

Clown Doctors



Report to Children's Heart Unit Fund (CHUF)

Clown Doctors Activity at the Freeman Hospital from
September 2021 to August 2023

The Funding Period

The funding granted by the Children's Heart Unit Fund enabled:

- **88 half-day visits** by the Clown Doctors to the Freeman Hospital
- **88 full-day visits** by the Clown Doctors to the Freeman Hospital
- **115 Very Special Meetings** (online visits by the Clown Doctors to children at home)
- The development of **The Beat Squad website**
- Clown Doctors participation in **special events** like the CHUF Toddle and the CHUF Christmas party.



Clown Doctors in Hospital: What Happened?

3325 engagements

During the funding period of September 2021 to August 2023 there were **3325** engagements between the Clown Doctors and patients and their families at the Freeman hospital (in clinic, PICU and Ward 23). This figure comprises:

- **812** individual **visits** by the Clown Doctors to young patients as **referred** by the hospital team.
- An **additional 593** individual **engagements** between the Clown Doctors and non-referred young patients in hospital, including those in clinic.
- **1920 engagements** with **family members** of patients.

Clown Doctors in Hospital: Children Reached

The Clown Doctors visited the Children's Heart Unit at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle on 176 occasions. On each visit, the Clown Doctors were given a number of referrals of children to see, and as restrictions eased were increasingly able to interact with children ad hoc in clinic, in the playroom and on the ward.

This period saw the Clown Doctors visiting a lot of very young in-patients – 36% of referred visits were with children aged two and under – which was a change from previous years.

The nurse who sat in on our visit with BABY commented on how much she had enjoyed the interaction with him.

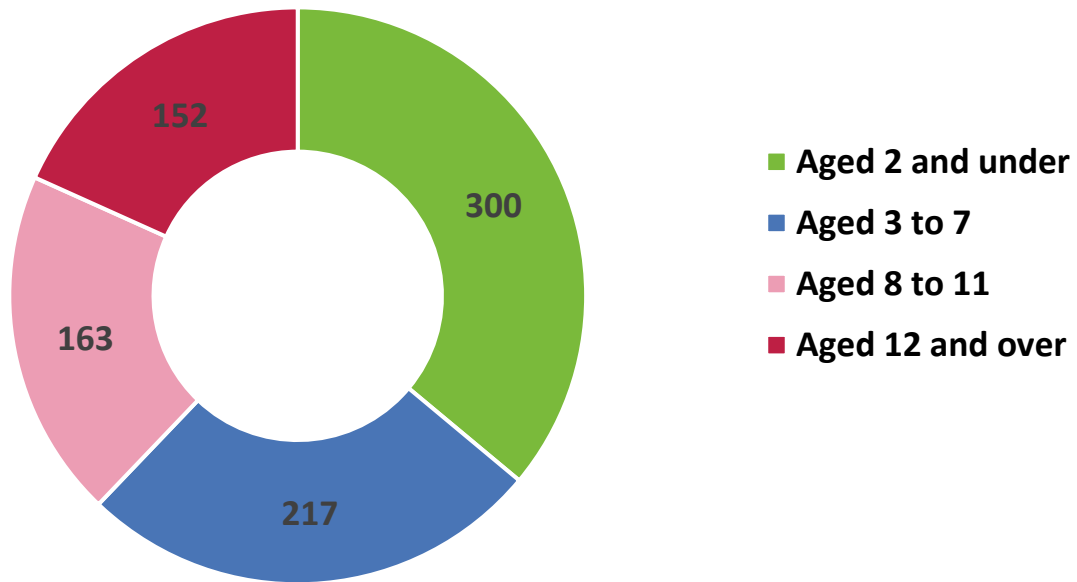
His mum came in later and commented on how when he is really engaged with us and our play, he can sit up by himself and hold up his head. She says that his motor skills are really advancing and how helpful his meetings with the Clown Doctors are.

Clown Doctor



Nonetheless, the Clown Doctors continued to visit and engage with children and young people of all ages:

Number of referred Clown Doctor visits with children by age



Today we spent time getting to know a young teen. Sometimes our job is to listen. For some young people having a conversation on lots of different topics is as important as say engaging with a magic trick. We try and pitch the visits at the right level for each individual to meet their needs.

Clown Doctor

Nice reminder today when visiting a 14 year old boy that we are not just for the younger ones. He was super quiet but loved our magic, and you could tell mum was chuffed we had hoodwinked our way in again.

