

Programme Highlights 2025

Hearts & Minds is the home of the **Clowndoctors** and the **Elderflowers**, therapeutic clowns that go to hospitals, hospices, and schools for children with complex needs, visiting children, young people and older adults who live with dementia. We are delighted to share some highlights of our activities that have taken place over the last 12 months. **Our aim is that every child in hospital, hospice care and ASN school should expect to see the Clowndoctors.**

Clowndoctors

he benefits of the Clowndoctors visits:

- Facilitating social connections
- Encouraging playful engagement
- Adapting to emotional and physical needs
- Reducing isolation
- Strengthening family bonding
- Encouraging engagement
- Enhancing emotional wellbeing

Research has shown that visits by the Clowndoctors can reduce the time a child stays in hospital by aiding recovery.

Dr Fraser's story

We received the following email from a doctor, describing the impact of the work of the Clowndoctors:

*"I am one of the junior doctors working on Medical Paediatrics. On Wednesday (possibly Thursday) last week, I was working an extremely busy shift with lots of patients to look after. It was mid-afternoon and I still hadn't had a break/lunch. I was called by one of the wards in a bit of a panic about a young patient (whom I knew) who was getting **very agitated and was scratching and biting at one of her relatives**. At this point, I really wasn't sure what to do. I knew of the case in depth, and I had no idea how I was going to de-escalate the situation. The medical situation was complicated and **there wasn't any obvious medication that could be given to help her calm down**. I was also feeling drained and stressed from a difficult few hours of working. Nevertheless, I headed up to the ward as soon as possible, trying all the while to work out how I would handle the situation that awaited me.*

*"When I arrived on the ward, I was surprised about the **lack of commotion**. As I headed towards the room where I knew the patient was, to my surprise, **rather than shouting and screaming, I heard singing and clapping**. As I got to the door, I saw the patient laughing and smiling at the Clowndoctors who were performing for her. The patient and her father both had a **huge smile** on their face, and everything seemed calm and jovial. The nurse informed me that the Clowndoctors had been on the ward just after I was called, and kindly agreed to see if they could **de-escalate the situation**, which they had done to great effect. The nurses and I were delighted. I even felt quite emotional, as it was the first time I had seen this patient (who has had a difficult journey) and her father laughing and smiling. It was just the lift that I needed to leave the ward with a smile and carry on working. I couldn't believe the difference in my mood and stress levels in such a short period of time. It felt like a miracle.*



"I'm so grateful to the Clowndoctors and I was able to see for myself the incredible value they bring to the hospital. If they hadn't been there, I honestly don't know how I would have handled the situation. It could easily have escalated further, which would have been distressing for all parties, and very resource intensive for the medical and nursing team."

Case Study

A young boy (aged 4/5) with Down's Syndrome was having the bandage on his face changed, which holds his feeding tube in place. A nurse on the ward approached us and asked if we could provide some distraction during the procedure. As soon as we arrived, he immediately recognised us, smiled, and got up from sitting with his dad to engage. We picked up where we had left off in our last visit, continuing a game of "squeaky floor," which made him smile. As the nurse guided him onto the bed to prepare for the bandage change, he remained focused on our play, initially distracted from the procedure. However, as she attempted to remove the old plaster, he became anxious, repeatedly saying "no" and waving his hands in front of her.

Sensing his distress, we quickly adapted the game to maintain his attention. This worked for a while, but as the nurse tried to proceed further, he became more upset, shouting for her to stop. She explained she just needed to push a little more to secure the new plaster. We mirrored this energy in our play—Dr. Wallop held a red sponge ball, while Dr. Gogo pushed it down, making a squeaking sound. The young boy quickly joined in, pressing his hand on top of ours. The harder he pushed, the louder the squeak became, creating a fun and engaging distraction. As he focused on the game, the nurse was able to complete the bandage change and refit the tube. At the end of the visit, he kept the red sponge ball and smiled, announcing that he wanted chips.

"Thank you, that really helped. I now know to come to you again for dressing changes." Nurse

HEALTH IMPACT: For the patient, this visit helped facilitate a necessary medical procedure, reducing anxiety and distress while increasing engagement. For the staff, it provided valuable support, reducing stress and making the process smoother.

Partnership working: Play and Connect

The Clowndoctors are currently working with the Royal Blind School to support pre-school children with visual impairment and their families. A Clowndocor visit offers both authentic connection and imaginative engagement, responding to how a child is feeling at that moment, boosting their wellbeing, relationships, and social skills.

Artistic Director, Lucy McGreal, explains: *"Clowndocor visits are accessible to children of all ages and abilities and are performed on their terms. Play & Connect has highlighted the opportunity for their unique voice, unique humour, unique imagination, and their unique self to be valued, validated, and amplified at times when they might be feeling powerless, anxious, lonely, or bored."*

Lucy Chetty, Head of Learning at Sight Scotland, said: *"What's really important is that families are feeling better connected, young people feel they have a peer group and a sense of shared safety and fun. They are really excited for the clowns to come along."*

Our Clowndoctors featured on TV! Watch STV's Scotland Tonight programme, where the cameras followed Dr Go Go and Dr Pip on the wards at the Royal Hospital for Children in Glasgow. The segment beautifully captured the essence of their work, showcasing the joy and connection they bring to young patients and is available to view here (episode aired Thursday 20th March 2025, sign in required): <https://player.stv.tv/episode/4ppl/scotland-tonight>



Archie's mum, Kiana Mullan, said: *"He is a lot, all the time.... but since coming here it's been so much better. His willingness to play, the way he bonds with people it's all improved."*