

Bunny buddies : supporting families through grief

Thanks to the funding from NHS Lothian Charity Lise Brown, Senior Community Palliative Care Nurse Specialist, and the East Lothian Palliative Care Team can provide further support to patients and their families receiving palliative care by providing soft toys, in this case bunnies.

Improved non-clinical experience for patients and families.

Part of the team's role is to provide psychological, spiritual and social support for patients and their families. They introduced bunnies to foster open communication and emotional comfort, helping children navigate a difficult time and families create lasting memories.

Nicola Mitchell from the team shared: "It's such a difficult and stressful time for families, so having these bunnies as one of the tools we can provide really has made such a difference to us in our role to support patients and families during end of life and bereavement."

Lise Brown explained more: "For me, the significance of grandparents in a child's life can be completely underestimated. With the families I have given the teddies to, there has been a very clear and strong connection between the grandparent and grandchild. It has allowed conversations to happen to support the adults prepare the child for their grandparent dying. They can use the teddy to look after each other when they go home after visiting and then, ultimately, they can then give their grandparent the teddy to go with them to the funeral directors."



Example of bunnies that can be given to families

The bunnies come as an identical pair, the larger bunny is given to the patient and the smaller one to a child or grandchild. This is one way to introduce conversations about loss and grief that children may not be able to understand and provides an object that will facilitate a connection between the patient and child during illness, bereavement and beyond.



East Lothian Palliative Care Team



So far the team have given out 7 sets of bunnies to families in East Lothian.



I can't explain how much the bunnies have helped our family through this difficult time and can't thank Lise and the NHS enough for the incredible care and support provided."

Family member



Bunnies provided to a family

'Kian' and 'Pops'

Diane Whitelaw's husband, Bobby, was a patient of Lise Brown from the East Lothian Palliative Care Team. Lise shared: "Bobby's family are one of the most inspirational stories we have come across as Kian, who is 8, had such a special bond with Bobby, who he called Pops. Kian just knew straight away what the bunnies were about and how they could help him."

Diane shared: "Lise came to our house in July 2023 and this was when she brought the bunny which is called 'Pops' and a book for Kian, I was not watching Kian that day so I kept them for Lise to give to Kian the next time she visited so she could give it to him personally and explain how it could help him while his Pop's was unwell. The larger bunny which Lise gave to Bobby is called 'Kian' and was with him every step of the way, even in the Western on his bed and when he passed - 'Kian' bunny was by his side."

Diane explained how the bunnies went onto support the family during the funeral: "Both bunnies played a big part in Bobby's final journey, 'Kian' in Bobby's hearse and 'Pops' carried by Kian at the front of the hearse. Both were together in the church and the crematorium. The bunnies were even pictured on the front page of the Order of Service, which raised lots of questions from the mourners wondering why on earth they were there! The funeral directors were so supportive in including the bunnies in the ceremony. It was a day we were dreading but the bunnies helped turn the day into a memorable one, which will never be forgotten, especially by Kian."

The bunnies continue to play a big part in the family's lives as Diane explained: Bobby's engagement ring has been sown into 'Pops' right ear, that is where it will stay. There are more adventures ahead for the bunnies to share with our family. My daughter is getting married, so I will be carrying the bunnies down the aisle, and they will be going on holiday with us to Jedburgh. Kian's other granny is a great knitter and has been knitting outfits for the bunnies including special Easter and Christmas outfits, making those difficult times a wee bit easier for us all and Kian in particular."



Bunnies at Bobby's funeral



"It really helped me, I got such a surprise when they told me about my Pops and I was crying, so I cuddled the bunny."

Kian, Patients Grandchild



Kian with 'Pops' and 'Kian' bunnies

NHS Lothian Charity has funded similar initiatives such as bereavement boxes in the Critical Care Unit at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. We have a number of grant programmes available that NHS Lothian staff can apply to. Go to www.nhslothiancharity.org