Clown Doctor

Clown Doctors in Hospital: The Impact on Patients

The Clown Doctors continued to show how they support and work in tandem with ward staff to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of children in hospital. Benefits are myriad including support with movement and physiotherapy, distraction from hospital treatment and providing company and lifting spirits.

We were asked by the Matrons to help distract with CHILD who had to take medication and was distressed. We stayed with her throughout and afterwards.

Clown Doctor

CHILD's mum said that he totally loves bubbles now ever since the time when he was upset and the Clown Doctors first distracted him using bubbles. They've been a comfort and joy to him ever since.

Clown Doctor

The physio who was working with CHILD said it is really useful to see her interacting with us and to compare notes with all the people who work with her because they are trying to check her developmental progress and capacity to focus and track things. We were able to help with that using light, our noses and faces etc.

Clown Doctor

Great to help CHILD with his speech. We played lots of games encouraging him to talk which really worked.

Clown Doctor

The Clown Doctors in Hospital: Changes during this Period

This period saw many covid-related restrictions still in place, and others starting to be lifted.

In March 2022, as hospital covid protocols changed, the Clown Doctors started to venture away from the playroom to see children on the ward again. They commented that they were able to spend time with teens who wouldn't necessarily have come down to the playroom, and staff were happy to see them back on the ward.

In May 2022 visits started to take place in clinic again.

So interesting and a bit sad that BABY did not respond to or smile at all until we put our masks down for a moment and he immediately began to smile and chat. He just didn't know how to respond to us or what to do when he couldn't see all of our faces. It was a really marked difference which the play specialist also observed. We were able to stand well back in the playroom.

Clown Doctor

We ventured down to clinic which is great to be back in after two years. We saw lots of different ages. What is wonderful about clinic is we get to touch base with children we have seen growing up. One mum commented, "it leaves a lasting positive impression on them".

Clown Doctor

Clown Doctors in Hospital: The Impact on Staff and Families

The Clown Doctors' presence in hospital continues to have a positive effect not just on patients but also on their families and the hospital staff.



Went to PICU. It was so appreciated by nurses and staff who watched so much in a beautiful way. One nurse mentioned she had felt like crying.
Clown Doctor

CHILD's parents were told of a delay to her operation during our visit. This was difficult but allowed us to engage with CHILD whilst giving parents time to take in the news.

Clown Doctor

CHILD's mum and dad said that our visit was as helpful to them as it was for CHILD, as mum has not left hospital since coming in with him a few weeks and ago and feels like she is going stir-crazy. They also said he has been very wary of anyone coming to the bedside, so it was nice for him to experience people who were just there to play and not do stuff to him.

Evaluation

During the spring of 2023, TIN Arts conducted evaluation surveys both online and in-person with families on ward 23 and clinic at the Freeman Hospital. The online survey was shared on social media with the support of CHUF and was open to anyone who had engaged with the Clown Doctors during the 17 years that the programme has been running. We received 30 responses in total.

The Clown Doctors are still talked about in our home even though my son is now an adult. He tells his own children about them. Keep up the good work.

Parent

The Clown Doctors always make sure to give my son their full attention and find something new for him every time.

Parent

By the Clown Doctors being present on the ward it gives the children something to look forward to each day, something to smile about and to be more happy and confident during what is a very difficult time for them. Not only did they help our son smile but they also made us as parents happy to see them make him happy 😊

