



***“Thank you to blood donors. Their generosity has allowed me to continue to live, and to fulfill a dream that is now six months old: Willyam! Every mother and child in the world should have the same opportunity.”***

## Merryl Nteme, receiver

Merryl Nteme is 29. She was born in Gabon, Africa. Both her parents were carriers of the sickle-cell anemia gene, so they passed the disease on to her. She was diagnosed in Africa when she was two months old. Sickle-cell anemia or drepanocytosis is a hereditary disease that affects the shape and functioning of red blood cells. It requires regular transfusions.

Merryl has been living in Québec since 1999, studying business administration at Université de Sherbrooke.

Because of her illness, Merryl gets an average of five transfusions a year. And motherhood was going to be a real challenge for her.

When she became pregnant, Merryl had to immediately stop everything she was doing. She had to stay in bed for the first few months, as the risk of a miscarriage was very high.

Throughout her pregnancy, she was monitored very closely to make sure her red blood cell count remained high enough. And, to really be safe, a cesarean delivery was scheduled for her eighth month of pregnancy, to better control conditions and keep from putting her body under additional stress. One month before the delivery, she had to be given blood transfusions, as her blood haemoglobin level had fallen...

A weekly ultrasound was done to make sure that blood was flowing through the umbilical cord properly. While there was always a risk that clots could form in the blood vessels, the baby seemed to be getting enough nourishment. Little Willyam finally came into the world last November 7; during the caesarean, Merryl needed three transfusions in less than 24 hours.

“I would like to thank those who launched and organized this day. I have had intimate experience with two different realities. In Gabon, it was not unusual for blood to simply not be available. My sister, who had the same disease, was not as lucky as I am. She died in 1993 because there was no blood available when she needed it. In Gabon, becoming a mother would have been unthinkable for me, or very difficult to deal with. Especially since my blood group is A negative.

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