

Hospital music group soothes pain of headaches for James, 11

By [Nottingham Post](#) | Posted: June 19, 2014

By Dan Russell



Musical respite: Enjoying a music lesson is James Bell, 11, of Keyworth.

MUSIC is helping an 11-year-old boy battle crippling headaches which have left him unable to attend school.

James Bell was diagnosed with chiari malformation at the age of four – resulting in the lowermost part of his brain growing down towards his spine.

The condition causes constant headaches, loss of balance and problems with swallowing and, despite undergoing surgery to remove part of his skull to give his brain more room, he is still suffering.

Although the procedure worked for a while James, of Keyworth, was diagnosed with a second condition also reducing the quality of his life.

His mother and full-time carer Kirstie Bell, 45, said: "The last time he went to school was in 2010.

"In 2012 it was discovered that he also had ehlers–danlos syndrome, a connective tissue disorder which he means he is much like an extreme contortionist.

"However, every time he moved his head he was dislocating his neck.

"In October 2012 he was flown to Arizona for fusion surgery which strengthened his neck and made his headaches more bearable.

"Very slowly he made progress and started to smile again but, sadly, in December last year the severe headaches returned and he is now on a lot of medication to try and help control the pain."

James also has epilepsy and is frequently in hospital for pain management and further tests.

However, it was while receiving treatment at the Queen's Medical Centre in May that James found a new way of coping with the pain – through music.

OPUS musicians regularly attend the hospital to help children like James deal with their treatment by playing music together.

Mrs Bell said:

"James gets really down when he is in hospital because he sees other children and he can't do what they can do, but he gets so excited about OPUS – the first time he did a session with them he was beaming.

"James feels that he is creating music and for that time the pain and depression does not exist and it is just wonderful.

"What they do is absolutely vital for so many people and it has inspired me to play piano at home and we have started singing together."

James hopes that there will be more OPUS musicians in the future.

He said: "I love playing music and my favourite instrument is the piano.

"The OPUS people are really nice and there should be more of them."

OPUS Music is funded by Nottingham Hospitals Charity who provided £3,000 for weekly visits last year.

Consultant paediatric nephrologist Martin Christian, from Queen's Medical Centre, said: "It would be a disaster if we didn't have them.

"Some of our patients are mesmerised by them when they come round and they give them a huge psychological boost.

"I think there is something incredibly calming about the music which has a positive effect on both the staff and the patients."

The Nottingham Post and daily deal website OriginalGiving have come together to help raise £500,000 for Nottingham Hospitals Charity's Building the Best appeal which will be used to fund a new cancer and neurology ward for children.

Barbara Cathcart, chief executive of the charity, said: .

"There is something special and powerful about what OPUS Music does for the children, including known benefits to their healing. These types of projects are made possible through the generosity of our donors, for which we are very grateful."

OPUS Music director Nick Cutts, said: "We really think we make a difference to the children that we work with.

"It gives them a different focus and brightens up their day.

"Giving children musical instruments empowers them.

"With out the funding we would not be able to do what we do and we find joy in the children and do not focus on their illness."

OriginalGiving specialises in leisure and entertainment offers, with up to 70 per cent off prices.

Once a deal is bought, a percentage of the amount paid will go to the charity shown on the website.

To take advantage of the offers and raise money for the charity, visit www.originalgiving.com/nottinghampost or see the offers elsewhere on this page.

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