



Press Release

Immediate Release

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### **Durham Mental Health Hospital Supports Samaritans Appeal**

A FEMALE mental health hospital in Durham is supporting the Samaritans Appeal to send gifts to children in need around the world this Christmas and it has an extra special significance for one patient.

Cygnet Appletree, in Meadowfield, County Durham has contributed to the Samaritans Christmas Shoebox Appeal for several years, supporting the Operation Christmas Child appeal to collect shoeboxes filled with toys, school supplies and hygiene items. This year it meant more for one service user who received many of the charity gifts during her childhood.

The hospital, run by Cygnet Health Care, is a mental health hospital for women that includes Pippin Ward, a specialist PICU service and Bramley Ward, an acute service for women.

The hospital takes part in the shoebox appeal every year but it touched the heart of one service user in particular this year, Kelly.

Kelly, who is bipolar and was in care from the age of five, received many Christmas shoeboxes during her childhood and remembered the feeling when receiving a present.

She said: "It was the best thing that had happened. It rekindled the belief in Christmas, no one was ever left out, with everyone getting a present.

"When I found out that Cygnet Appletree took part in the campaign, it made me so happy I honestly just cried. It is such a positive act and a small one which makes a big difference.

"It is the best thing you can do for a child, when they are in a vulnerable position and there's nothing else for them. It means so much to the child and it is so easy to do. It gives them a memory they will carry with them for the rest of their life.

"It allows them to enjoy Christmas, sometimes for the first time in their life."

The Cygnet hospital team asked for donations from staff and were able to make up four boxes which will be sent to children aged 5 – 9.

The service users, alongside Kelly, took part in wrapping the shoeboxes before choosing what they would like to put in them, making sure that thought and care went into them.

"My biggest memory of the shoeboxes is receiving a smurf teddy," Kelly said. "I carried it with me everywhere and I still have it now. I can remember that feeling and belief that Father Christmas had remembered me. Knowing I am now able to pass that feeling on to another small child is unbelievably emotional."

The shoeboxes are sent to more than 100 countries in places like Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia as part of the Samaritan's Purse's work through local churches.

The Samaritan's Purse said: "Partnering with Operation Christmas Child ensures shoeboxes get to hard-to-reach groups like refugee children in the Middle East.

"You'll be giving unimaginable excitement and hope to children in need around the world."

Shoeboxes for the appeal should be wrapped in colourful paper and attach a label stating whether it is for a boy or girl and select an age category of two-four, five-nine or 10-14.

Gift suggestions include cuddly toys, dolls, toy cars, small musical instruments, stationery and hygiene items such as a toothbrush, bars of wrapped soap, comb or hairbrush, flannel.

But toothpaste, sweets, lotions and liquids should not be included.