Parent

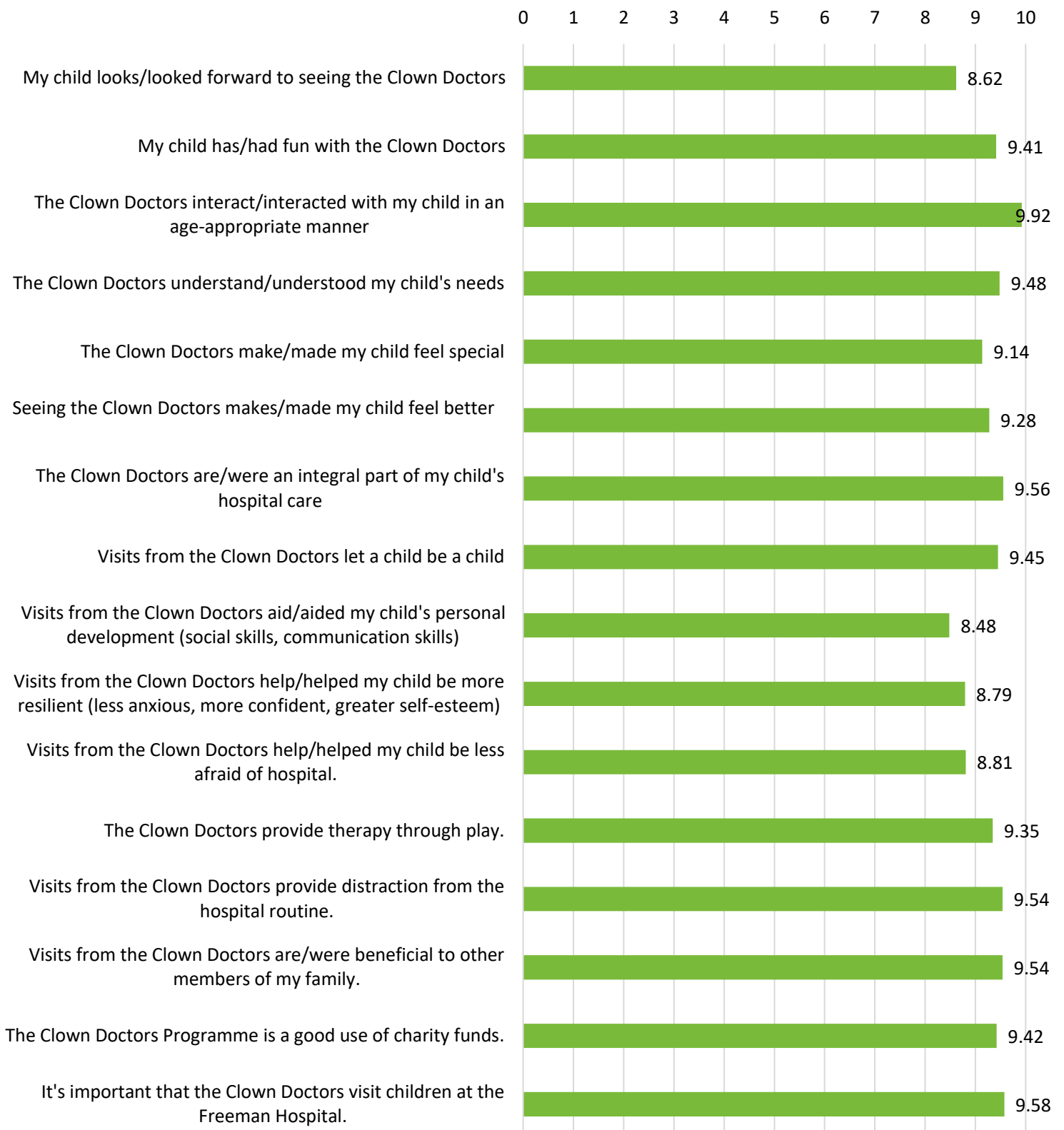
Families were asked in the survey to what extent they agreed with certain statements on a scale of 1 to 10. To the statement, “It’s important that the Clown Doctors visit children at the Freeman Hospital” we received an average score of 9.58 showing us that families of patients continue to welcome and value the Clown Doctors’ presence at the Freeman Hospital.

We didn’t receive an average score of less than 8.48 on any of the statements which is resoundingly positive holistic feedback. Other areas in which we scored particularly highly (over 9.5 average score) were:

- “Visits by the Clown Doctors are/were beneficial to other members of my family”.
- “The Clown Doctors are/were an integral part of my child’s hospital care”.
- “Visits from the Clown Doctors provide distraction from the hospital routine”.



We asked survey respondents to rank on a scale of 1 to 10 the extent to which they agreed with the following statements:



Outside the Hospital: Special Events

The Clown Doctors continue to take part in the CHUF Toddle and the CHUF Christmas party every year.



Outside the Hospital: Very Special Meetings



In January 2021 the first meetings between patients and the Clown Doctors took place outside the hospital setting. Called Very Special Meetings, this new programme connects young patients who have been discharged from the Children's Heart Unit with the Clown Doctors. Very Special Meetings take place online on the Zoom platform and are personalised to each individual child or young person taking part in the programme.

On behalf of my son, TIN Arts' work has had an extremely positive impact on him. The Clown Doctors Very Special Meetings started on Zoom & my son was very fortunate to be involved in the new project from the start. In a time when my son was having to Shield due to Covid, the Clown Doctors provided much needed relief & laughter. They always put a smile on our son's face & always have the ability to make him feel special. They personalise the Zoom calls to the child & show a genuine interest which has forged a lovely bond between them & our son. The work of the Clown Doctors from TIN Arts certainly has a powerful & positive impact on the recipient's mental health & wellbeing. They are such a tonic to children like my son who have been through so much & have life limiting conditions.

