

EXPLORE - When people become sick and need care

Children, as well as adults, can become sick and may need to be looked after. Here is a story about a person who wanted to care for other people:

Sister Frances Dominica, a Church of England nursing nun, first thought of a children's hospice through her work caring for a young girl named Helen, who lived at home with her family but needed care 24 hours a day. She founded Helen House, the world's first children's hospice, which opened in November 1982. A hospice is a place rather like a home for those who are very seriously ill and likely to die.



It is natural that parents of a very ill child would want to care for them at home; they love their child and want to do anything for them. However, looking after a child who needs care each hour of every day, as well as looking after the rest of your family and going to work can be completely tiring. So, Helen's family's experience highlighted the need for care and support for children with life-shortening conditions and for their family. Helen House was set up to help families cope by providing occasional respite care – personalised and tailored to individual needs, just like caring for someone at home. The hospice was designed to be as much like an ordinary home as possible. It had eight children's bedrooms, as well as rooms for parents to stay. The hospice is about making the most of life, no matter what. Thirty years on, there are now two hospice houses. Helen House is for children from birth up to 18 years old, and Douglas House for young adults. The two hospice houses offer specialist care and pain management, short breaks and end-of-life care, as well as counselling and practical support for the whole family.

Jane came to Helen House in 2003 with her 9 year old son Sebastian, who was battling with cancer:

“Helen House cared for us; it made us feel very safe. It gave us the chance to do what we wanted to do for our son, the way that we wanted to do it. There was so much love and support. We have much cherished memories. Helen House stayed in touch with us and we became part of a Helen House group of families and we continue to support one another.”



Choose Activities:

- Write a job description for a carer or volunteer in a hospice. What qualities do you think are needed to look after someone who is sick? What beliefs and values would be important? What could they offer, etc?
- Visit the Helen and Douglas House website (<https://www.helenanddouglas.org.uk/>) - research the work they do and how they help families. Think about why their work is important. Create a poster encouraging people to raise money for the hospice.
- Do you know anybody who is a carer or works for the NHS? If so, arrange a phone call/video call with them and prepare a range of questions for them, such as: How long have you worked there for? Who do you care for? How are people and their families cared for? Record what they tell you and think about if their beliefs and morals help them to make certain decisions in their job.
- Make a thank you card for the carers in your community and explain what they do that helps others