

Peer support weekend in Crieff for young people with cancer

Background

Young people diagnosed with cancer and undergoing treatment experience many negative impacts to their lives and they often feel disconnected and isolated. Led by Teenage Cancer Trust and supported by staff at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People, NHS Lothian Charity funded 9 young people aged 13-17, who have been diagnosed with cancer and are treated at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People, to attend a residential weekend at Crieff Hydro Hotel. The trip provided the young people with an opportunity to spend time with others who are in a similar situation, have experiences away from their normal environment and from their families and take part in fun activities.

The weekend

Accommodation

The group stayed in self-catering lodges which provided social spaces for the young people to come together to get to know each other and 'chill out'.
100% of the teens rated the quality of the accommodation as high or very high

Food

The group ate all meals together at the various cafes and restaurants in the hotel complex. Teenage Cancer Trust also provided food vouchers to supplement any additional food requirements.
100% of the teens rated the quality of the food as high or very high

Activities

Activities over the weekend included tree top adventure, alpaca trekking, archery, laser tag, swimming and tennis. The activities allowed the young people to try something new and step out of their comfort zone.
100% of the teens rated the quality of the activities as high or very high

Thanks to feedback from the young people, their families and staff from NHS Lothian who attended the weekend this report illustrates the impact of the trip and how it supports NHS Lothian Charity to meet a number of its strategic outcomes and objectives which contribute to the final goals of 'Enhanced experience and care for patients in hospitals and their communities' and 'Have a positive impact on health in the Lothians'.



My child has said it was the best time ever. They enjoyed being able to try new physical activities in a safe environment and just relax with people who understand."

Family member



How the trip made a difference to the young people who attended

Improved confidence

The young people were asked to rate their levels of confidence prior to and after attending the trip (1=low, 5= high).

On average they answered 3 before and 4 after.



"I am more confident of being away from home."

Young person



"More comfortable talking to people I don't know."

Young person



"I feel more confident about doing things, like going out to do stuff."

Young person



"I had a number of conversations with young people across the weekend about how attending the weekend had helped them build their confidence and achieve things which they weren't sure they would be able to do following treatment."

NHS Lothian staff member



100%

of families reported they had seen a big or little improvement in their young person's confidence since returning from the trip



"He was nervous about spending time with people he didn't know but he enjoyed it and seems more confident."

Family member



"It's increased his confidence and lifted his mood. He realised that he was able to complete challenges that he was unsure that he could do (which previously would have been classed as easy before his diagnosis). It's given him a confidence boost."

Family member



"He had a really super time, he surprised us all with how much he thoroughly enjoyed himself. He was comfortable around others and I think has definitely given him a confidence boost."

Family member

60% of the young people reported 'trying something new' was one of the biggest impacts of the trip.



How the trip made a difference to the young people who attended

Improved feeling of social inclusion

The young people were asked to rate how socially included they felt prior to and after attending the trip (1=low, 5= high).

On average they answered 3 before and 4 after.



I found new friends, meeting kids with same condition, making me feel not alone. I feel happier."

Young person



It was nice to make new friends and share with those who have been through similar experience."

Young person



I feel good as I made friends and I have rarely met other children who have had cancer."

Young person



The young people all came some not knowing anyone and by the end they all became such good friends."

NHS Lothian staff member



80%

of families reported they had seen a big improvement in how socially included their young person felt since returning from the trip



It will provide them with a lot more confidence, will let them find new friends and they will feel included again."

Family member

100% of the young people reported 'meeting other young people who have had cancer' was one of the biggest impacts of the trip.



After long two years of not able to do anything and being social isolated, he is now feeling socially included again."

Family member



It was good to have the young people socially interacting with each other. It is difficult whilst receiving treatment and the single cubicles to build friendships and rapport with other young people who have had similar treatment."

Family member



How the trip made a difference to the young people who attended

Improved self-esteem

The young people were asked to rate their feelings of self-esteem prior to and after attending the trip (1=low, 5= high).

On average they answered 3 before and 4 after.



"I was worried about leaving home, but now I feel better because now I know I can do it. I was worried of trying new things but now I know I can do it."

Young person



100%

of NHS Lothian staff reported they had seen a big improvement in the young person's self-esteem during their time on the trip.



"It was a pleasure to see the young people doing so amazing and actually by not having the safety net of their parents, they were able to take back control of certain things that they may not have been able to do whilst on treatment."

NHS Lothian staff member



"The weekend to Crieff enabled them to take control of their own life again and making decisions for themselves."

