

Aurora

Newsletter for Northern Lights

The experience of
Christmas in Lapland
for seriously ill children

Issue 6 - 2012

25 YEARS



Northern Lights
Children's Charity

Northern Lights is a children's charity which takes seriously ill children from the North West of England on 'holidays of a lifetime' to meet Father Christmas in Lapland.

The children nominated for these trips are aged between 6 and 11 and are suffering from life threatening illnesses, usually cancer related. The aim of our holidays is to give them the experience of Christmas in Lapland and to gain some well-earned rest from their daily hospital routines.

25 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Looking back – with your help over the past 25 years we have provided 'holidays of a lifetime' to Lapland and Florida for over 350 children with life threatening or serious illnesses.

To celebrate our 25th Anniversary we are trying to enlist the help of 25 new supporters who can run different fund raising events, find at least 25 schools or other organisations willing to support us during the year or people to commit to a single donation or monthly standing order, however small the amount, and aiming to raise at least £25,000 in total in our 25th year.

We know this is a big challenge, but if you could consider being one of our anniversary fund raising supporters or even organise a fundraising event, please contact us by calling Karen Jones on 0151 336 2515 or via email on info@northernlightscharity.org.uk.

We are hoping that 2012 will be our best ever fund raising year, allowing us to take even more children on this wonderful holiday of a life time. A number of events are already in the planning stage including an anniversary raffle, a number of runners are running

marathons while raising funds for us, the Mayor of Neston has selected us as his charity of the year, we are the nominated charity for the Chester 1/2 marathon, (see later in the newsletter, for further details) and we are running our Anniversary Ball on the 30th November.

However to reach our goal we will need to fund raise throughout the whole of 2012 and we look forward to hearing from you if you have any ideas or can help us. **See inside this newsletter for examples of fundraising which has helped Northern Lights in the past.**



WHAT KIND OF CHILDREN DO WE HELP? THE 2011 GROUP

I was lucky to be one of the adults going with the children on the most recent trip, in December 2011 and so can give some insight into what the holiday meant for them.

The 6 boys and 6 girls were aged between 6 and 10. Eight had been nominated for the holiday by staff of the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital and 4 had been treated by Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool.

Five of the children are in the last stages of treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. This treatment takes 2 years for girls and 3 years for boys, involving a first 6 months of intensive chemotherapy with many hospital stays, followed by less intensive drug therapy, including a monthly general anaesthetic for treatment to their

spinal cord. Two other children had been treated for orbital sarcoma, which had for each involved the loss of an eye and use of a prosthetic eye. Two more had undergone heart surgery for congenital defects and were still receiving drug therapy. Wilm's tumour and Non-Hodgkins lymphoma were the diagnosis for 2 other children, treatment of each involving long term chemotherapy. And finally, 1 child suffers from cystic fibrosis, which means a lifetime of drugs and daily physiotherapy.

None of this would have been obvious to anyone watching the group of excited children checking in at Manchester Airport, but over the next few days I spent with them it was clear how this holiday was helping with their recovery. Just being selected for this holiday had already boosted their self

esteem, making them 'special' for a positive reason for a change instead of for negative illness-related reasons.

The children had an action packed 4 days, with all sorts of activities in the snow, swimming in an amazing pool complex, and visiting Santa in his village. I watched them grow in confidence and independence through both small everyday achievements such as choosing their clothes to wear each day or food to eat from the hotel buffet and through succeeding in new challenges such as tobogganing or taking a ride on a husky dog sleigh. While these may be seen as everyday learning experiences for most children in this age group, for those who have had a long period of illness and dependency on others for their care, these opportunities for development may have been missed and this holiday provided the chance for them to learn that they are capable of being more independent, boosting their confidence and self esteem. They all did everything as much as they wanted to, under the watchful eyes and encouragement of the adult helpers. As well, of course, the different experiences of this special holiday would usually be new and exciting for any child of this age so there was a lot to remember and tell family and friends about.

