

# NEWS SPECIAL

# Couples put on their dancing shoes for 'Strictly' grand finale for hospice



Strictly: Fifteen couples from around Bolton will be taking part



### By Joe Harrigan

joe.harrigan@newsquest.co.uk

COUPLES will be putting on their dancing shoes next month for a special 'Strictly' challenge in aid of Bolton Hospice.

In all, 15 couples from around the borough and beyond will be competing in this year's Bolton Hospice Strictly Learn to Dance Grand Finale, inspired by the hit BBC dance show, to be held before a live audience at Bolton Whites Hotel on April 2.

The contestants have been training hard at Little Lever's A Touch of Class studio to prepare them to take to the floor.

Contestant Lucy MacFarlane, who will be dancing with Chris Simpson, said: "I'm taking part as I have first-hand experience being around the hospice care system.

"Both myself and my terminally ill grandmother received first class care and attention from all the nurses, doctors, catering staff etc and it is vital that they can continue their good work and provide some comfort during what is a terrible time in most people's lives.

"I am loving the dance classes. I already know I'm going to miss doing this after the show is over.

"I'm really looking forward to getting into the party atmosphere and

just having some fun."

Dance partner Chris has similarly person motivations for taking part.

He said: "My reason for taking part in this year's Strictly is due to a very good friend of mine who entered the fundraising contest around five years ago.

"He said I would enjoy the experience. I enjoy performing on stage, and have done throughout my school years being in many plays, shows and choosing performing arts as one of my options at school.

"The process so far is incredibly enjoyable and lots of fun and laughter is had, especially with my dance partner Lucy.

"Her determination to win the night motivates me to commit to the whole process."

The oldest dancer to take part is 74-year-old Michael Court, who will be dancing with 13-year-old granddaughter Ffion Marshall, who will be the youngest contestant.

He said: "Learning to dance is completely out of my comfort zone, being slightly deaf and with two left feet, it is with thanks to the Touch of Class Dance School to get me moving hopefully in the right direction.

"My approach on the night will be to enjoy the experience and to have the honour of dancing with my granddaughter who is a very special

young lady."

Little Lever High School pupil Ffion is every bit as excited.

She said: "I was born with a rare heart condition called Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome which is a birth defect that affects around one in every 100,000 babies.

"Even though my heart condition does affect my day to day life it wasn't going to stop me taking part, I'm always up for a challenge.

"I wanted to raise lots of money for Bolton Hospice. In 2021 they looked after my Uncle Dave, I know he would be very proud of me for taking part.

"I also want to dedicate my performances to the memory of my grandma, Gwyneth Marshall who was a huge Strictly fan.

"I have no doubt she'll be watching over me now with a front row seat and a 10 paddle in her hand."

This year will also feature the event's first all-male couple when Carl Slack and Travis Hesford take to the dance floor.

Travis said: "I have always wanted to take part with a male dance partner and when the opportunity came up, I jumped at it with both hands. I asked my best mate, Carl Slack from school to do it with me and he said yes."

The hospice says tickets are still available through their website until Sunday.

Pictured: Lucy McFarlane and Chris Simpson, Michael Court and Ffion Marshall, Carl Slack and Travis Hesford, Kate and John Greenhalgh, Stacy Fox and Stephen Sommerville, Nathan Wedge and Megan Ryan Loughran, Greg Spanner and Danielle Hewitt, Jennie Thornton and Gary Bryant, Paul Limb and Emma Crook, Colin MacCulloch and Libby Harrison, Natalie Ashworth and Adam Haslam, Natalie Wardach and Richard Tapper, Lesley Worsley and Trevor Croasdale, Philip and Sarah Greenhalgh and Jennifer Butterworth and Chris Beswick.

