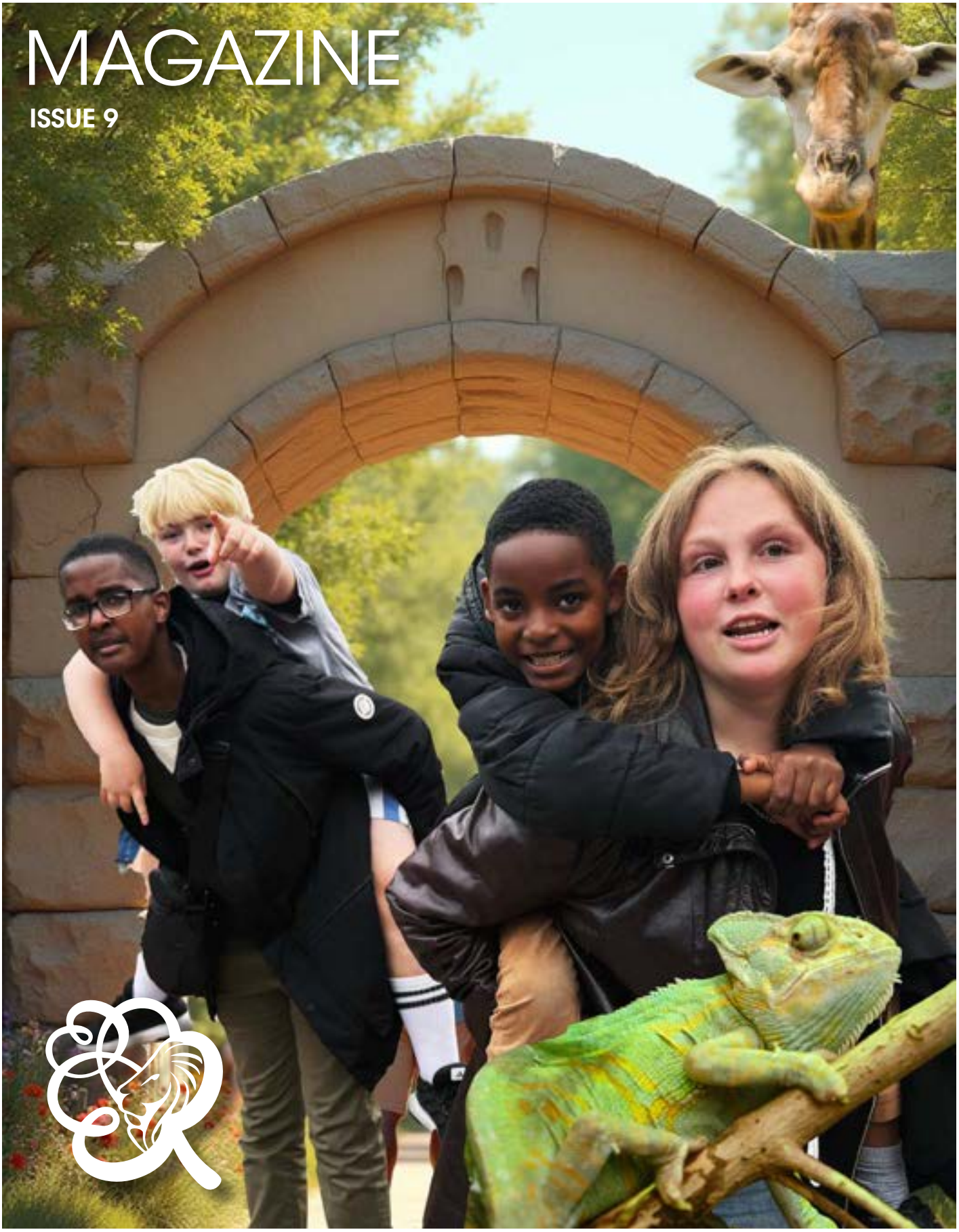
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BRAVEHEARTS

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 9



EDITORS NOTE

Welcome, readers, to issue 9 of BraveHearts Magazine!



Goodness, October already? The year is really flying by, and within these pages, you can find some of the exciting things our BraveHearts have been up to, from the Success Charity summer picnic to a wonderful trip to the London Zoo.

We've introduced some exciting new columns to our magazine, such as Sophie's Cross-Stitch Corner, Serena's Fashion Column, Dear Sophie, and Callum's Metal Music Review and cooking section — this is just the beginning, so watch this space to see more of our BraveHearts' crafts, ideas, recipes, and recommendations. I would also like to thank Matt for sharing his story — let's hope Success' endeavours leads to smoother sailing for us all!

From thought pieces on important issues such as Jamie's mental health, letters to nurses, a fun trivia quiz and much, much more, this issue really has something for everyone. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we've enjoyed putting it together.

Annabelle

BraveHearts magazine is written by members of the Success Charity survivor community.

We are registered as charity, under the name Success Life After Cure Limited.

Our charity number is 1188298

Email:**bravehearts@successcharity.org.uk** to find out more about the charity, its services, or to submit your stories and articles for a future issue.

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THE SMALL STEP TO RECOVERY

In this regular column, Charlie Sharpe shares his small steps to recovery, arguing that even when we are not feeling our best, there are always small, or even tiny steps we can make on our recovery journies…

In 2019, I received a shock brain tumour diagnosis. I was told from the start that it was treatable and that I'd be ok, but that didn't really ease the blow! The next year was one of deciding whether or not it would be safe to treat it without a biopsy, proceed with a mid-brain biopsy on a small tumour, or just to carry on with life. It was an incredibly frustrating time. Finally, in May 2020, I was given the go-ahead for a biopsy.

It was a terrifying situation, in the middle of lockdown, having to go into the hospital by myself, having been told there was a 20% chance I would die, and waving goodbye to my family, who had to drop me off at the door. This was where the idea of small steps first came into play for me. I could only focus on each step in front of me - go to reception, find my room, have a shower… If I stopped to think about the bigger picture, I would have been overwhelmed. I managed to stay positive throughout and, in the end, the biopsy was a success.

As many of us reading Bravehearts may know, the fatigue after any kind of brain surgery can be extreme. So, I had to stick to the idea of focusing on small steps to recover. My day would be broken down into simple steps: get out of bed, have something to eat, go for a small walk, and try to do some gentle yoga. The biopsy confirmed that I had a mid-brain germinoma and that it would be treated with proton therapy in Manchester. I continued with my small steps and slowly but surely, my strength began to rebuild, ready for Proton therapy in Manchester.

Despite the marketing efforts of my oncologist and neurologist, I soon learned that proton therapy was actually very difficult. As fatigue built and my appetite



declined, I reached a point where I began to suspect that the nurse's prediction of my return to work in six to eight weeks might be overly optimistic. In fact, although the treatment was successful (I celebrated being 5 years cancer-free this year!), the following 18 months proved to be the hardest part of the whole ordeal.

For months, I would only be able to get out of bed for less than 3 hours a day to watch some tv, as Doug from the Success Team recalled me telling him when he briefed me on the topic of this column - it felt like a huge achievement just getting my socks on. But that was what got me through - pushing for those tiny wins. At first, it was just a short walk down the corridor and back, then I built up to walking down the drive - maybe 50 metres. Then I built up to a slow walk up the hill to a local cul-de-sac, and eventually a 10-minute loop. After doing this for a month or so, I started to take daily yoga sessions with my friend Eithne Bryan. Again, this started as a gentle yin session each morning, lying in poses for 5 minutes at a time and just getting the lymph moving around the body and eventually built to active vinyasa flows. Each session and walk gave me a strong sense that I was finally recovering. These small, daily wins helped me to stay focused on recovering even when I was admitted to the intensive care unit at UCLH with a swollen brain - as soon

as I was discharged,
I would try and get back to the short walks within a few days.

That was the key thing for me. Breaking everything down into manageable chunks and focusing on each small win. Slowly but surely, I got stronger. Now I go to the gym regularly, I am a certified yoga teacher, and I am working on starting a new career. Of course, I still struggle occasionally - like most mornings when I need to get out of bed! But that determination has kept me going!

