

Bear facts - helping to take the fear out of hospital for children

Medical students host Teddy Bear Hospital day

BY CHRISTINA MCDONALD LEGG

Happiness has been described as never stopping to think if you are happy. And this is never more apparent than when watching a child play. When children play they put themselves entirely into having fun, into happiness.

Watching them play at the teddy bear hospital last week was a day that inspired many people to smile, to grin, to laugh and chuckle with delight.

"A day not to miss, purely for the feel good factor," one attendant aptly described it.

Children brought their teddy or favourite toy to be seen by medical students, in

an effort to reduce children's anxiety about going to the doctor or visiting the hospital. The Teddy Bear Hospital brought children in with their teddies to show them that the foundation of a doctor-patient relationship is trust.

A teddy with a sore back, an elephant whose trunk was blocked, a teddy who burnt his feet while dancing on the hot cooker, and a doll that was pregnant.

All of these would need to go to the same place. If your teddy had been chewed by the dog and needed to be repaired, or if it had fallen down the stairs and broken its leg where would you take it? The teddy bear hospital of course.

Last week over 360 teddies visited the doctor with their owners, all aged four to seven, creative aspirations lighting their little eyes as they marched single file into the Sports Hall at NUI Galway, determined to get their teddies cured.

"My teddy has a hurt leg," Roisiun, 5 said.

"Mine fell down the stairs and hurt his arm," Ailbhe, 5 said.

"My teddy has to have his appendix out," another child said, pointing irrefutably to the place it would need to be taken from.

It's amazing the creativity of children, and what they pick up from around them. One girl said that her teddy had an earache. Then in the same breath she explained that her best friend had been out of school with an earache.

Aimed at dispelling the kind of fear that children have of doctors and hospital environments, the Teddy Bear Hospital reiterated that these aren't things to be scared of.

"I think that it is important to reassure children from as young an age as possible that illness and the fight against it are a part of everyday life and not necessarily something to be afraid of," Nuala Kane, Press Relations Officer for the Teddy Bear Hospital said. "Where I believe we might make a real difference is hopefully to help reduce trauma

to hospital they'll remember this experience and they won't be afraid anymore," Sarah May, a teacher at Knock Roon National School said.

Children were delighted with the opportunity to get their teddies cured, and were enthusiastic about meeting the 'doctors' and learned a variety of things from the day out.

"I learned that if you go to the hospital it's not scary," Roisiun (5), said bravely.

"I learned that doctors are very nice people," Ailbhe (5) said.

After initially taking their teddies to the doctor, children took them to an x-ray machine and then to fill their 'prescription,' of fruit and health drinks. And finally, when all the business was taken care of, the children were released to play in an enormous bouncing castle.

Mats were set up for the children to colour, tables arranged for them to get their faces painted, and jugglers enthusiastically flipped their props high in the air as life size animals in costume roamed the Sports Hall.

Outside, children prowled the real ambulance, wandering inside and out while pelting the Medics on hand with a thousand inquisitive questions.

The idea for the Teddy Bear Hospital project began in Norway and is organised by the European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) and the International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA).

The Teddy Bear Hospital is now an ongoing project and takes place throughout the world, including Germany, Sweden, the UK, and Ireland. The Teddy Bear Hospital at NUI Galway was the third in Ireland, the previous ones being held in Dublin.

"The day was really a success," Nuala said. "I felt the results were very evident. The children had a great time and the students got involved and talked to the kids. We would like to put on an annual event here at the college, hopefully."

With over 150 volunteers



Children lined up with their



Ellen Hession, Claregalwa with her doll at the Teddy Bear Hospital at NUI Galway



Noel Mulcahy, with his teddy at the Teddy Bear Hospital at NUI Galway.

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make a real difference is hopefully to help reduce trauma in the case of children who might be visiting sick relatives."

Overcoming the fear of hospitals and doctors through fun and play was the main objective of the day.

"I think that a lot of children are afraid of hospitals and doctors and by coming here and seeing the doctors use their instruments, it's remembered as fun. And hopefully if they ever have to

ly."

With over 150 volunteers from the faculty of medicine and health sciences and from the other faculties as well, over a thousand hours were put in to organising the monumental event.

"I know students are accused of being apathetic a lot of the time but when you see an event like this where people are really getting involved and giving up their time to help it's really encouraging," Nuala said.

at NUI Galway.

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Niall McDermott, with his teddy, at the Teddy Bear Hospital at NUI Galway.

