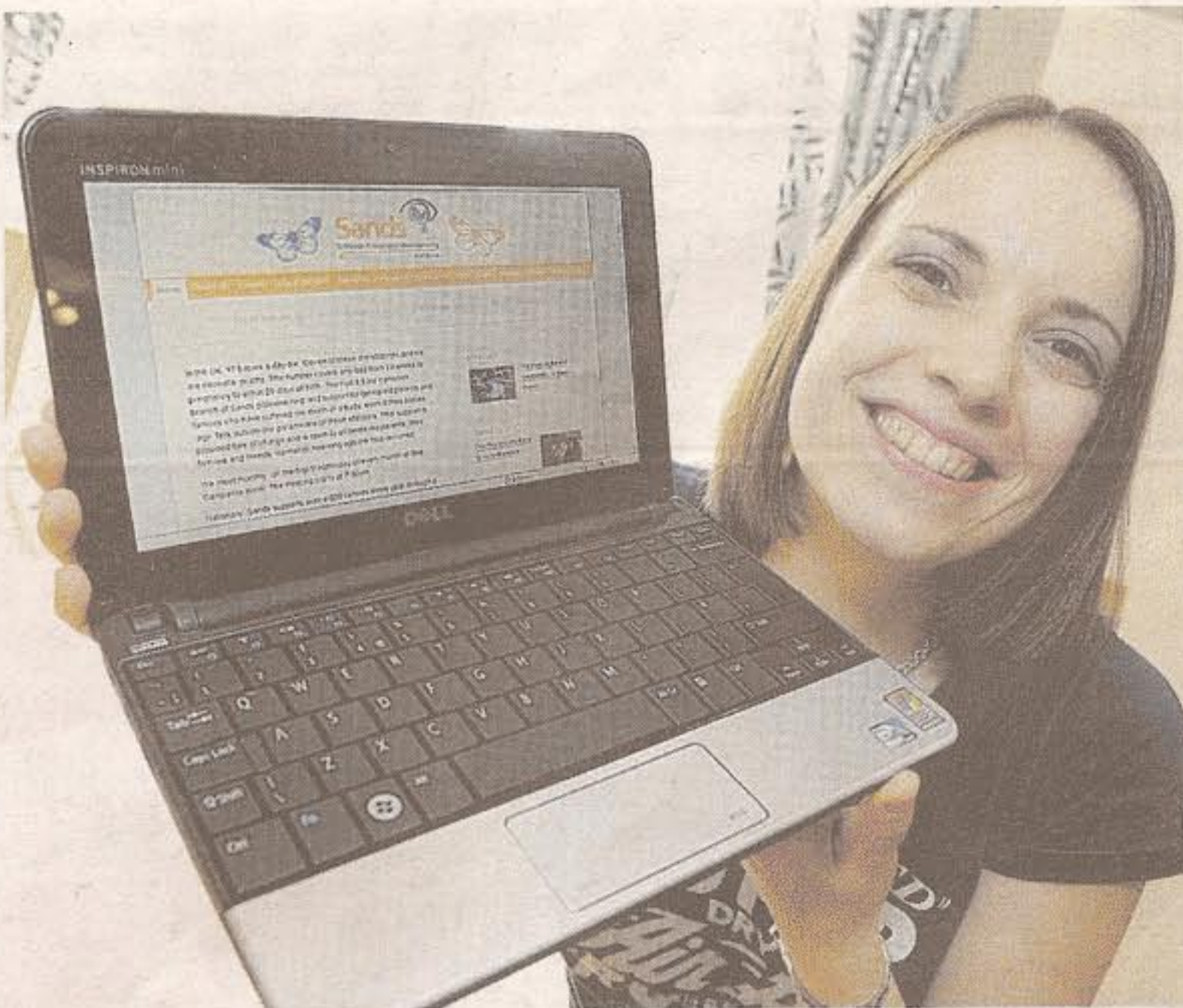


To mark Stillbirth and Neonatal Deaths Awareness Month, **Laura Greendale** speaks to Eszti Pontone about a support website she has set up



**HELPING OTHERS TO HEAL:** Eszti Pontone has set up a website for the Hull branch of Sands, a stillbirth and neonatal death charity. Above, Eszti with a photo of her twins. **Pictures: Jerome Ellerby**

### Help raise awareness

**STILLBIRTH** and neonatal death has been brought to people's attention in the media over the past year as celebrities such as Lily Allen, Amanda Holden and Kelly Brook have lost their babies late in pregnancy.

Pregnancy should be a wonderful time for families, but for the 6,500 each year in the UK that suffer the tragedy of stillbirth or neonatal death, their lives are forever changed.

During June alone, more than 500 families will be left devastated when their much loved and wanted baby son or daughter is stillborn or dies in the first few weeks of life.

In the UK, 11 babies are stillborn every day.

If you want help or support from the Hull branch of Sands – which hold meetings the first Wednesday of every month – visit [www.hull-sands.org.uk](http://www.hull-sands.org.uk) or e-mail [admin@hull-sands.org.uk](mailto:admin@hull-sands.org.uk)

**C**radling her perfect little twins in her arms, Eszti Pontone was cherishing the few minutes she would get to spend with them.

On May 29, 2010, Isaac and Florrie were born at just five months and were too young to survive.

"They looked absolutely perfect," said Eszti. "We took them into the bereavement room, which is in a quiet corner of the delivery ward, and were allowed to spend some time with them on our own."

Isaac and Florrie's funeral was held just a week later and Eszti and husband James didn't know where to turn.

"My first thought was to go on the internet to see if I could find any support," said Eszti, 31, who lives in east Hull with James and their three-year-old son, Archie.

"I found the Sands (Stillbirth and Neonatal Deaths) website and discovered they held monthly meetings in the Hull area.

"The group has 'befrienders' – bereaved parents who are trained to run support groups – and it was there I met lots of other mums and dads who shared their stories.

"Without them, I don't know how I would have got through the first few months."

Next month is Sands Awareness Month, which will help to raise some extra money for Sands and also important awareness of

stillbirth and neonatal death.

The death of a baby either during pregnancy, at, or shortly after birth is still something that people find incredibly difficult to talk about and many are shocked to find out how many people it affects each year.

Taking the step to talk about her experience was a hard one and it took time for Eszti to be able to talk about the twins.

"I couldn't even mention their names without bursting into tears," said Eszti, who tells me they passed

away on Archie's second birthday.

"The first support group I went to, a woman sitting next to me squeezed my hand and another passed me a tissue. I was so grateful that I could talk about it and people would understand what I was going through.

"I lost my mum in 2005 and I met others who could sympathise with me. I had some lovely memories of my mum I could cherish, but with Florrie and Isaac I didn't have that – I just had lost dreams."

# Helping other bereaved parents through website

Eszti was overwhelmed with the support she received from Sands and felt she wanted to help locally.

More than £2,000 was raised at an event last November and Eszti suggested using some of the funds to set up a website for the Hull-branch of Sands, to help other parents in the city.

"The support group is brilliant and I thought a website would make the service even more accessible for bereaved parents," said Eszti.

"Sands has a Facebook page and

after the twins passed away, I used it as a forum to talk to others. In October, I received a message from a man who wanted to come along to support groups, but didn't know when and where the meetings were held in Hull.

"I thought a website would be a great idea for the Hull branch."

The website – [www.hull-sands.org.uk](http://www.hull-sands.org.uk) – went live in February and is proving to be a success.

It offers city-specific information and advice from the national charity.