Parent

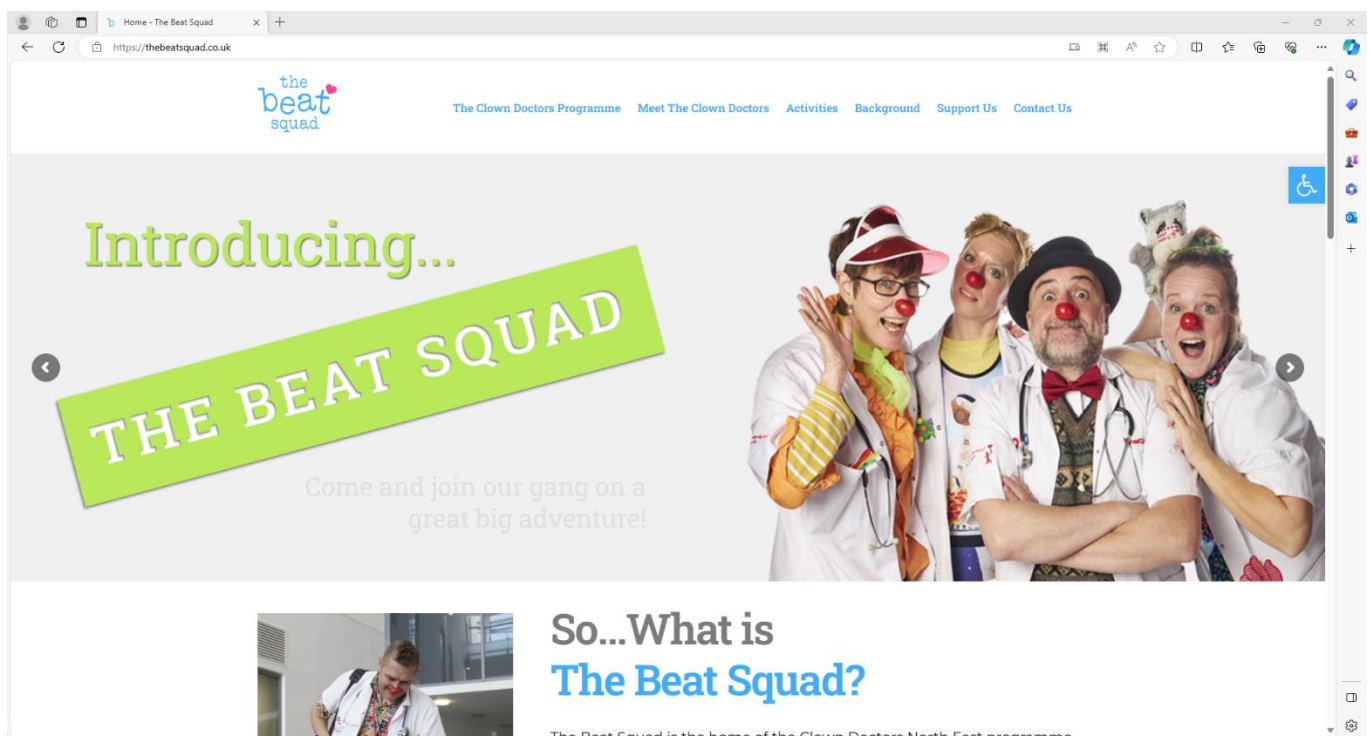
To date, **12 children and young people** have taken part in the Very Special Meetings programme and a total of **115 Very Special Meetings** have taken place.

The hospital team invites families to participate and asks permission to share their details with TIN Arts who coordinate the Very Special Meetings.

Some children take part when, or for as long as, their families feel they need the meetings, and others have taken part in every meeting they have been invited to since the start of the programme. Children are invited to attend a Very Special Meeting every eight weeks.

Going forward, TIN Arts seek to expand the programme to reach more children and young people by enabling the Clown Doctors to invite children directly into the programme.

Outside the Hospital: Website



In the spring of 2023 TIN Arts worked with a web design company to refresh and relaunch The Beat Squad website making more Clown Doctor themed content available to children and young people to access independently. The website also provides information about the Clown Doctors programmes as supported by CHUF to funders, families and the general public: <https://thebeatsquad.co.uk/>



As always, TIN Arts and the Clown Doctors would like to share their heartfelt thanks to CHUF for funding their work, and to the play specialists from Ward 23 without whom this work wouldn't be possible.