Never too young to make a difference

Tuesday 9 March, 2021

Juvenile Arthritis Research were blown away when they heard about 7 year old Leighton and what he was doing to raise awareness of juvenile arthritis. Having seen his younger brother go through diagnosis and treatment for juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), Leighton started making posters to raise awareness of this condition which affects one in a thousand children.

Sometimes juvenile idiopathic arthritis can be an invisible condition and people don't see the daily struggles that children with arthritis face. As well as coping with the pain that their condition causes, there is a lot more to cope with too from medications (often as painful injections) and regular blood tests as well as a plethora of other tests, scans and x-rays. Then there are the side-effects of the medication which can be very unpleasant. Having a child with JIA in the family can be tough on all family members with so much time spent at appointments and getting to grips with a "new normality".

Leighton's brother Jordan is now 5 years old and when he was first diagnosed was found to have arthritis in 17 of his joints. He struggled to bear any weight on his legs and had to have steroid injections under general anaesthetic as well as starting on disease modifying drugs. He now needs biologic injections twice a week to keep his arthritis under control.

Having seen his brother go through all this, Leighton wanted to make a difference. So he decided to do a sponsored walk to raise funds for Juvenile Arthritis Research charity and has managed to raise over £400 to help children with JIA. These vital funds will be used towards searching for a cure for juvenile arthritis, and awareness and support work.

Richard Beesley, founder of Juvenile Arthritis Research explains "Awareness that children can get arthritis remains low and this can cause long delays in diagnosis. During that time, joints can become permanently damaged. We know that prompt diagnosis and treatment leads to far better outcomes for children with JIA."

What is incredible about Leighton's story is that despite his young age, he wanted to help his brother and he wanted to help others so he took it upon himself to do something by making those posters.

It just goes to show that you don't have to be a "grown-up" to make a difference. You don't have to be in a position of power. You don't have to be a famous celebrity. You CAN make a big difference right now, no matter who you are and how old you are.

"Thank you if you're donating, I hope it makes lots of children happy, love from Leighton" (age 7)

If you have been inspired by Leighton's story and want to make a difference in your community to raise awareness of JIA, please get in touch.

About juvenile idiopathic arthritis:

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (also called JIA) is an autoimmune disease. This means the body's natural defences (called the immune system) which are designed to fight off viruses, bacteria and infection get confused and start to attack your joints. This causes pain, discomfort, fatigue, and reduced mobility.

Across the UK, around 15,000 children and young people under the age of 16 have been diagnosed with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), and every week around 20 families are given the news that their child has the condition. JIA is a painful autoimmune disorder, where the body's natural defences attack the joints causing inflammation. This leads to pain, discomfort and reduced mobility. Without adequate and prompt treatment, JIA can lead to other health conditions as well as permanent disability and long-term health implications. Some children with JIA develop uveitis, which is inflammation inside their eye. If this isn't treated promptly, children could lose their sight.

At the moment there is no cure for Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis. All existing treatments reduce the symptoms of JIA, but are not a cure. Whilst these treatments have beneficial effects in reducing pain and inflammation, and provide some protection against long-term joint damage, they come with their own side-effects and can affect the long-term health of children taking these medications.

Media:











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You can find out more about JIA in our booklet, My JIA, available as a free download from www.jarproject.org/myjia

About Juvenile Arthritis Research:

Juvenile Arthritis Research have three aims – to find a cure for JIA, to raise awareness that children and young people get arthritis, and to provide support to children and their families when they receive a diagnosis of JIA.

You can find out more, and support Juvenile Arthritis Research at www.jarproject.org

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