The best moment for me was the introduction to Santa himself in his Post Office, when a group of boisterous children became silent and awe-inspired, and were delighted to be in a group photo with him. When we asked the children at the end of the holiday what the best bit was, the answer was 'everything'!

Wendy Fiander



NORTHERN LIGHTS IS NOW ON FACEBOOK (Northern Lights Children's Charity). WE USED THIS FOR THE FIRST TIME TO KEEP THE FAMILIES UP TO DATE DURING OUR TRIP IN DECEMBER 2011.



Here are some of the comments added to Facebook when the children returned from their special holiday:

Thank u to everyone for taking such good care of our son. He is full of it. Thanks for taking him on a trip of a lifetime he will never forget it, lots of love and merry christmas xxx xx x

Our son has only just got to bed hasn't stop talking about all the amazin things hes been doing,thanks to northern lights. He has great memories to keep for ever your all amazing people thanks again xxxxx

Our daughter said a big thank you to you all at n.l.c.c. she had a brill time shes not shut up about it she said it was fantastic. thank you for making it possible for her to have a trip of a lifetime thank you again and have a brill happy christmas and a fantastic new year

Thank you northern lights for giving our daughter a lovely time and a trip of a life time she had an amazing time and made some lovely friends im sure she will treasure the memory forever! you all do an amazing job thanks again xxxxx

We are home with our very excited little girl. She's had such a wonderful time and not taken a breath yet since we picked her up, telling us all the things she's been up to. Thank you so much for taking her and Happy Christmas to all you wonderful people xx

Our daughter was talking in her sleep last night, shouting out and laughing !! even now, she cant stop telling me about everything you all did, she's been through the photo's on Facebook about 20 times, she cant wait for the dvd, but i think she's a little embarassed about the carol singing, once again thanks to you all, they've all had an amazing time !

You are all very special people and have spread a great deal of happiness with your kindness and genuine warmth these children will never forget these special memories

Just want to thank you all for making my sister have the holiday of a lifetime she came home very happy and really enjoyed herself. Thank you.

Our daughter said a 'HUGE BIG THANK YOU' to you all for such an amazing trip !! she's hasn't stop telling us all about the exciting things the children have done. She had lots of fun with the other children, who she would like to keep in touch with (where are you mum's!) Thank you once again for a magical trip that she will have memories of forever xx

Hi can I just say a big thank-you to everyone at northern lights for such an amazing trip. My son had a brilliant time and hasn't stopped talking about it. Also a thank-you to Brian who did a wonderful job of looking after him. And also you Karen who did a great job in keeping us updated. I will be making a donation to the charity in January and try my hardest to encourage northern lights to be soon sponsored by family and friends in up and coming charity walks/ runs . Thank-you so much again x

Thank you so much !!!! Have wonderful Christmas and I will be raising some funds for you in the new year!!!!!!



We are now on Twitter: @NLights87

FUNDRAISING FOR NORTHERN LIGHTS

Here are just a few examples of the many ways people have raised funds for Northern Lights in the past 25 years. We would like to say a huge THANK YOU to everyone who has been so important in supporting our work.

Perhaps these examples will give you some ideas about raising funds to help us in our 25th anniversary year? If you would like to talk to us about your ideas or projects then please see our website www.northernlightscharity.org.uk for contact information.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- Charity Christmas or Summer Ball
- Pub quiz nights
- Grand National or Halloween Party
- Golf Day
- Raffles and tombolas

REGULAR DONATIONS

- CAF donations
- Pay as you earn
- Gift Aid tax refund
- Easyfundraising
- Recycle4charity



SPECIAL DONATIONS

- In lieu of presents on special birthdays
- In place of sending Christmas cards
- In memory of someone special
- Through a Charity Trust

SPONSORED EVENTS

- Santa dash
- Sponsored slim
- Rainbows and Guides sponsored events
- London Marathon and Great North Run
- Boxing Day dip
- North Pole Marathon
- Duathlon
- Rowing the Channel
- Sponsored spin
- 6 year old doing a sponsored run round his school field