This was where the idea of small steps first came into play for me. I could only focus on each step infront of me."



SUCCESSFUL CONNECTIONS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Saturday 28th February 2026 - 1, Wimpole Street, London

"Invisible threads are the strongest ties."

Friedrich Nietzsche

For more details visit successcharity.org.uk

NOURISHING RESILIENCE

A Mother's Journey from Hypothalamic Hyperphagia to Nutritional Empowerment. Vanessa Previero is on a mission to Support Survivors in Reclaiming Health and Happiness.



In 2013, my world was turned upside down when my daughter Millie was diagnosed with brain cancer. The journey through treatment not only brought challenges of its own but also introduced us to the relentless metabolic side effect known as hypothalamic hyperphagia – an unrelenting desire to eat. As Millie's weight skyrocketed, so did the emotional toll on the family, with bullying at school and a constant struggle to recognise the child we once knew.

Fast forward ten years and I am now on a mission to share this story and the transformative power of a nutrition plan I have developed since the end of Millie's treatment, and refined through my MSc in Clinical Nutrition. Having now completed my post graduate degree, I have expanded my practice (https://www.nourshingres.com) and my approach is very much rooted in solid foundations based on my experience and my studies.

Finding Hope through Structure

My journey revolves around a structured eating plan that not only helped Millie achieve a healthy BMI but also restored her energy levels, improved sleep, and fostered a positive, independent mindset. The framework I have developed draws inspiration from research, but also the experience of working with Millie over the year emphasising health, hormonal balance, and weight stability.

Survivor Lucy Maples, under my guidance, her mother's support and with the supervision of Helen Spoudeas, embraced this structured approach, shedding 15 kilograms in eight months. It is important to recognise that the goal is not just weight loss but overall health improvement, challenging the conventional wisdom that often prioritises losing weight over maximising well-being.

Changing Perspectives on Weight Loss

My approach challenges common perceptions about weight loss as follows:

1. **Nutrient-Dense Eating:** Identifying foods rich in nutrition and understanding how to consume them optimally to support digestion and overall health.

2. **Metabolism Support:** Acknowledging that a calorie is a unit of energy and focusing on foods that support the body's metabolism to turn energy into fuel (ATP) rather than storing it as fat.

3. **Health First, Weight Loss Second:** Highlighting that weight loss is a natural by-product of improving health, emphasizing the importance of being **'healthy to lose weight, not losing weight to be healthy' – Diane Schwarzbein.**

Bridging Nutrition and Psychology

The importance of addressing the psychological aspects of survivors' experiences is just as important as diet:

1. **Tailored Nutrition:** Recognising that generic advice like "eat healthy" may not be helpful for survivors dealing with overwhelming food cravings. Instead, a personalized nutrition framework, combined with psychological support, proves more effective.

2. **Emotional Challenges:** Acknowledging the psychological toll of guilt and shame associated with overeating, judgment, and societal pressures on body image; and supporting survivors positively through experiencing a healthier approach to how they can view food.

3. **Incremental Progress:** Encouraging survivors to set small, achievable goals unrelated to food to build confidence, independence and momentum on their journey to health.

The Knowledge Behind the Journey

My approach is founded on understanding the body's reliance on glucose as the main fuel source, reinforced by knowledge gathered as part of my ongoing MSc in Clinical Nutrition. My framework incorporates optimal ratios of carbohydrates, sugars, proteins, and fats, dispelling myths around deprivation and emphasising responsibility, independence and awareness.

The Path to Empowerment

Recognising the daily grind and emotional exhaustion of this journey, my aim is to support survivors through SUCCESS, providing a drug-free pathway to health through food.

My vision is to empower survivors to take pride in their efforts, find independence in their nutritional choices, and maintain a healthy BMI that supports their long-term well-being.

In the end, my story, and Millie's, is not just about overcoming a health challenge; it's a testament to the transformative power of nutrition, resilience, and the unwavering love of a mother determined to find a way to give her daughter the health and happiness she deserves.

METAL MUSIC REVIEW

By Callum

In this regular column Callum shares with us his love for all things Metal…

In the chaotic underworld of Metal music, everyone has their own personal preferences regarding a specific subgenre (e.g. Death Metal, Doom Metal, Black Metal, etc.) or fusion genre (Blackened Death Metal, Funeral Doom, Pagan Black Metal, etc.), the balance or imbalance between melody and distortion, the vocal quality and/or characteristics of the singer(s) and song tracks that cover a particular lyrical theme (e.g. bloody corpses, impending doom, historical folklore, etc.).

As for me, I have various interests - including themes of morbid fantasy, technology, history, life experiences and more - that currently span across 31 individual subgenres and fusion genres.
Plus, I have a particular preference towards:

- That perfect auditory balance between skull-crushing distortion and the catchy melodies that make a song track easy to listen to

- 4 specific heptatonic (7-note) scales – F#, C#, G# and D# – that I feel are most "Metal-oriented"

- The appropriate utilisation of vocals that match with the lyrics from Gregorian chants for that olde-worlde sense of time and gang-singing for a sense of facing difficult life experiences as one (rather than being alone) to shrieks screams or mournful groans for expressing physical and emotional suffering

- Those epic guitar solos – the inhuman shredding, reaching the insane high notes, sudden drops in electronic elements or breakdowns and phantom-like wails– that make a song track totally unforgettable

My current #1 song track, "The Breathless Season Bane" by Perennial Isolation (an Atmospheric Black Metal band from Spain), combines all of the best elements of Metal that make it totally worth listening to.

For starters, it utilises my favourite heptatonic scale – F# (F#, G#, A#, B, C#, D# and F) –; second, it maintains the perfect balance of musical extremities and melodies without one overriding the other; and third, it features the ultimate "calm before the storm" build-up to a Black Metal-style scream which sounds like the lead vocalist is having his soul reaped from his bones.

Instrumentally, the darkly-atmospheric harmonies and shreds of the guitars coupled with the thunderous beats of the drums creates an overwhelming force of freezing-cold, blackened soundwaves that ripple across the death-ridden landscape – save it for the moment of eerie calmness that (as already mentioned) occurs just before the climax!

The cover image for the album itself, "Portraits", is no different in creating that cold, dark and bleak sense of isolation in the dead-middle of Winter's skeletal grasp; a classic yet grim vibe that Black Metal as a whole is notorious for.

A cabin that is set within the heart of both loneliness and desolation – right next to a black-as- death forest – gives a real touch of eeriness and potential fear in not knowing might be out there; wild animals, wailing phantoms or even a dark reflection of one's own inner thoughts. And yet, for metalheads who love this kinda thing, they can appreciate the imaginative touch in what the band were trying to convey and therefore feel that it shares a strong connection with the list of tracks that are featured on its song list.


METAL MUSIC
REVIEW

CHALLENGES AND ADJUSTMENTS

One of our survivor community worked with Doug, (one of the Success Team), to help her prepare for a work placement.

Using the advice provided by Sophie (page 32) we worked on an information sheet to give to their supervisor, and to all the people they are working with.

Everyone appreciated it, and it has worked well, we are sharing it here in case it can help anyone else…

How to help me thrive during my internship

Like every life journey, mine comes with some bumps during childhood, which I have now overcome, but they left some areas of vulnerability.

Your patience and some simple adjustments would make a big difference….

Thank you!

Challenges I can face:	Adjustment you can help with:
I am sensitive to high-pressure situations	Allow me to take a short 4–5 minute break to reset and return refreshed. I will communicate clearly with the team before stepping aside.
Processing large amounts of information at once **Big groups can overwhelm me**	I prefer information given in smaller chunks and articulated steps. I am more comfortable in small groups or one-to-one situations, where I can connect deeply and engage fully.
Remembering instructions during busy times	I may use a notebook to jot down tasks and reminders throughout the day.
Occasionally not catching instructions fully **I wear a hearing aid in both ears**	I may ask politely for instructions to be repeated to ensure accuracy and I appreciate your patience. I can hear well, but when there is a loud background noise I can find it difficult to catch everything. I will let you know when that is the case and I may ask to go to a quieter place.
Regular constructive feedback please	I value open communication and honest feedback. I will use the feedback to build confidence and improve my practice. I am always eager to learn and grow.

