



Fun for families

Laura Cartledge meets a woman who turned a simple idea into a successful free event



Natasha and Deven

Natasha Whitelock moved to Sussex from London to swap working on a trading floor for the world of motherhood. "I had to learn a completely new language," Natasha recalls. "I had start from scratch finding classes and meeting people, and the more I got talking to other mothers I found that I wasn't the only one in the same boat."

Inspired by this, Natasha set about starting the Southern Baby Event & Family Day.

"Being a mum I realised how little there is to do for the whole family for free, where they can go out and spend quality time together without worrying about the cost to get in," she explains. "In the first year I had 2,500 families attend, and last year over 4,000 footfall, so clearly there is a demand to find out information and have a day out for all the family."

However, it isn't just children and parents that have been impressed. This month marks the events third birthday as it comes to Fontwell Park Racecourse on October 16 and national retailer Matalan is joining in the fun by becoming headline sponsors.

"The event is set to be bigger and better than before with the support of Matalan," says Natasha. "We are bringing in new farm animals to join the animal petting area, and we have 'little corner of heaven', a dedicated pampering zone for mums to take some much-needed time out while daddies or grandparents take the children off to join in the free trail classes or enjoy the funfair rides.

"There will be competitions galore with an abundance of prizes to be won. Back by popular demand, we also see the return of 'yummy mummy pimp your wheels' and the new, highly anticipated 'surf challenge' for those who feel brave."

So how would Natasha describe the event? "It has always been my goal to create an event that had all the fun of a traditional fete that I remember as a child, but also the most fantastic baby and family-related products and

There is something for everyone

services that I could find with experts offering practical and friendly advice," she replies. "It's a place that can give you ideas, new friendships and a chance to buy wonderful products for you and your family – perfect for some early Christmas shopping."

And with most of the exhibitors being independent there's a great chance to buy rare gems of clothing and unique styles – fantastic if the high street is leaving you uninspired as you hunt to help fill Santa's sleigh.

With attractions including all sorts of animals to pet and ride, arts and crafts, bouncy castles and all kinds of taster classes, there will be more than enough to entertain the little ones, which is thanks, in part, to Natasha's ideas contributor – her four-year-old son Deven.

"Deven thinks it's his party and has helped with ideas," she explains. "Next to his crayons and colouring books is my laptop from which I work."

But the event isn't just for kids. "Ultimately I want people to come along with their families and really enjoy themselves," says Natasha. "There is something for everyone, from a pamper area for mums to take time out, to quad bikes and beautiful cars on display for the men folk to have time away from the shopping. I'm really excited about this year, its hard work but I get to meet great people through it all so come along and join in the fun!"

Chestnut Tree House

Chestnut Tree House was thrilled to be the beneficiary of the Southern Baby Event in 2010 and, as the event goes from strength to strength, so the hospice's involvement increases.

This year there's lots planned to get visitors involved and help them learn more about Chestnut Tree House. There will be plenty to keep the kids entertained – including a colouring competition and lucky dip – not to mention an attempt to do a record-breaking conga.

Chestnut Tree House offers care and support to children and young people with life-limiting and life-threatening illnesses. Less than 10 per cent of hospice's running costs are government funded, for the rest it relies heavily on the generosity and support of the people of Sussex.

■ For further information, visit www.chestnut-tree-house.org.uk or www.southernbabyevent.com