A MESSAGE FROM OUR PATRON



These kids have often spent so long in hospital, with nothing to see but the four walls of their clinical environment, the drip stand, slowly pumping fluids into their veins and the medicines trolley as it arrives with their next batch of unpleasant medicine. They have often endured discomfort, isolation and hair loss as a result of their treatments, and yet they come out to the Arctic Circle and really start to live. The shackles of the hospital environment are for a brief time at least, thrown away, and they can enjoy a normal life as kids again. It was great to witness their energy as they hurled themselves down the snowy slopes on their sleds, and pelted pretty neatly packed snowballs at me and my TV crew from GMTV. The footage that we captured on film of their activities, and of them sitting mesmerised by Santa Claus surrounded by his elves in his very own house was both moving and astonishing. By far the most emotional filming I have ever been involved in.

I am delighted to write in support of the 25th anniversary of the Northern Lights charity coming up on the 22nd April and I can only hope that the charity exists for many many more years to come as its work is so brilliant and inspiring. On two occasions in the past, I have been thrilled and delighted to have gone out to Lapland with a group of wonderful happy and courageous children, and to witness their gorgeous faces light up with pleasure as they have been whisked along on sleds pulled by huskies, driven around on snowmobiles, pulled in sleds by reindeer and presented with presents by the 'real' Santa, under the magnificent umbrella of the northern lights in the arctic sky.

As a doctor, we need moments like this to remind ourselves of why we do what we do, and to drive us to continue to strive to find the answers to the cruel diseases which can affect children and adults alike, and to make us all grateful for what we have, even if it is merely good health. I thank the Northern Lights charity for having included me in the past on their trips and continuing to include me in their activities. I wholeheartedly celebrate the last 25 years of success they have had, and of the wonderful work they do. Long live the Northern Lights charity and here's to the next 25 years.

Dr Hilary Jones

25TH & 30TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Whilst 2012 marks the 25 anniversary of the foundation of Northern Lights, it is also the 30th Birthday of the Chester Half Marathon.

We are delighted to announce that the Cheshire Oaks Chester Half Marathon have chosen Northern Lights as the official race charity for 2012. Chris Hulse, Race Co-Organiser, says "We are pleased to be supporting such a worthy local cause. Each year an amount from the race entry fees is donated to the official race charity. Our runners will also be invited to raise money and together we hope to raise in excess of £10,000 for Northern Lights"

The Chester Half Marathon is being held on Sunday 13th May, starting at the racecourse before heading out of the city past Mollington, through Saughall and Blacon before returning for a spectacular city centre finish in front of Chester Town Hall and Cathedral.

In addition to the half marathon there is the children's fun run around the racecourse which is always popular and attracts up to 500 fun runners. This year there are a number of schools from within Cheshire West and Chester supporting Northern Lights. Many schools, lead by the Blacon primaries, are already committed and are actively encouraging children to take part in the fun run and fundraise.

The race is extremely popular and as in previous years is expected to fill quickly; so enter now at www.chestershalfmarathon.co.uk to secure your place for the big day on May 13th.

If you would like to be part of the Northern Lights volunteer team on race day or to run and raise money for Northern Lights please register as a volunteer or enter the race online (see web link above) and

contact info@northernlightscharity.org.uk for your Northern Lights fund raising pack and further details.



Chris Hulse & Andy White of Active Leisure Events the race organisers

WEST KIRBY BOXING DAY DIP

Boxing Day 2011 saw us helping local fund raiser John McGowan at West Kirby marine lake for the annual Boxing Day Dip. The shrieks above the surf were not the usual seagulls - but madcap people braving the wintry water for a festive dip.

Screams from the wave of fancy-dressed funsters were an accurate thermometer that told exactly how cold the water is on Boxing Day, but it did not stop more than 80 entrants tackling the event at West Kirby, watched by big crowds in the sunny but windy weather that was whipping the water up as the tide came in.

The colourful throng at the Morrison's end of the lake included a smattering of Santas, elves, a fairy, "118" men, lots of other fancy dress outfits and not forgetting the mankini, a sight to be seen, but it was all in a good cause, with a bucket collection and sponsorship all raising funds for Northern Lights.