Christmas E-Cards



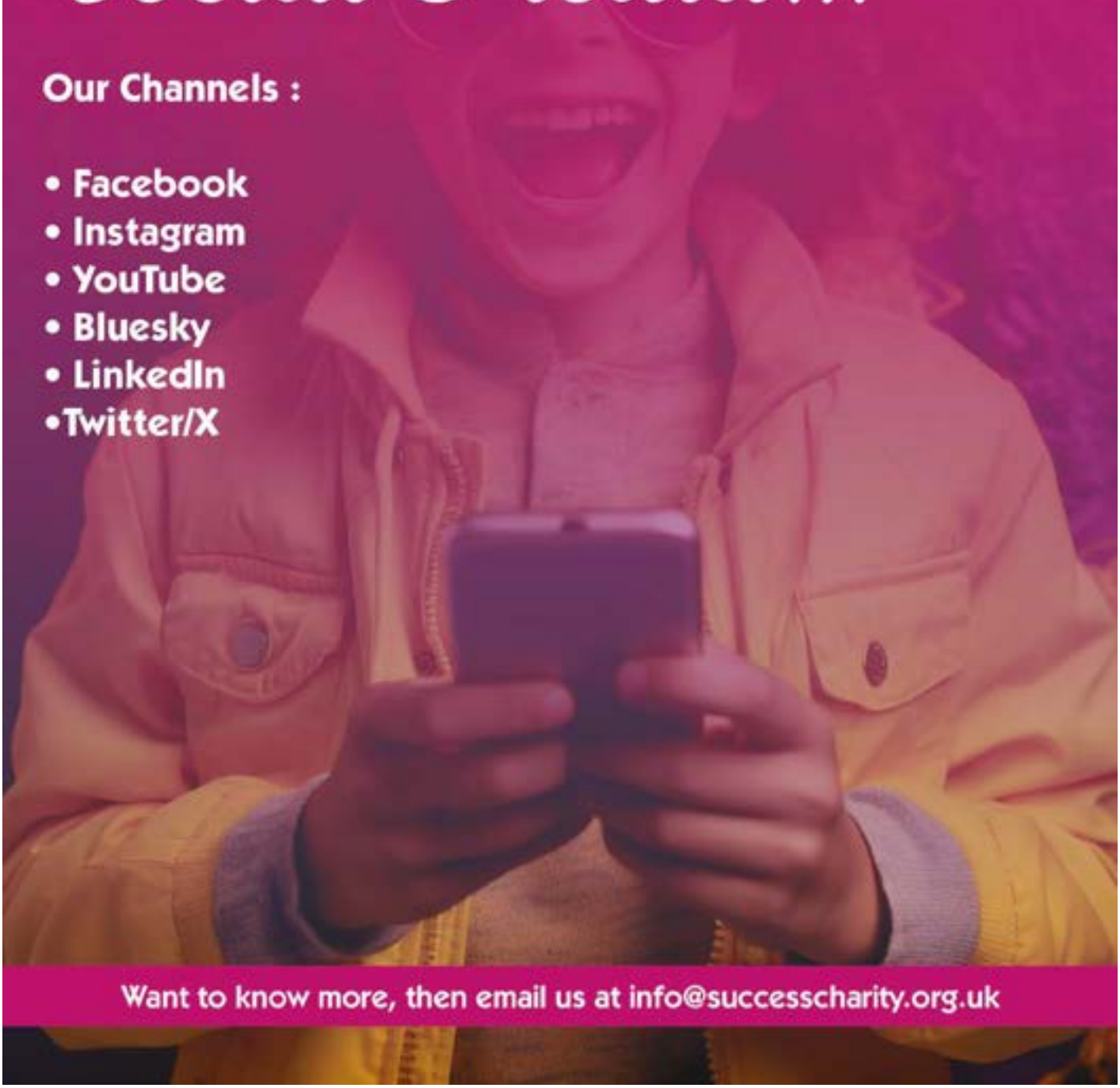
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Want to know more, then email us at info@successcharity.org.uk

SOPHIE'S CROSS-STITCH CORNER

Hey everyone! This is the first edition of Sophie's Cross-Stitch Corner. I'm so excited to get things going.

Well, as the title suggests, I am a cross-stitch enthusiast. I LOVE IT! I like designing my own patterns, sewing them, and then doing it all again. In the past I have made gifts for other people, created card kits and other products that I have sold, and designed works of art for myself. In these articles I hope to share these with you and keep you updated on my current ideas and projects.

In addition, I'd love to hear about what you have been doing. Please don't hesitate to contact me with photos and information about what you've been doing, and if you do, you may feature in my next column!

This edition's photo is of a commission I did for a friend. Her partner had a birthday coming up, and as he loved walking, so she asked me to create a scene in the countryside with a path going off into the distance. I did struggle with this initially, but then I found a photo on the internet which was exactly like the vision I had in my head.

I didn't want to copy the photo, so I used it as a guide for the path, then created my own version of bushes and trees of different sizes. I put the smaller ones higher up near the horizon to create a sense of depth or distance. I also tried emphasising the horizon by using lighter blues and a trick I once came across. To make something even lighter than the colour you're using, you only sew the first diagonal stitch of the cross-stitch (a bit like a tapestry stitch). It includes more of the fabric colour (in this case white, which makes it lighter). I've seen this worked on a black background as well, which makes things darker.



Share your latest crafting creation or crafting tips with Sophie,
email us now bravehearts@successcharity.org.uk

MY JOURNEY TO 'SUCCESS'

I have achieved so much this past year!

I have passed my Open College of the Arts Foundation Certificate in Drawing and I'm now enrolled on a Creative Arts BA Honours with the OCA, which will commence in October 2025.

I managed to achieve my Foundation Degree a month within the designated time. The course provided me with a detailed understanding of the many art forms and techniques that I studied.



Furthermore, I am an enthusiastic and dedicated advocate for the Charity Success.

As a brain tumour survivor myself, I understand that being 'cured' is not the end of the journey. My family and I require support for the rest of our lives and the support provided by Success ensures that we do not feel isolated. It has taken me over 35 years to find other people who understand 100% how I feel.

However, Success has ensured that I am in constant contact with others in a similar situation. For example, on a Monday evening I join an online support group and attend the annual Success conference.

During the summer months I have run a stall on the harbourside at Porthmadog, with the assistance of family, friends and my P. As, selling soft toys, pocket money items as well as a Lucky Dip and Wheel of Fortune, with proceeds being donated to Success.

"I managed to raise over £2,000."

Friendship Group!

Scan ME!

Introducing Our New Online Friendship Group!

Come and join our friendly community. This is a safe, supportive space to connect with others who understand your experience.

