

# Narborough: Stephen defies the odds ten years on

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A NARBOROUGH teenager who defied the odds to overcome leukaemia is hoping to become a vet because he loves looking after and working with animals.

Stephen Carter, who recently celebrated his 18th birthday with family and friends at Narborough Community Centre, was given just 24 hours to live after being diagnosed with the most devastating childhood disease in the UK as an eight-year-old.

But he proved the doctors wrong by bouncing back to health after five years of hospital treatment and follow-up checks, astonishing his parents Leslie and Sandra with his courage and resilience.

Stephen, of 44 Meadow Close, has been in remission for the past six years and is waiting to hear whether he still needs an annual check that the cancer of the blood has not returned. He had been hoping to join the Army but was told it was not a good idea because of all the medication he was taking.

His father said: "Stephen has now developed an interest in animals and would like to work towards being a vet. We are trying to get him a chance to work with animals during the school holidays."

Stephen goes to Plaxtole House in Lynn, part of the College of West Anglia, four days a week and stays at September Lodge in Holbeach, where he is learning to cope on his own and be independent. He returns to Narborough for occasional weekends and the school holidays.

Mr Carter, who used to be his full-time carer, said: "Stephen is very fit and healthy now and there is no sign of the cancer coming back.

"He was advised to lose some weight because he went over 12-stone and was at risk of a heart attack and he has done that. He put on weight while on the medication because the tablets made him hungry."

Medical checks have been kept on Stephen's bone growth as it was initially feared the leukaemia might affect this and put him back a couple of years, but this has been picking up.

He became ill with what was thought to be a urine infection in 1999, when the family were living at Partridge Grove in Swaffham.

But a blood test at Lynn's Queen Elizabeth Hospital showed that it was leukaemia and he was immediately referred to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

He was taken there by ambulance the same day and went straight into intensive care, where his parents were given the devastating news that he had only 24 hours to live.

But Stephen rallied after being given blood transfusions and medication and after a week in intensive care was put on a general ward, where he remained for the next three months.

Since then, Swaffham and Litcham Home Hospice has helped the family by taking him to Addenbrooke's and helping with his care at home.

And the Carters thanked Dr Richard Musson at Swaffham's Campingland Surgery, medical staff at the Lynn and Cambridge hospitals and social services for the help they had given Stephen.