

"If Rhys fell in the River Tawe, 99 per cent of people would jump in to save him.

"But people can be lifesavers simply by signing up for the bone marrow register, they don't have to get wet."

The good news came as the two families were preparing for a world record attempt at the Liberty Stadium in Swansea.

The event was a bid to get the most people to sign up as bone marrow donors in one venue in 24 hours.

The current record is for 250 signatures collected in Tenby in July 2005.

A donor match has also been found for Kidwelly man Mr O'Neill, who now lives in

Australia.

His sister Andrea Maunder said: "We have been lucky to have some great news, but there are many other people in the world still in need of a donor match."

Mrs Maunder helped to organise the Liberty Stadium event, which was aimed at people aged 18 to 40 and in good health.

She was joined by a host of well-known faces who pledged their support for the appeal, including Big Brother star Imogen Thomas, Welsh rugby legend Jonathan Davies, Glamorgan cricketer Robert Croft, boxer Enzo Maccarinelli and a number of Ospreys players. Mrs Maunder said the family was overjoyed to hear the good news about her 48-year-old brother.

"I had a text from Carol, John's wife, to say they had found a match for John from America.

"They're hoping the operation will go ahead on August 8.

"My mother's been crying tears of joy.

"She has prayed for this call so much.

"This is what we have been praying and waiting for."