Want to know more, then email us at info@successcharity.org.uk

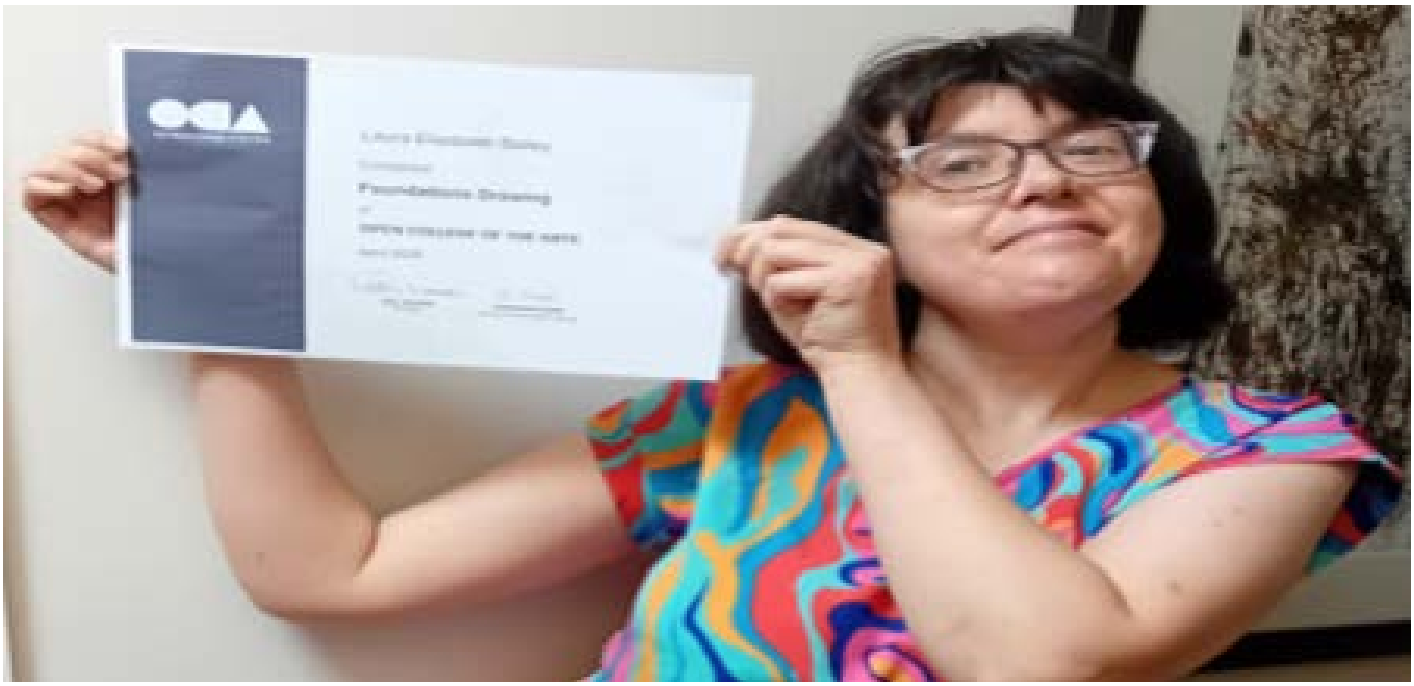
I had great fun raising money during the summer and I met a lot of very friendly people who were also interested in the charity and were eager to buy items and to learn more about Success. I managed to hand out all my stock of Success merchandise, such as bracelets, pens and notebooks.

I would highly recommend that others become involved in fundraising for Success. Not only is it enjoyable, but it is also a highly satisfying experience.

Furthermore, I managed to distribute over 24 collection tins locally, which have been a successful addition to my fundraising.

After such a successful summer of fundraising, I intend to do similar during the Christmas period, securing a place at local festive fairs

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many local business who kindly and generously donated items for sale, or vouchers as prizes for the Wheel of Fortune. I couldn't have achieved what I did without their support.







COOK WITH CALLUM

Talk of Jellyfish is often heard in the Friendship Group (every Monday evening from 6.30 – 7.30) introduced by Callum, often it has to be say encouraged by Doug.

So in this first Cook with Callum, it should come as no surprise that we are creating a Sesame Jellyfish Salad…



INGREDIENTS

- Approx 250g ready-to-eat shredded jellyfish*
- 3 tablespoons premium sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon hot honey
- ¼ teaspoon chili oil, or to taste (optional)
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger root, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons white sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander
- 2 tablespoons spring onion (sliced thinly)

STEP 1 – Rinse and drain jellyfish*; place into a bowl.

STEP 2 – Whisk sesame oil, soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, chili oil, and ginger together in a small bowl; stir into jellyfish and marinate 15 minutes.

STEP 3 – Place sesame seeds in a dry frying pan over medium-low heat; toast until golden, about 1 minute. Set aside to cool, about 5 minutes.

STEP 4 – Stir coriander and spring onions into jellyfish mixture; sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve immediately (with any friends you can talk into trying this dish – the editor) • Yes, there is such a thing!





BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Hello my name is Marina Anagnostou. I am the oldest brain tumour survivor of this group. Success.

I Love My Life and Everything It Has Taught Me and Everything I Have Learnt Along The Way. Thank You Life For Everything.

Music has also been my therapy. Songs with a positive message. " I ain't going to do anything I don't want to" by Bonjovi very much describes my character. I know what I want and no one is going to tell me otherwise.

Also when I was growing up the song that made them famous and so resonated and still does " Living On A Prayer"







We hope you had a great birthday Marina

BraveHearts Live!

You are invited to join us...

Want to know more, then email us at info@successcharity.org.uk

LETTER TO THE NURSES

By Sophie

We all know the role nurses play in our recovery.

Sophie writes an open letter to two amazing nurses who have made a lasting impression in her life…

Steve Russan

My mum kept every card that I received during my chemotherapy. One of them was a picture of a bull, and inside a message from one of the nurses I had formed a bond with … over milk!

You see, when I was young, I drank milk every morning and night. I would always have it warmed up in the microwave and drink it in a beaker/sippy cup.

The nurse was named Steve, and he would call milk 'moo juice'. I don't remember what Steve looked like, what we talked about, or even the origin of the nickname Moo Juice.

But I would so love to speak to Steve just one more time.



Melissa Strickland

When I was 9, I had an operation to remove some cysts that had developed in my brain. This was 6 years after my original diagnosis of optic glioma and the chemotherapy I had to treat it.

During the recovery period of my operation, I met a nurse who remembered me from when I had had my chemotherapy. I had been too young at that time to remember her, but she told me about the things she remembered, and over the time I was recovering we became good friends.

I received a toy goat as a get-well-soon gift that sang the goatherd song from The Sound of Music. One evening I was playing the tune in the hospital wing, and me, Melissa and some of the other nurses were dancing around to the music.

At the end of my recovery period when it was time for me to go home, Melissa helped to remove the cannula from my hand. I was so nervous about having it removed in fear that it may hurt, Melissa explained to me that it wasn't the cannula coming out that hurt (in fact, there is no needle to come out at all – only a tube!). It is actually the masking tape, which as you remove it, sticks to the hairs on your hand and pulls them out. To reduce the pain, I used so many Zoff adhesive remover wipes that Melissa nicknamed me the Zoff-off Queen!

Many years later, I was asked to try and arrange a meeting with some nurses to share some information that we thought they might find interesting and/or useful. Remembering how kind she was, I decided to contact Melissa to ask if she might help me to initiate this meeting, and with the hope that she might remember me. And I was amazed to find that she did!

I would love to speak to Melissa again, nearly 20 years after my operation, and just find out what she's been doing.



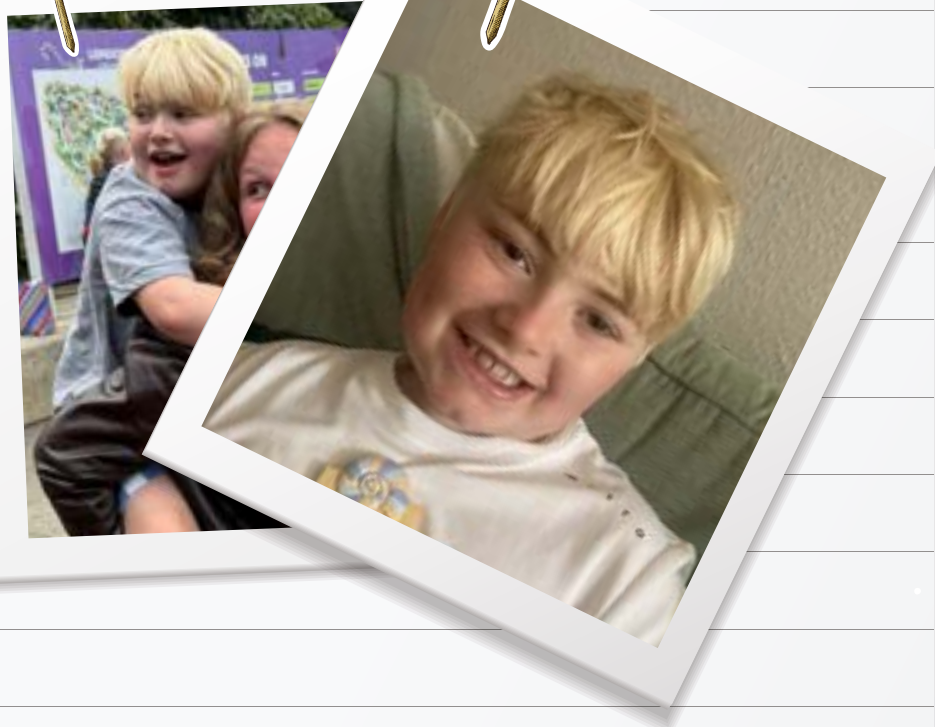
Do you have a letter that you would like to send to a nurse?

