

THE ELLEN MACARTHUR CANCER TRUST – Q&A FOR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS

“One of the most positive things I've learned during lockdown is I've got a huge, huge community around me all going through the same storm. We're not necessarily in the same boat, but we look out for each other.” - Wen, who shielded in complete isolation indoors for 11 weeks due to post-treatment immune deficiency issues.

What challenges are the young people the Trust supports facing through and in the aftermath of COVID-19?

Young people in recovery from cancer need the Trust more than ever because of COVID-19. We have to be here for them. That is why we exist. These young people can be categorized into two groups.

- 1) Young people who are post-treatment and have been isolated, especially through shielding - the Trust is the light at the end of their tunnel, where they can enjoy the freedom of being outside, be with friends and share their experiences of something only they can truly appreciate and understand.
- 2) Young people currently on treatment - they have been experiencing the horrendous aspects of cancer treatment at the worst time. Some are physically and socially isolated, only have very limited contact with their families and their increased vulnerability means the fear of catching COVID-19 looms constantly.

Unprecedented levels of mental health and wellbeing issues are anticipated. Isolation, loneliness anxiety, anger and fear are all challenges young people and their families experience during and after cancer treatment. COVID-19 is elevating every one of these to unimaginable levels.

How has the Trust supported young people during 2020?

Lockdown

As soon as lockdown was implemented in March, we launched online support and engagement activities for young people and wider Trust community, so they were able to stay connected and benefit from the support of the whole Trust family.

These daily activities included:

- 'Trust Tuesday Hangouts', including quiz nights, Bingo, singalongs, painting and craft sessions and Netflix parties
- The launch of our Sound Waves podcast, discussing issues affecting young people with cancer and their families, on Mondays.
- 'How To' Thursdays vlogs and blogs from our skippers and volunteers on everything, from mastering the trip favourite, Uno, to how a sail works.
- Saturday Stories - sharing inspirational case studies from the Trust community.

- Volunteer training and development continued on Zoom on Wednesdays.

In May, we took the difficult but inevitable decision to cancel all our 2020 trips. We then looked at how we could continue to support young people throughout the rest of the year when we couldn't all get together in person.

It was critical young people got the support they actually need, not what we thought they might want. So, we invited young people, their parents and the hospital and charity partners who work with them, to tell us what they were going to miss most about not coming on a Trust trip in 2020 and how we could fill that gap.

There were more than 180 responses.

We learned the biggest thing young people would miss was their **friends**, the people who 'get' what they have been through and understand how they are feeling without having to explain. The friends that stop them feeling like the 'only one'.

And they would miss learning **new skills** on trips, the skills that help them realise they are more capable than they believe, and which give them a sense of achievement many have not experienced since finishing their treatment.

They wanted to still feel that **connection** to people who relate to them in a way others can't, to not feel isolated, to be involved in a way that makes them more **positive** and **confident** about the future and to have something to look forward to.

This led to the creation of the young-people centred 'Virtual Summer' programme.

Virtual Summer

'Virtual Summer' ran from July to September – across our traditional trip season. This was a comprehensive, mainly online, support programme, covering **social engagement, skills and training, peer-to-peer support** and **mental health support**.

- The Trust Hangouts continued, and the range of activities varied to appeal to different age groups. The Trust volunteers and skippers got involved in these too so young people could see familiar faces they would miss by not joining trips.
- Skipper 'How To' blogs and vlogs continued so young people can brush up on their sailing skills ahead of their next trip.
- 'Wider Horizons' career inspiration sessions, videos and blogs gave young people insight into getting into certain careers, on to courses or developing life skills to get back into employment/education.
- 'A Conversation About...' drop-in sessions were held in partnership with post-cancer care experts for young people who need further or specific support in their recovery. Topics included survivor guilt, body image, nutrition and fertility.
- A Book Club for over 18s and Pen Pal exchange for under 18s were introduced.
- Volunteers could undertake online RYA Training courses, to develop their sailing knowledge and/or to add to their CVs and discuss in job/university interviews.

