



Supporting young people with blood cancer when they need it most

September is Blood Cancer Awareness Month and Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and local charity Friends of the Cancer Centre is highlighting the vital role a specialist nurse is playing in supporting young people with blood cancer.

Rachael Quinn, who is Friends of the Cancer Centre's Teenage and Young Adult Clinical Nurse Specialist, works each day in supporting young people coping with leukaemia, lymphoma and other life - threatening blood disorders. In her role at the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre and Haematology Service at Belfast City Hospital, Rachael provides care for young people, their families, carers and peers. Facing a cancer diagnosis at such a formative time of life is particularly difficult for teenagers and young adults. Rachael acts as their keyworker, providing continuity of care across the treatment pathway, providing ward based care and community support to help young people through such a difficult time. As well as looking after each young person's medical needs, Rachael strives to look after all aspects of their well-being including supporting them on their return to education.

Speaking about her role, Rachael said:

"I am privileged to be able to work alongside our wonderful young people, and the way they face their treatment is hugely inspiring. I work to build a relationship with both the young person and their family, to ensure that I can support them through what can be a really difficult and unsettling time.

"A key part of my role is ensuring that our young people are given the information they need about their treatment. Particularly for young patients, treatment can be very complex, and I ensure that their treatment is fully explained and they understand what is happening. This means I can provide continuity of care across the treatment team, and any individual young person can make informed decisions about their care.

"As well as directly funding my post, Friends of the Cancer Centre provides a range of additional support for the haematology and TYA teams. This includes funding to purchase resources for patients and their families with a long stay on the ward, dayrooms to give patients

and families a relaxing space away from their hospital bed, and vital equipment. The charity also funds gifts to help us celebrate our young people who are spending special days at appointments or on the hospital ward. I want to personally say a huge thank you to everyone who supports the work of the charity. My role would simply not be possible without it, and your support helps us care for young people and their families each and every day.”

For over 35 years, Friends of the Cancer Centre has been dedicated to making a real and meaningful difference to cancer patients and their families across Northern Ireland. The charity is here to enhance the quality of patient care and support through its life-changing and life-saving work, which has continued throughout the pandemic. The charity’s work includes funding additional nurses, supporting local research and providing practical support, such as financial grants, which help families through a difficult time. Friends of the Cancer Centre relies entirely on the generosity of the local community and all money donated stays in Northern Ireland, directly benefitting patients and their families.

Colleen Shaw, Chief Executive of Friends of the Cancer Centre, said:

“Whilst the past year have been the most challenging ever faced by the charity, we are so proud that our work has been able to continue throughout. Our fantastic team of funded staff, including Rachael, have remained on the frontline of care, ensuring that they are on hand to support local people affected by cancer.

“We know how difficult a cancer diagnosis can be for young people and their families, and we are pleased to be able to support Rachael in guiding young people through their treatment and in making a difficult time a little easier.”