Email us:

bravehearts@successcharity.org.uk

How has Success Charity helped me?

Meeting children and adults who are going through a similar things as me. Listening to other brain tumour survivors stories. This helps me know I am not the only one going through it. I'm really happy to see everyone get together at the picnic and conference.



FASHION COLUMN

By Serena

Are you a dedicated follower of fashion?

Our very own fashion guru Serena explores the history of Topshop in the first of her columns on Fashion…

1964 was the year that Topshop was born, the same year that The Beatles were one of the most popular bands in the world, and Kellogg's pop tarts were introduced to the public for the first time, with four flavours.

Topshop was founded by Raymond Montague Burton and part of The Burton Group.
Starting out in a basement of a store in Sheffield called Peter Robinson. Topshop left those basements in 1974, establishing itself as a stand-alone store and appealing to 13–25-year-olds.

In 1978 Topman was born, and opened doors for the first time. The same year that the first non-Italian Pope in 400 years was elected, and the first IVF baby was born in the UK.
Topman was the male version, as Topshop reached to a female audience.

Topman became popular due to the decline in men's tailoring services

Topshop's flag ship store opened in Oxford Circus 1994. The store had 3 floors and was 90,000sq feet big.

In 1997, The Burton group split up and restructured into the Arcadia group, which then purchased Miss Selfridge, Wallis and other big brand shops. In 2002 Sir Philip Green and his wife brought the Arcadia Group for £850 million, the Topshop brand became more popular with high profile collaborations, like the Kate Moss 2007 collection.

The collaboration ended in 2010. In the same year the prime Minister, David Cameron chose Sir Philip Green to lead a government review on spending.

Protesters believed Sir Philip Green wasn't the right person to do that and accused him of tax avoidance. The Topshop in Oxford Circus closed for three hours, leading people to supper-glue their hands to the shop windows in protest. It was later found that Arcadia had paid significant amounts of corporation tax.

With Topshop stores closing because of a "material impact on trading…" during the corona virus pandemic, and being criticized for "lagging behind" on their online shop compared to other fashion shops, Arcadia Group was at risk of collapse, putting 13,000 jobs at risk.

Arcadia Group went into administration in late 2020 with closure of its physical stores, including the flagship store in late 2020 and early 2021.

In February 2021 Asos acquired the Topshop brand online and it became online only.

In August 2025 Topshop began its return into physical retail shops. Topshop celebrated their relaunch on the runway along with fans on the 16th of August 2025 in Trafalgar Square, for their first catwalk in 7 years.

So, what do you think?
Do you like the new Topshop?
Which do you prefer?

Let Serena know at:
bravehearts@successcharity.org.uk



SAILING INTO RECOVERY

By Matt

Matt shares his story…



My journey began long before I stepped on a boat. In 2002, when I was six, I was diagnosed with an astrocytoma brain tumour. Because of its dangerous position, doctors couldn't remove it, though they operated to relieve the pressure of fluid in my head, known as hydrocephalus. For a while, monitoring seemed enough. But at 11 the tumour started growing again, and I faced a biopsy that meant going deep into my brain.

The diagnosis was a rare form of brain tumour, a tanycytic ependymoma. Treatment meant chemotherapy and radiotherapy. It was gruelling – I was tired, weak, and missed out on so much of childhood. The radiation damaged my pituitary gland, leaving me dependent on hormone replacement.
I also live with short-term memory problems and anxiety. These after-effects didn't just disappear once treatment ended. They followed me through school, friendships, and into adult life.

At the same time, I realised recovery wasn't only about medicine. I had to take ownership of my wellbeing – eating carefully, exercising, and finding ways to manage stress. Those lifestyle changes surprised even the doctors. They didn't erase the challenges, but they gave me a foundation to build on.

Sailing arrived in my life when I was 14, through a four-day trip with the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust. At first it was just something new to try. Looking back, though, that first trip wasn't only about ropes and sails – it was about rediscovering myself after years of being defined by illness.

I still remember travelling to Southampton, nervous but excited, meeting others my age who had also faced cancer. On those boats, we weren't patients – we were young people cooking together, laughing, and learning. Water fights on deck, BBQs on the beach, and the thrill of steering for the first time all reminded me that joy was still possible.

Sailing gave me freedom from the shadow of treatment. Out at sea, life felt lighter, with room for both fun and quiet reflection. It also gave me belonging. After so much time away from school, I often felt out of step with people my age. On the boats, friendships formed quickly. We learned together, shared the work, and had space to enjoy the journey.

From 2010 to 2015 I returned on trips, each time growing in confidence. By 2016, I wanted to give something back. I trained as a volunteer with the Trust, and by 2017 I was supporting other young people regularly. Over time, I worked towards becoming a skipper. That journey wasn't just about building miles – it was about finding the confidence to lead and showing that recovery doesn't have to limit what's possible.

Recently I achieved my Yachtmaster Certificate, a milestone that means more to me than words on a page. It represents persistence and refusing to let setbacks define me. It shows that the boy who once lay in a hospital bed, anxious and unsure of his future, could grow into a skipper trusted with a crew and a vessel.

One day, I hope to take that further by skippering for the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust, supporting young people just as I was once supported.

But sailing is only part of the story. The long-term effects of treatment remain with me. Short-term memory issues and anxiety are daily realities. At times, in education and work, I've faced barriers to getting even simple adjustments. Working in large media organisations and later the Civil Service gave me first-hand experience of how little awareness there can be of hidden disabilities. It left me feeling unseen.

This is why Success Charity has been so important. It has helped me realise that life after cure isn't about snapping back to "normal." It is about navigating the ongoing challenges while still building a meaningful life. Success gave me the confidence to speak openly about the realities of life beyond cancer and to see my lived experience not as a weakness but as a strength.

Sailing taught me that recovery is about discovering who you can become after illness. Success reminded me that the same lessons apply on land. Together they have helped me live more fully – not in spite of my challenges, but alongside them.

If I could share one message with anyone navigating their own storm, it would be this – never give up, never say never, and never stop dreaming. You may not choose the battles life throws at you, but you can choose how you meet them.



Never give up, never say never, and never stop dreaming

"WHY MENTAL HEALTH SHOULD NOT BE NEGLECTED"

By Jamie

In the first of what we hope will become a regular column, Jamie takes a deep dive.

If I were writing to my younger self with advice about mental health, to tell you the truth, my younger self would not have listened. I think a lot of people at the time were trying to help me with my emotional and behavioural difficulties, and I was not someone who would see their point of view, do what I was told, or ever believe I was wrong.



Unfortunately, as a result of this warped and distorted thinking, a damaged sense of who I was, a complete distaste for the entire world and a seeming ineptitude for social activities, I ended up in some dark situations, surrounded by bad influences, although I'm now in a place where I believe that all of those things had to happen to get me where I am today.

