

Using exercise to improve outcomes for children living with cancer

'Wee Move: Gie at a Go' event

Helen, Aftercare Wellbeing Practitioner and Emma, Advanced Paediatric Physiotherapist from the Locharanza Ward, RHCYP collaborated on an initiative to help children living with cancer (up to age 18) stay active and experience safe physical activity which can be incorporated while receiving treatment. Learning from the success of similar events in [England](#), the 'Wee Move: Gie it a Go' event was held on Saturday 18 October 2025 at Meadowbank Sports Centre. Children had the opportunity to try out different activities in a relaxed, no-pressure environment. Activities were delivered by sports facilitators from eight sports clubs and charities, e.g. cycling, football, wheelchair basketball, mindful movement, golf and fencing. Three stall holders provided information on the support provided by their organisations. The event was made possible thanks to 12 NHS Lothian staff members who generously volunteered their time on their day off.

NHS Lothian Charity supported the event with funding of £6,500 to cover costs such as the venue hire, travel expenses for children and their families, catering costs, t-shirts for all participant's and activity costs.



In total of 130 people (patients and their families) attended the event.



I loved being on the bike as I felt free."

Patient



Child trying out a bike

How exercise benefits children living with cancer

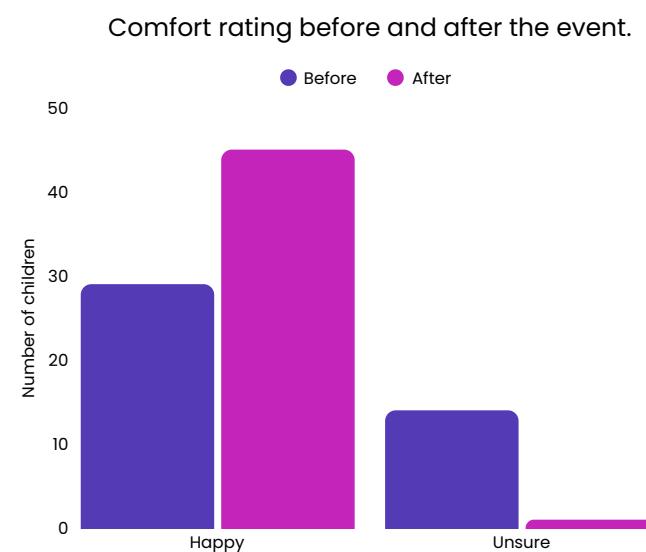
Overall survival rates for childhood cancer have significantly improved over recent decades but patients still experience the rigour of prolonged treatment and its side-effects which has a detrimental impact on their health and quality of life. Side-effects of treatment include reduced cardiovascular fitness, reduced bone density, fatigue, pain, altered cognition, secondary cancers, lean muscle mass loss and reduced psychological and emotional wellbeing.

It has been reported that survivors of childhood cancer are 10 times more likely to develop chronic health conditions compared to siblings ([Nathan et al., 2008](#)) and likely to experience lower psychological wellbeing. Increasing physical activity and exercise is increasingly being evidenced as one of the most effective ways of improving physical and psychological wellbeing of those undergoing cancer treatment and reducing the impact of some of the debilitating treatment related side-effects. In addition, regular physical activity has a role within recovery and survivorship, and has been shown to reduce risk of cancer returning and long term prognosis ([Starkie, 2000](#)).

The team at Locharanza Ward observe a large proportion of their patients become sedentary very quickly following diagnosis and this continues into aftercare. They see patients struggle with debilitating fatigue, a lack of motivation/confidence to exercise and a lack of knowledge around benefits of physical activity and exercise. Therefore, those children miss the positive impacts of exercise outlined in the research.

Impact on patients and their families

Improved confidence to take part in and access exercise



100%

of NHS Lothian staff members and facilitators involved in the event observed an improvement in confidence.

 One of the most heart warming things was seeing one of our patients who is an amputee gaining the confidence to cycle on a bike."

NHS Lothian staff member

 Amazing, my son wants to rejoin his football club after taking part today!"

Family member

 The variety of activities provided were a perfect gateway into exercise and were fun, this helped ease everyone in and helped them gain their confidence as it wasn't competitive."

Sports facilitator

Reduced social isolation

100%

of NHS Lothian staff members and facilitators involved in the event observed a reduction in how isolated patients and their families felt.



Loved catching up with other families not seen in a long time!"

Family member



The the large selection of activities offered gave everyone a chance to jump to each station and meet different people."

Sports facilitator

Improved wellbeing

100%

of NHS Lothian staff members and facilitators involved in the event observed an improvement in wellbeing.



The mindful movement sessions was really fun and relaxing."

Patient



You could see the children who hadn't done much exercise. As the day went on they were red faced, hot and running around with lots of smiles!!"

NHS Lothian staff member



Impact on NHS Lothian staff

80%

of NHS Lothian staff members agreed they felt more connected to patients after the event.



It's so good to see our patients outside a hospital setting and it reminds us how resilient these families are. They don't need much but sometimes just a bit of opportunity and direction."

NHS Lothian staff member

100%

of NHS Lothian staff members agreed they will incorporate some of the learnings from the event into practice.

Attending this event allowed me to contribute while learning valuable skills such as communication and organisation."

NHS Lothian staff member

80%

of NHS Lothian staff members agreed the event has improved team morale.



An amazing day I am sure none of us will forget anytime soon."

NHS Lothian staff member



The NHS Lothian staff team at the event



It's made me feel better embedded into the MDT. It confirmed to me the reason I do what I do everyday and how much I mean to all my patients and their families. I definitely came home with my heart full."

NHS Lothian staff member

Learnings for the team and next steps

The feedback shows the impact the event has had on patients and their families, and these were made possible by the large and varied range of activities available to children to try. The relaxing and fun environment the NHS Lothian staff and sports facilitators created also contributed to the success. Many of the families also commented on the suitability of the venue and how well organised the event was, which contributed to their enjoyment.

Emma and Helen undertook lengthy planning and organisation for the event which required significant time beyond their clinical and normal duties, additional administrative and IT support would have been advantageous, particularly to navigate the complexities of NHS Lothian's policy and risk assessment. Emma and Helen would like to acknowledge and thank the NHS Lothian Teams (e.g. Risk, IG, QI, Legal Teams), NHS Lothian Charity, Meadowbank staff, facilitators and volunteers who all collectively made this event happen.

For next steps Emma and Helen will collaborate with the Locharanza Team to explore translating some principals of the 'Wee Move' event into the ward setting, where OT and Physiotherapy staff embed physical activity and exercise into standard care pathways for children living with cancer to improve outcomes after undergoing treatment. Taking learnings onboard, Emma and Helen plan to deliver the 'Wee move: Gie it a Go' event every 18 months to support patients and their families stay active.

Thanks to Helen and Emma for supporting this evaluation. Long-term insights will be collected by the team anecdotally from families during routine clinic visits.

Report compiled by Rebecca Caulfield, Evaluation Manager, NHS Lothian Charity