

# **Research shows power of dream fulfilment for children with life-limiting illness**

July 13 2015, by David Tripp

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Fulfilling the dreams of children with life-limiting illnesses can empower them and their families and could have an enduring positive impact, according to new University of Stirling research.

The three year study, a collaborative research project between the University and [children's](#) charity Dreams Come True, explored the impact of [dream](#) fulfilment - such as a child meeting their hero or visiting a special place - as a potential intervention in the holistic care of children with life-limiting conditions.

Jayne Galinsky, PhD researcher at the University of Stirling, said: "The study showed that fulfilling a dream can create a sense of empowerment and hope for the future, a validation of their illness and a sense of normalisation and engagement in a world outside of illness. It also creates an opportunity for the child and their family to create memories that strengthen family bonds."

For a child and their family, acceptance of their application for a dream fulfilment experience provided validation that the child's condition had been recognised and taken seriously. This was particularly apparent for those children with non-cancer diagnoses.

Selecting a dream gave children a sense of empowerment and control, often lacking in their lives, which extended through the planning of the dream. The anticipation of fulfilling the dream provided a distraction from the illness and a positive focus for the future.

Families who shared dream experiences, such as holidays where several families travelled together, described how their child's illness shifted from its central position in the family to the background.

The dream fulfilment also created memories that became a source of comfort for families who were subsequently bereaved and for surviving children.

Jayne Galinsky said: "It seems that dream fulfilment provides something outside of their normal experience that is a point of punctuation in these families' lives. The dream becomes a significant milestone around which memories are curated and positive experiences can be reinforced."

One negative impact highlighted was post-dream 'blues' that arose for some families in the weeks following the completion of a dream. A better understanding of this effect will help charities understand how to find ways to reinforce a dream's positive impacts.

More than 50,000 children and young people in the UK have life-limiting conditions. Medical advances continue to improve life expectancy but treatments remain largely supportive, increasing the importance of interventions which enhance life experience and wellbeing.

While little is known about the impact of dream fulfilment - few studies have been carried out in this area, with current understanding mainly based on case studies – the Stirling team, headed by Dr Liz Forbat, Reader and Co-Director of the Cancer Care Research Centre in the University's School of Health Sciences, has considerable experience of studying this population of life-limited children.

Jayne Galinsky presented the findings at the 7th International Cardiff Conference on Paediatric Palliative Care, which took place from 8-10 July.

Conference Chair Richard Hain said: "We really need effective psychosocial supportive measures in children's [palliative care](#), and

however difficult it is to do research in this field, we also need good studies to evaluate whether such interventions make a real impact on outcomes for the child and their family.

"This is work that tries to answer that question, and not only in palliative care - it may have relevance to evaluating the impact of psychosocial interventions in other areas too."

Provided by University of Stirling

Citation: Research shows power of dream fulfilment for children with life-limiting illness (2015, July 13) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-07-power-fulfilment-children-life-limiting-illness.html>

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