I will be doing a bit of speaking about a few bullets points I put together which mainly boil down to the "glass half full" philosophy, but first I will explain why. We, as human beings, will generally mould our reality to what we believe, and we are suckers for being proved right. So, if we believe that, "the world is a bad and scary place" then we will actively look for things that reinforce that. The same with, "everybody hates me" or "I'll never feel okay" or "nothing will ever change." These are all things that I have believed, and from my experience, I was right every time. So, that is why I believe mental health is so important – it affects everything in your life!

With all that being said, however, there is nothing easy about hearing the words, "You have a brain tumour." I cannot guarantee this will be an easy experience for you, and I know that so many brain tumour survivors have different lifelong struggles, a lot of which I have not experienced as yet, and I can only express how truly sorry I am for the fact that you are in this situation. All I can say is that I wish every single brain tumour survivor finds the help they need, when they need it, and that you find something about this experience that makes you stronger, and some peace and happiness in your own life and future. I cannot express enough how much strength and happiness that I have found in getting involved with Success, and how much understanding there is between every single one of us survivors. If you are reading this, you found us too, and I am grateful you've made that step towards your recovery.

After a long period of soul-searching, I've found various things that have helped me which I have tried to boil down to a simple list which I sincerely hope can help you in your journey. I shall do my best to conclude by mentioning all the things that I have found helpful to resolving my difficulties at the end, but for now, the list:

"The invisible disability"

You may feel alone right now, and that no one truly understands what you're going through. "The doctors don't understand," "my friends don't understand" or even, "I don't even understand." Unfortunately, no matter how close someone is to us, they

may not really fully grasp how much of a challenge it is to go through what you are going through right now.

Perhaps one of the most difficult things about living post brain tumour diagnosis is nobody told you exactly what to expect when you first arrived in that doctor's office or hospital where they told you that you needed treatment, or at least, if they did, living with those things is a whole different ball game.

The conversation that was had with me at the time of the brain tumour being found on the scans was actually just had with my parents, and that might be your experience as well, although when I was told about the tumour, and the fact that I'd need surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, it now seems a distant blur. The question must have been asked, "What will life be like afterwards?" to which I'm certain the answer was something along the lines of, "We can't be sure."

For years, I eventually even convinced myself that there was nothing wrong with me anymore. I had been "cured" 5 years post chemotherapy, and obviously, the surgery, chemotherapy and radiation couldn't have any lasting effects, could they? I was clearly making it all up! All the pain was just an excuse, all the fatigue was just because I was lazy, all the headaches were just a cry for help, all the mood swings were me attention seeking.

I now have a better understanding of how pain can express itself in so many different ways, many of which I do not fully understand, although my own physical and emotional pain are hard to differentiate, as they seem to exacerbate each other. When I am feeling run down, tired or depressed, these things become harder to deal with as my back pain or neuropathy can make it harder to get a refreshing night of sleep. The same goes with if I have a migraine that day, or I did a small amount of walking and my back hurts, when I find that I become a lot more irritable, frustrated, or just isolate myself from the world.

Do not ever let anyone ever underestimate what an immense change it is to go through treatment for a brain tumour, to be left with chronic pain, fatigue, sight or hearing loss, hair loss, adrenal insufficiency, mood changes, strokes – the list could go on forever. Trying to explain what living is like post brain tumour to my younger self would be like trying to explain to a fish what it feels like to breathe on land. I don't think I would have had any comprehension back then, so do not let anyone take away from your story! It is yours, and nobody else has the authority to tell it.

"Being okay with yourself before you can be okay with anyone else"

A quote from Robert Holden: "Beware of destination addiction… the idea that happiness is in the next place, the next job, and the next partner. Until you give up the idea that happiness is somewhere else, it will never be where you are."

I should preface this next paragraph by saying that nothing I am about to say diminishes the sympathy I have for anybody who has or is currently going through treatment for a brain tumour. Words cannot describe how terrible it was for me to realise that there are things in life I would really like to be able to do, that I think I should be able to, but since my tumour I find I cannot anymore. One of the most prominent on that list is studying, which I find my fatigue and brain fog have hindered to extremes since my treatment. There is also difficulty around exercise, or even housework with the neuropathy and back pain I have been left with.

Unfortunately, the unattainable in life really is just that sometimes, but if I can take a positive out of that situation today, then it is just how grateful I am to know where I am in life more than ever and understand to some extent what my current strengths and weaknesses are.

Life becomes so much easier when you shift your attention to the things you have, the things you are actually able to change or control. I spent the first 23 years of my life

with my entire focus centred on what I didn't have, the other things I wanted, the things that I thought were wrong, unjust, and completely out of my control. They say that the grass is greener on the other side, and my truth is that when I reached the other side, it was still never good enough, and I realised how much I missed being where I just came from and wanted that back.

There was nothing lower on my list than accepting the things that I could not change in life or letting go of the anger that was keeping me stuck, because all of my anger was justified. I was right to be upset that my brain tumour and treatment had disrupted my life and my future. I was right to be upset that I had a difficult life at school and at home. I was right to tell everyone how unfair it was and be angry at everyone all of the time because anyone would act like me if they had my life.

A good friend of mine said to me once, "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?" I never truly understood what he meant until I stopped expecting anything of anyone else. If I genuinely wanted peace within my life, it had to start from within. This included coming to terms with the fact that everything in the past has happened, and I am not in a position to change that fact, and must focus my attention into the present moment in the hope of creating a better future, as there is absolutely nothing else I have any control over – no matter how justified I am, or how unjustified the circumstances were.

"Sense of self"

So, that was a bit about knowing where I am, but to be honest, I had to start with knowing who I am.

Unfortunately, I spent a good portion of my life beating myself up for things that were completely out of my control, or just not my fault to begin with, which led me to not knowing whether I was a good or a bad person, whether I deserved anything good in life, or whether I should be alive at all. I couldn't believe for one second that anybody would want the best for me, and when people paid me compliments, most of the time I proceeded to shrug them off or just convince myself that they were lying and wanted something from me.

The problem with looking for validation outside of myself was that it was never enough for me. I never felt it was dependable and always on tap when I felt I needed it, and when I did get it, it never changed how I felt about myself. A good friend told me at the time, "If you had a best friend, you'd want the best for them, wouldn't you? Would you make them something good to eat something healthy for dinner? If they were feeling tired, would you tell them to get an early night? Okay, now do those things for yourself!"

That was as simple a start as it took for me to actually practically change some things about what I was doing. I was filling my head with the most horrible thoughts, fears and words that I could imagine, and subconsciously telling myself horrible things about myself. I couldn't reach into my head and pull out the negative thoughts, and I've found the only way to get anywhere towards removing them has been to try and fill my head with better things.

So instead of, "everyone hates you" or "you shouldn't have even bothered" it would be things like, "I love myself" or "you did the best you could" and so on. That might seem weird or alien to you (believe me, it did to me) but I just did these things until I believed them, and it was the best thing I could have ever done for myself.

Once I was better able to be at peace with who I was, it was a lot easier to let people in my life go who weren't good influences, or positive people to be around. By letting people stay in my life who tell me negative things, I'm subconsciously telling myself that that's what I deserve.

Did I deserve a brain tumour? Probably not. Unfortunately, after telling myself that was exactly what I did deserve for years, I started to believe it, along with everything else I was telling myself, whilst seemingly actively

trying to do negative things for myself or surround myself with negative people. It doesn't make it true, but in some deluded way, I was right, and deeply unhappy. To be completely blunt, telling myself something different probably wouldn't have made the experiences I had at the time much easier, although now I'm able to realise that I could have saved myself so much emotional turmoil later on if I had been a bit nicer to myself.

Hobbies

One of the main things that has carried me through in low moments has been the ability to creatively express how I'm feeling. It doesn't mean that I'm necessarily able to practice my hobbies during those times, or even be very good at them, but they are something I am able to do that help me feel better, and not only do I enjoy doing them, but looking back on my experiences with them can make me feel quite happy. Being in a place where you feel happy and contented can open any number of doors, particularly if you are in a position where you could use one of your talents to forge a career path or help others using your gifts.

