

It's Good to Give and NHS Lothian team up on mental health support

NHS Lothian and Edinburgh-based charity It's Good 2 Give have joined forces to increase the availability of mental health support for children and young people who are diagnosed with cancer.

With funding of £420,000 donated by the charity, NHS Lothian have begun recruitment for two additional psychology roles, embedded within haematology and oncology services to support children, young people and their parents over the next five years.

While mental health support is already in place within children's services, these extra roles will significantly increase capacity, enabling more children and young people to receive vital support as well as increasing the provision for more early interventions and providing extra support at the end of treatment.

Dr Rachel Brackenridge, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, NHS Lothian, explained that a cancer diagnosis is a life-changing and challenging experience for anyone and can lead to very normal feelings of vulnerability, fear and sadness. She said: "We know that the diagnosis and treatment for cancer can lead to significant levels of distress for patients and their

families. Living with and beyond cancer can have a considerable impact on people's quality of life and, at times, can lead to more disabling, longer-term difficulties, such as anxiety, depression and lowered self-esteem.

"By providing specialist mental health input our team can help support mental wellbeing and psychologically informed care for our patients and their families at the most difficult of times."

It's Good 2 Give provide practical support to young cancer patients and their families across Scotland. Co-founder and Chair, Lynne McNicoll, said that the inspiration to support the health board's work came directly from a young person they worked with. She said: "Joanna was an enthusiastic Trustee of the charity who did a huge amount to promote the work we do and to raise awareness of the needs of young cancer patients, all while undergoing treatment for bone cancer herself. We were exploring different things we could do to help support children and young people and she suggested that having additional mental health support could make a huge impact and from there the idea developed."

Sadly Joanna died in 2019, aged 18, but her impact and legacy lives on. Lynne added: "Joanna did so much to help other young cancer patients like herself. I am delighted that we have been able to turn her suggestion into a reality and look forward to seeing the impact of this important work."

Joanna's parents, Alan and Angela, are incredibly proud of their daughter and everything she achieved. Angela said: "Joanna was just 16 when she was diagnosed with bone cancer, and despite facing gruelling treatment including an above the knee amputation, she was a passionate and active supporter of the charity, as well as a keen fundraiser. Helping other young cancer patients was really important to Joanna and we know that she would be so pleased that her suggestion has become a reality.

“The physical impacts of cancer are often very obvious, but the strain it can have on children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing is significant. For Joanna, she felt that it would have been so good to have someone to talk to; to explore how she was feeling and to help give her the tools to express herself, but also to help her cope with the emotional pressure that living with cancer has, and the frustration she felt on missing out on the typical things that every teenager wants to do.

“It really is fantastic to see the expansion of this vital service within NHS Lothian, thanks to the support from It’s Good 2 Give.”

Dr Brackenridge added, “We have a relatively small team, but they work incredibly hard to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of the children, young people and families experiencing cancer. This additional support from It’s Good 2 Give will make a huge difference to our service and we hope, in turn, to our patients.”