One brave dipper, Iolene Marie Parry, entered the water in an Hawaiian outfit, has raised over £650 to help send seriously ill children to Lapland in our 25th Anniversary year and has won one of the prize hampers. Another of the hampers has gone to Mark Sargent for dressing up in a Morph outfit to enter the water. We enjoyed seeing all of the different outfits and hope that not too many people caught colds after their dip in the icy water.

Thanks to John for all his hard work in organising this event, especially after the cancellation of last year's event due to the ice on the marine lake. A great event that definitely blew away the festive cobwebs and many thanks to all those who took part and have raised money through their sponsorship to add to our 25th Anniversary fund.



NESTON TOWN MAYOR, CLLR MARTIN BARKER ADOPTS NORTHERN LIGHTS AS HIS CHARITY BALL BENEFICIARY



As my term as Neston Town Mayor moves towards its conclusion, I have decided to organise a Mayors Charity Ball, which is now booked for 28th April 2012. The decision to host a charity ball was easy. The decision to select a beneficiary was not so easy, as there are so many good local causes I could have picked. In my acceptance speech, I stated that I was looking forward to meeting as many of the groups, clubs,

organisations and societies that exist in Neston Town and the surrounding wards and to find out more about the great work happening in our area. Since May 2011 my wife Cheryl and I have been privileged to attend many events and have been humbled to have met so many wonderful people. The work that is carried out behind the scenes in our Community is truly remarkable, and a great credit to those involved. I really believe we live in a great area and we are fortunate to have many caring and compassionate people who live in our town.

We have been honoured to have attended many special events at both the Neston Primary and Neston High School. We have been impressed at the talent and spirit of the young people in our community. It is encouraging to see many societies and clubs that cater for children in our area.

So it is with this thought, that I have selected the beneficiary of the Mayor's charity ball to be Northern Lights Children's Charity. A Neston based charity, Northern Lights has been raising

money to take seriously ill children to Lapland to meet Father Christmas, every December since 1987. The charity works tirelessly throughout the whole year to make this dream come true for seriously ill children from The North West. This year, they are celebrating their 25th Anniversary. Northern Lights hope to take twice as many children this year to Lapland as they usually do, and I hope that the funds raised from the ball will go a long way to help reach this goal for this very special charity.

The Mayors Charity Spring Ball is a black tie event being held on Saturday 28th April at the Grange Country Club at a cost of £38 per head for a three course meal, live music, charity auction and raffle. If anyone would like to organise a table, purchase tickets or donate prizes for the event, please contact Cllr Martin Barker via MTBarker@hotmail.co.uk or Northern Lights via info@northernlightscharity.org.uk and further information and a booking form can be sent out.

25 SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT 25 YEARS

Amanda Powell, Head teacher of The Acorns Primary and Nursery School in Ellesmere Port and Dave Williams, Head teacher of Dee Point Primary School in Chester are set on a mission to find a minimum of 25 schools who will aim to raise £250 per school for Northern Lights to allow children the opportunity to travel to LAPLAND to meet FATHER CHRISTMAS.

Their target is £6,000 and any school who would like to join in their fund raising efforts should contact Mandy by email at:

head@theacorns.cheshire.sch.uk

Schools already committed to help achieve this target are listed below:



The Acorns Primary School
Horns Mill Primary School
Mill View Primary School
Saughall All Saints C of E Primary School
Upton Heath C of E Primary School
Blacon High School
Moulton Primary School
Woodfall Primary School
Whitley Village Primary School
Dee Point Primary School
JH Godwin Primary School
Parkgate Primary School
St. Winefrides Primary School

William Stockton Community Primary School
Lache Primary School
Dorin Park School
Barnton Community Primary School
Rivacre Primary School
Elton Primary School
Ashton Hayes Primary School
Lower Peover CE Primary School
Hoole C of E Primary School
Westminster Community Primary School
Mickle Trafford Primary School
Woodhevs Primary School

Northern Lights is very grateful for the help of other organisations to ensure our holidays are provided for the right children and to make them as special as possible. Here are the views of 2 of these organisations, without who's help we would not have been able to achieve so much.