I personally enjoy writing, which could include standalone poetry or song lyrics, short stories and more, as well as being partial to guided meditation. I love listening to music throughout the day, and I take headphones with me pretty much wherever I go. I've got friends who love the same, but also people who enjoy quite different kinds of things such as playing instruments, arts and crafts, running and more. I find lots of interesting and cool meditations and techniques online, although technically, these could all be classed as forms of meditation, as they help bring one into the present moment and quiet the thinking mind!

Whatever it is one enjoys, I'm a strong believer in doing it. To quote a film, "I'm not normally one for giving advice, but under the circumstances: Find something that makes you happy and do it. Everything else is just background noise."

Mental health treatment pathways

I personally have had quite a lot of difficulty surrounding the mental health pathways, and to tell you the truth, for a long time I thought the entire system was completely against me and didn't want to help me at all.

To give a bit of context, very soon after I finished my high dose course of chemotherapy treatment in 2013, my mood and emotions became extremely volatile. The psychiatrist at the hospital gave me a low dose of an antidepressant as a trial which I reacted very badly to, and I ended up in the treatment room of a local private GP who gave me a prescription for an antipsychotic, on the basis that I have an urgent consultation with a psychiatrist in London. I quickly formed a strong relationship with him, although my life at home didn't improve much, and over the next 10 years I had been prescribed countless medications, got myself into unending trouble with drugs, the police, and in the end, I couldn't see a way out.

I never considered the fact that I needed to deal with the whole picture, including my life at home and personal choices. I am not personally of the belief that addiction is a choice, but after burning most of my bridges, destroying everything around me, and losing part of myself, I finally made the decision to give everything up, as I could see nothing would ever get better if I continued to engage in drug taking, and the reckless behaviour that so often goes with it.

For the better part of 2024 I was suicidal, psychotic and paranoid, and I didn't know what was causing all of the problems I was experiencing. I lost touch with the private psychiatrist I had been seeing due to some rather manic behaviours I was exhibiting, and because of a tricky financial situation, I felt the local NHS mental health team was my only option. As all the drugs left my body, I suddenly realised that the cancer treatment I had over a decade ago left me with a lot of pain as a side effect, and without a crutch to lean on, I became ever

more depressed and suicidal.

Sometimes for things to get better, they may get more troublesome first, although the longer these worries are left unexplored, the more entangled the ball of thread becomes, and the longer and harder that one has to spend untangling it!

I was enlightened by Dr Spoudeas, along with a good friend of mine that the unfortunate fact is that doctors are unable to treat patients or prescribe medication in a holistic fashion anymore, especially outside their field of expertise. When I presented myself to a local Mental Health crisis unit, as psychiatrists and mental health specialists, they were seemingly unable to deal with me due to some neurological concerns including migraines, neuropathic pain and fatigue which could be related to the brain injury and chemotherapy. When I saw the neurologist, I explained that I had previously been prescribed medication which helped the pain and fatigue symptoms, although she, as a specialist neurologist, was unable to prescribe psychotropic medication.

I've been waiting for a neuropsychiatric appointment to deal with the problem as a whole, and I have just received an appointment date for the 16th September 2025. Thus far, the responsibility for my care has fallen wholly on the GP, and through no fault of their own, they have not been properly equipped to manage what is in fact a complex and multidimensional situation. The point is that the referral is being made, and I'm very much looking forward to this appointment.

No matter if the help you need seems worlds away right now, it is out there, although knowing how to ask for it certainly helps. If in doubt, and you feel it would help you, I wouldn't hesitate to ask your GP or 111 for advice on the next steps. A quick search on Google for services near you could also be promising. I would note that contacting Success as I did was one of the best decisions I could have made, and they're very keen on hearing from everyone, everywhere, who's had a brain tumour diagnosis before their 25th birthday.

To sum it up:

First, I needed to work out where I was, then I needed to work out who I was, say kinder things to myself, find joy through hobbies, and try and access the help and support I really need. I can also say that finding the right psychiatric medication has also played a massive role in helping me feel more back to normal than I have ever been, but I honestly believe that without every single one of these things, I don't believe I would feel anywhere near okay right now.

I understand that it would be helpful to be at all dishonest, so I would add that things have not been easy up to this point and are still not perfect. Physical pain will so often translate into mental and emotional frustrations, and there is still some difficulty with management of my physical conditions, although with the help of all the things I have explained in this chapter, I find that life is indescribably better compared to if I were to leave a single one out.

The things that have really helped me turn a corner would include talking therapy, the right balance of medication, a healthier lifestyle, as well as self-help like journalling, shadow work and meditation. Self-care has also been crucial. As they say during the safety announcement on an aeroplane, "Put your oxygen mask on first, before helping someone else with theirs!". That meant things like surrounding myself with positive influences, being kind to myself and enjoying my life, in the best and healthiest ways that I can.

As I said at the start, the reason I believe mental health should not be neglected is it affects absolutely everything. Today, as a result of making it one of my priorities, I'm writing this as a 25-year-old, feeling more peace and joy than I could have imagined after my brain tumour, heck, even a year ago! I have the ability to be there for my grandmother today, who has been there for me since my diagnosis, and be someone she can talk to and trust. I have friends in my life who I can talk to and trust,

and I have opportunities in my life to be useful.

This is by no means to say that the work is anywhere near completed, and I am well aware that my journey of healing myself will never truly be finished. There will always be something to work on, something that happens in life where I need to take extra care of myself and so on. I know that if I take my mental health for granted, I run the risk of quickly ending up not far away from where I came from in the first place.

More than anything, I understand how hard it is to stay positive when going through a brain tumour, whether that is the diagnosis, the treatment, the follow up appointments, the scans and subsequent anxieties that arise – both for you and for those around you - or the consequences that you may encounter on your journey onwards, which could be the result of any of the things on this list. Like I said at the beginning of this chapter, if I was speaking to my younger self right now, I would have paid no attention to any of this. As someone who can't force anyone to listen to me (a fact which I denied for years), I can merely tell you what has helped me and my mental health, although I have the sincerest hope that you are able to take something from it.

I would just like to make it abundantly clear that I would never take it upon myself to tell anyone else what would work for them with complete certainty – anything that I have mentioned is entirely personal, and for the mainstay found through an arduous process of trial and error. Your journey is personal to you, just like your beliefs, your values and your personality. Although I can say what worked best for me, it would be up to anyone else to find out if it worked for them too.

I also understand that some people are living with consequences of the injury and treatment that I have not experienced, for which I feel nothing but sympathy. I sincerely hope that you are able to pull through whatever it is you're going through right now, and I wish you the absolute best on your journey. Nothing but the best of luck from me and from us all, and perhaps you'll find us at Success!

In the next issue of BraveHearts, Jamie will be doing a deep dive into Independent Living…



Jamie is a man of mystery, and try as we might, we have yet to be able to take a photograph of him…

SUCCESS SUMMER PICNIC

Community Picnic

We had a great time at our Success Picnic at Regent's park.

We chatted, sipped cold drinks under the summer sun, and Helen even danced the afternoon away…





















Dear Sophie is our new column, where our very own Sophie Roberts answers your questions.

Question: Should I tell my employer about my medical condition, and if so, when?

Answer: This is always a tricky one, and a question that I've heard many times. At the end of the day, it's a bit of a judgement call. My experience is it's better to tell your employer – that way you're more likely to get any support you may need.

For example, you can apply to Access to work and your employer should purchase any specialist equipment they recommend.
It also gives you justification if something happens that wasn't your fault. For example, when someone gives me some oral instructions, I would find it hard to remember them all as I have processing difficulties. If my employer doesn't know this there is no justification for me forgetting something. Telling them at this stage, when I have made a mistake does not look good.

Of course, it is also your responsibility to find coping mechanisms for challenges such as this. It's no good blaming everything on your condition. You can do anything you put your mind to, you just need to find something that works for you. For me, in this example, it's my responsibility to do what I can to remember the information that was given to me by doing all that I can – I ask them to repeat the information and give me more explanation if necessary, and I write things down wherever possible.