NHS Lothian staff member

100%

of families reported they had seen a big or little improvement in their young person's self-esteem since returning from the trip



"He doubted he would be able to do some of the activities such as the high ropes stuff but he loved it and even did it twice! He has more self-belief."

Family member



60% of the young people reported 'pushing themselves out of their comfort zone' was one of the biggest impacts of the trip.



How the trip made a difference to the young people who attended

Improved ability to share their experience with cancer

The young people were asked to rate their ability to share their experience with cancer prior to and after attending the trip (1=low, 5= high).

On average they answered 3 before and 4 after.



100%

of NHS Lothian staff reported they had seen a big improvement in the young person's ability to share their experience with cancer during their time on the trip.



Participants engaged in some powerful discussions sharing their experiences with cancer and these conversations occurred in an unforced, organic way as a result of the young people feeling at ease with each other and with staff. "

NHS Lothian staff member



It was really lovely to see some of the teenagers who had been more isolated during their treatment, due to side effects or intensity, be able to open up to others in a similar situation. They were able to discuss the impact of their cancer diagnosis and treatment on things like friends, school, body image, side effects and changing family dynamics and there was a real sense that the others 'got it.'"

NHS Lothian staff member



"I feel better about sharing my story."

Young person



"I had a very nice time talking to people who have been through the same thing as me."

Young person



"He's found friends who been through the same illness, so speaking about it is has been a lot easier."

Family member

70%

of families reported they had seen a big or little improvement in how easy their young person finds it to share their experience with cancer since returning from the trip

How the trip made a difference to the NHS Lothian staff members that attended

Improved health and wellbeing

100%

of the NHS Lothian staff that attended the trip reported an improvement in their own health and wellbeing



Seeing young people on treatment and feeling at their worst and then seeing them in a completely different situation is also hugely rewarding as a practitioner as doing this job obviously carries an emotional toll and things like this can ease this somewhat."

NHS Lothian staff member



Being able to connect with the young people and some of my colleagues in an informal setting was really positive and has had a positive impact on relationships back in the hospital."

NHS Lothian staff member

Increased feelings of confidence and motivation

100%

of the NHS Lothian staff that attended the trip reported an improvement in their feelings of confidence and motivation



I found that as the young people were so positive and keen to try things that this was infectious and encouraged me to also push myself out of my comfort zone, which meant I found myself doing a high ropes course for the first time in my life! Having done this successfully at Crieff, two weeks after the trip I was able to then take my own son to a high ropes course which I would never have done before."

NHS Lothian staff member

Increased feeling of connections with others

100%

of the NHS Lothian staff that attended the trip reported an improvement how connected they felt with others



Being able to connect with the young people and some of my colleagues in an informal setting was really positive and has had a positive impact on relationships back in the hospital."

NHS Lothian staff member

Increased ability to de-stress

100%

of the NHS Lothian staff that attended the trip reported an improvement in their ability to de-stress and enjoy activities with the young people



I personally found the weekend very enriching. Being able to see the young people off treatment and gaining back their independence was amazing. I see them at their worst when they are in hospital and it was absolutely brilliant to see them thriving and having fun with others."

NHS Lothian staff member

How the trip made a difference to the families of the young people who attended

80%

of families reported the trip provided them with an opportunity to relax or to get a short break/respice while their young person was away



We were happy to know that our child was having a good time and that they managed to gain some of their independence away from us. This of course was reassuring and allowed us to deal with other stuff we normally did not have the time for."

Family member



It provided me the opportunity to get a short break and spend more time with other members of the family"

Family member



I think this weekend away is also very important for the parents. Parents have had a lot of extra responsibility whilst their child has been an inpatient or on treatment and having the Crieff weekend allowed them to trust NHS staff with their child for a weekend, people they know from the ward."

NHS Lothian staff member

Legacy

100% of the young people and their families and NHS Lothian staff reported they would recommend this experience to other young people who have experienced cancer, with nearly everyone sharing how 'fun' the experience was.

70% of the young people reported that going the trip has motivated them to take part in other group activities/clubs, such as...

- "Pizza nights."
- "Everything I can."
- "More trips."
- "I'm thinking about going back to rugby."



Since returning, a few patients who are due to be finishing treatment soon have seen the photos of Crieff and have already expressed and interest in attending in the future. "

NHS Lothian staff member



Thanks to Teenage Cancer Trust, NHS Lothian staff and all the young people and their families who took part in this evaluation. Visit NHS Lothian Charity website to find out more about the projects we support - www.nhslothiancharity.org