EDDIE HINCKS, CHILDREN'S CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

My name is Eddie Hincks. I am the family support worker for CHICS (Children's Cancer Support Group) based at Alder Hey hospital.

My first involvement with Northern Lights came in 1992 when my son Colin was chosen by the staff on the



oncology unit to go on holiday to Florida. He had an absolutely fabulous time. He had not been on holiday without us before and obviously we were quite concerned. We had no need to worry as he was so well looked after and returned with so many great memories. I do believe that it helped him to move on after his treatment.

One of my roles at CHICS is to advertise and recruit children for the annual trip to Lapland. This can prove a little difficult with some parents reluctant to allow their child to go on holiday without them. It is at this point that I inform them of the professionalism of the charity, their experience in organising this trip, and

my own experience of letting our son go. I always say to them there may be one problem and that is you may not get the same child back. In almost every case the children return with much more confidence, having made new friends and an experience that will stay with them forever.

To enable me to get at all eligible children I enlist the help of the unit's Macmillan nurses, social workers, ward and clinic staff, as not every family joins our support group and we did not want any child to miss the opportunity of going to Lapland.

To all at Northern Lights, keep up the good work providing this wonderful opportunity for the children.

ROB GOODWIN, COSMOS HOLIDAYS

It is strange as I write this my mind fills with memories and emotions... Each and every year I look forward for one email... Not the letter from the tax office dictating if I owe them



money or not, but the list of the Northern Lights children's names. Once I receive this I know Christmas is just around the corner. Now it is time for me to get ready for their arrival.... The biggest decision I have to make is always which rep will be allocated to the children for their arrival, during the training course we actually mention the children coming over and that the best rep will be allocated the Northern Lights bus, so from then on each and every rep wants to impress. So now we have the reps working hard to impress and I know the kids names, all I need is ski suit sizes, boot sizes, rooms together and of course pre-boarding and seats together on the plane... Oh I forgot, the private visit to Santa's Post office needs to be organised...

As it gets closer to the arrival date, the competition between the reps really steps up, and now it is decision time... Who will it be? Once my decision is made and the transfers are handed out, I enjoy watching the

individuals face light up, however then it soon changes to a look of horror when they realise what a huge responsibility they actually now have. Often or not they ask for a private chat, just so they can be sure they fully understand what is expected from them. Once reassured we set off to the airport in anticipation for the kid's arrival. It is amazing; it appears as if a new lease of life is injected into the team.

Every morning we have a team meeting, usually around 06.30am, this usually consists of feedback and the task list for the day, however for the duration of the visit of the Northern Lights children we usually receive feedback about all the staffs experiences with these amazing young people, the whole team are inspired by each individual child.

Of course the children participate in all the activities, however they have one special treat, a private visit to try and find Santa at his Post Office, the reps carry out this task continuously throughout the month of December, however this visit to Santa's Post Office is unique, because every time we visit there with the Northern Lights children, we find him in his office, no other visit have we ever found him actually in his office. So with the reps excitement and anticipation, they usually start to panic around 30 minutes before the bus is due to depart, so a quick prep talk is always required, to calm their nerves.

The visit is always a success and there are no words to describe the feelings inside

when you see the children's faces, when they actually meet Santa.

On every trip we have a Christmas Feast on the last night of the holiday and they are always great fun, however on the trip when the Northern Lights children are with us the feast always becomes so much more fun and the atmosphere is always incredible, I am convinced that this is because we have some of the most inspirational children in the world at our party.

The final day is always a sad one, and I actually have to brief the staff regarding showing emotions in public and how to control this until all our guests are no longer in view, I cannot describe and would never be able to, how difficult it is to say goodbye to such amazing new friends, and you may not believe me, but these children have made our Christmas special.

Overall the Northern lights children make our Christmas, for the rest of our stay in Lapland and for a long time afterwards, these children remain in our minds, we all feel honoured to have met them and they give each and every one of us inspiration.

We can only ever thank the organisers of the charity and of course the children themselves for us having this experience.

COSMOS
holidays