The challenge of course is when do you tell them, and how. At the interview, after working there for a day – a week – a month, or when the occasion arises (i.e. after something has happened which needs to be justified). Well, you can dismiss the last one. As I said, don't leave it to the last minute to tell your employer else you won't have a leg to stand on.

Here's what I think; you should tell your employer as soon as possible so that they know and understand what your challenges are and what you need. That's the when. The how is the judgement call. I wouldn't write it in your CV for example. Whilst there's no harm in doing that, I think it's better to let your CV show the experience that makes you a good candidate for the role (bear in mind, it may do just that!).

I would mention it at the interview stage, but only if the moment arises – towards the end, like an additional question when they are concluding and ask if there's anything else you'd like to say. Keep it brief – for me, I might say: I have a visual impairment and some challenges when it comes to processing information due to a medical condition I had when I was a child. Then I would add a positive spin: But given the right support, I am able to learn and adapt to any challenges that may arise.

Question: How do I cope when I have friends at school who are going for a bike ride, and I can't go with them because of issues with my balance?

At times I feel excluded.

Answer: These are the questions I find the hardest, because just like you I struggled at school. I felt isolated and alone and had no idea what to do about it. All I can do is share with you what I have learned since I left school.

The second I left school I had a much clearer mind and was able to step back and sort out in my head what had happened. I realised that whilst I had struggled and gone through some tough times myself, I had been stuck in a bubble, only thinking about myself and seeing things through my eyes.

I began to consider what the people around me must have been thinking and seeing. They might have seen me struggling but not understood why or what I was going through. Or maybe they did know what I was going through but didn't know what to do or how to help me with it.

I then thought about how yet again all these considerations were centered around me. What if the people around me were going through problems and struggles of their own and were wrapped up in their own bubble. Perhaps, whilst it appears that they are taking part and having fun, they feel other emotions that they are trying to hide.

The reality is that we can't feel included all the time. But if you do feel excluded, maybe try talking about it with your friends. It may be unreasonable to ask them to stop doing the activities that you can't participate in, but perhaps you could suggest they alternate the activities you can't do with the ones you can. You could also try and find other ways that you can be involved in the activities. For example, perhaps your friends could race their bikes, and you could be at the finish line with the timer to determine who wins.

To send Sophie your question, just drop us an email at: **bravehearts@successcharity.org.uk.**

A DAY AT THE ZOO



You asked for more events when we can get together, build friendships and become a strong and supportive community...

Our visit to London Zoo was our first autumn meet up. The day involved, meeting some incredible animals, playing tag, piggy back rides, pizza, burgers and ice cream...



TRIVIA QUIZ

By Callum

1. **Who founded Great Ormond Street Hospital in 1852?**

   A) Joseph Lister
   B) Charles West
   C) Robert Liston

2. **Where did Duck (formerly Montague) say his nickname originated from in "Thomas The Tank Engine"?**

3. **How long ago did life first appear on Earth?**

   A) Approximately 1.7 billion years ago
   B) Approximately 2.7 billion years ago
   C) Approximately 3.7 billion years ago

4. **What kinda dish did Elmer Fudd always say he was gonna turn Bugs Bunny into?**

5. **Which subgenre of Metal most-typically utilises deep, guttural growling vocals?**

   A) Death Metal
   B) Doom Metal
   C) Black Metal



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CHRISTMAS CAROL CONCERT

HOPE, JOY & RECOVERY

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10th of December

6.30pm - 8.30pm



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www.successcharity.org.uk

SALLY'S POEMS

These poems were written by Sally our community poet, at our spring conference this year.

Do you have poems that you would like to share?
Email: **bravehearts@successcharity.org.uk**

Success

Success is here to

Amplify our voices
Advocate our needs
Accelerate and Innovate

With Success I know
I'm more than surviving,
I'm not alone.

Success is our light
brightening our futures
reminding the world
we have much to give –
be patient with us
let us prove ourselves!

Brain tumours are part
of our story. One chapter
but not the whole book.

With Success I know
we can write the rest.

Remarkable

Doctors tell me I'm remarkable.
A fighter who beat the tumour
not just surviving but thriving
when the odds were stacked against me.
They see the tests, the treatments,
what my young body endured
and say yes, you are indeed remarkable.

I'm happy to tell you
my life now is remarkably
unremarkable.

There's chaos and joy
in the everyday magic
of night feeds, nappies,
gas bills, play dates
movie nights with my wife.

It's humdrum, monotonous
the weeks slide by
and normality is bliss because
my life now is remarkably
unremarkable.

A Sister's Story

You were six and I was nine
when the tumour left you

blind. Overnight our world
tilted, we were lost

to each other. You, in hospital
for operations and tests

me, made speechless
by grief and loneliness.

I spoke only to my journals,
scripts and songs.

But slowly, I learned
to face the pain, head on.

And so I came to see
just how much we've grown

our hearts, our minds,
your depths of resilience.

How grateful I am to you,
my beautiful teacher, my sister.

Storybook

Thirty-five years since
my tumour was cured.

It took over my childhood
but I remember how it felt
to escape
into the warmth of a book.

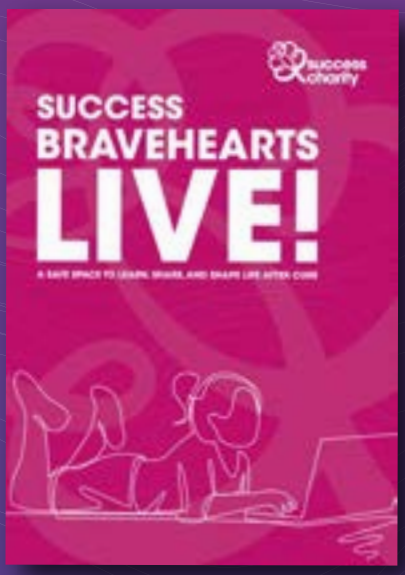
Magical tales set
my imagination alight
held me tight, kept me strong,
when real life ground me down.

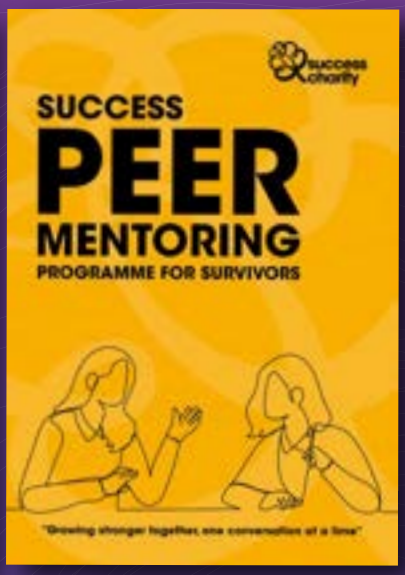
Now, I tend this flame.
I build worlds with words
and pictures, create storybooks
for children to escape into.

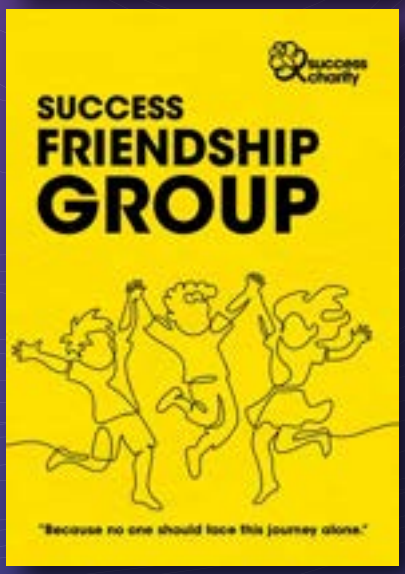
I'm writing my story
for me and for them.
Soon I will hold the book in my hands
and say yes —
I did it.

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Have you heard about our 4 survivor services?









SUCCESSCHARITY.ORG.UK

Want to know more, then email us at info@successcharity.org.uk