

Beads of courage help young patients cope with serious illness



A cheque for £1000 was recently handed over to Hedgehog children's ward and a very special patient.

Lucy and Chris Fox, two of the founders of the local charity, Megan's Wish List, came into the unit at Tunbridge Wells Hospital in July to present the generous donation to staff and Jasmin Turner, with her mum, Lizzie.

Megan's Wish List was set up by the family and friends of 17-year-old Megan Fox, who passed away in March 2014, after she was diagnosed with a brain tumour in October 2013. The charity aims to raise money to help local children and teenagers who are suffering with life-changing illnesses and disabilities.

The money will be used to allow the children's unit to continue to sponsor 'Beads of Courage' – a special initiative to help children receiving treatment for childhood cancer. Each time a young person has a procedure, test, or treatment for their illness, they are given a bead. The colour of the bead signifies what has happened – for example, white beads relates to having chemotherapy, light green beads are for scans such as x-rays and MRIs, and yellow beads mean an overnight stay in hospital. The beads help children to make sense of the experience they are going through and research has shown that programme has helped to decrease illness-related stress and increases the use of positive coping strategies.

Megan collected the beads during her treatment and her parents, Lucy and Chris, are keen for other young patients to be able to do the same.

Lucy said, "We are delighted to be able to donate this money to the Hedgehog Ward to help with the Beads of Courage programme. Megan was cared for, whilst undergoing her treatment, at Tunbridge Wells and The Royal Marsden Hospitals, and it's wonderful to be able to give something back. We know the beads helped Megan to cope and we hope the money we have handed over today will help many other children, and their families, to get through difficult times."

Five-year-old Jasmin Turner, from Crowborough, who was diagnosed with leukaemia eight months ago, has also been collecting the beads throughout her treatment, and now has more than 400.

Her mum, Lizzie, said: "The beads of courage have been brilliant for Jasmin. They have really helped her get through some very difficult times and some extremely tough treatment and she has loved collecting them. It's a way of marking each step towards getting better and a great coping mechanism for many children going through serious illness."

At this time, the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust Paediatric Oncology Shared Care unit currently cares for 33 children who are receiving or who have received chemotherapy. The unit shares the care of children receiving chemotherapy with The Royal Marsden and Great Ormond Street Hospitals.

Paediatric Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist, Helen Stevens, said: "Beads of courage are visual and tactile symbols that can be used by a child to explain to their friends, family and teachers about their journey through cancer chemotherapy. Megan collected them and they gave her encouragement throughout her treatment. We are very grateful to Lucy and Chris, and the other trustees, for their generous donation which will enable us to provide Beads of Courage to our patients at Tunbridge Wells Hospital. It is an honour to use these beads in Megan's memory."

You can find out more about Megan's Wish List, including their forthcoming charity fundraising event 'Black Tie Casino Night' on Saturday 1 October at the Marriott Tudor Park in Bearsted, by visiting www.meganswishlist.com