- A new Signposting page was created on our website for young people who need further support beyond the Trust.
- Our Sound Waves podcast continued and surpassed 1,500 downloads in its first six months.
- Parents and guardians were supported with virtual coffee mornings, where they could 'meet' our skippers and volunteers and chat about issues affecting them in their child's recovery.

Virtual Summer was a success on a number of different fronts...

- We pivoted our entire operations almost overnight and achieved our aim to support young people. They engaged in the offerings and feedback was positive.
- Especially through the 'A Conversation About...' sessions, new young people who had never previously been supported by the Trust got involved. We hope they will now stay engaged and join us on a sailing trip again when we get back afloat.
- Social media engagement was high, and we added followers across all of our main social channels (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter).
- At a time when the predominant message from the charity sector was one of crisis, we were able to continue to support young people in a very positive way. This is reflected in feedback we have received from across the sector and our funding partners, who recognised the Trust's positive tone of voice in 2020.
- We have proved we can be a 12-month a year organization that can provide activities to support young people before and beyond their trips.

Beyond Virtual Summer

With schools returning in September, the immediate need to provide such a wider range of support decreased. However, COVID was (and still is) with us and we wanted to make sure we were still there for the young people that needed us.

We chose to continue a number of activities including the pen pals, book club, 'A Conversation About...' sessions and the RYA online training for volunteers. These will continue at least until the end of 2020.

In half-term there were also two Halloween and Bonfire Night Tuesday hangouts. We are looking to host some more during the Christmas holidays.

How is the Trust planning for 2021?

The Trust team has been exploring all the eventualities we could face next year – from delivering trips as normal at one end of the spectrum, to the UK being in 'lockdown' and running another Virtual Summer at the other. Along that spectrum there are a number of possibilities.

These include what a vaccine and/or a robust testing programme might enable us to do; how we could run socially distanced yacht trips and/or outdoor adventure residential weeks; and if regional socially distanced activity days on the water could bring young people together if we're not able to bring them to us.

We have also considered how we will manage if our capacity to offer places to everyone is impacted by social distancing and/or there are differences in, or changes to, local regulations, including between Scotland and England.

We have identified the risks and control measures for each possibility and picked the brains of anyone who could offer expert insight or a fresh perspective on our plans. We are very grateful to everyone who has given their time; from medics and our cancer charity partners to sailing and outdoor adventure organisations/charities, who have been gradually getting people back doing activities in a COVID-safe way.

There's still a lot of work to do, and clearly the safety of the young people and the comfort of the families, as well as our skippers, volunteers and staff, are our biggest consideration.

We need to remain agile in this constantly changing landscape and although talk of a vaccine and mass testing is cause for optimism, we must be realistic and pragmatic to enable us to plan to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people.

But whatever happens, we will be here for young people next year. So, we are continuing to nurture the strong relationships we have within the UK's hospital network and are working closely with our partners in the charity sector, particularly CLIC Sargent and Teenage Cancer Trust, to ensure every young person who needs us in 2021 has the chance to access Trust support.

What costs have been incurred during 2020?

When COVID-19 hit, we had already progressed with payment of necessary overheads, including the rent of one of our premises, deposits on all our season boat charters and residential centres, insurance and marina boat berthing fees. Not all of these were recoverable costs.

Because we needed our small team to focus on supporting young people through the pandemic whilst getting plans underway for 2021, we only furloughed one member of staff and have made no redundancies. We took the strategic decision to continue investing in fundraising and communications, so we come out of COVID in as strong a position possible in terms of potential income streams and profile.

Has the Trust received any financial support beyond its fundraising activities?

We were not eligible to apply for emergency (government and other) grants at the start of the pandemic. We have subsequently received emergency grants for core costs from the Isle of Wight Council Government Covid-19 Discretionary Fund, Scottish Government Coronavirus Small Business Support Grant, Julia and Hans Rausing Trust and Association of Sail Training Organisations (ASTO).