



The Catherine McEwan Foundation Scholarship

All in for education

Case study report 2021

The Catherine McEwan Foundation is pleased to publish its first case study report on The Catherine McEwan Foundation Scholarship, a unique and innovative educational opportunity for young people in the senior phase of high school living with Crohn's disease or Colitis. The Scholarship is now in its third year and this report will detail the impact being made for scholars and the successes the program has had on their education and self-confidence. This case study will also outline the key organisations, people and ideas behind the scholarship and the journey that scholars have been on, hearing directly from them and their parents. Finally, it will reveal the plans for the imminent expansion of the scholarship to reach more scholars in more places, changing the lives and futures for an increasing number of young people in Scotland. This report will be the first in a series of ongoing annual case studies.

Who is the Catherine McEwan Foundation?

Founded by Derek McEwan in 2003, The Foundation helps people living with Crohn's and Colitis access better treatment and better care to improve their lives, ideally supporting them to successfully live with their condition. Their work helps change the lives of children, young people and adults with inflammatory bowel disease by funding much-needed improvements in IBD healthcare across Scotland; investing in pioneering research; and directly funding the educational support and recovery for young people via the scholarship programme.

Being diagnosed with IBD can have a huge impact on people and for young people in particular, their education. They can often miss out on key learning and development opportunities at school due to low attendance or inability to fully concentrate for the entirety of the school day. The Foundation, in collaboration with The Royal Hospital for Children in Glasgow and Saturday School Ltd, is providing a solution for those young people who are affected at such a crucial stage in their lives.

The idea behind the scholarship

As a registered charity, the Foundation is always looking for ways to expand and support more people in new and pioneering ways. After a long period of research and exploration, Derek and the team – aware of the impact that IBD can have on anyone – returned to an area that they had always looked to offer enhanced support: education.

“We were always very aware, through the younger people we worked with, that schoolwork can take a massive hit, teenagers in high school for example will simply miss huge portions of school, and this results in them attaining poorer grades in exams or dropping out of subjects completely through no fault of their own”.

Derek goes on to explain how the unique scholarship model was devised.

“I was aware of Saturday School and the work they do with young people taking SQA exams and quickly realised that with the support of The Royal Hospital that all three organisations could work together to create something very special, from what we can see, there is nothing like this being done anywhere in the UK, and we are incredibly proud of the impact it is making for our scholars”.

What exactly is The Scholarship?

The Scholarship is devised and led by The Foundation, in partnership with Saturday School, providing a fully funded educational support and recovery plan, bespoke to each young person in terms of their educational needs. In simple terms, scholars attend Saturday School on a regular basis to catch up on work missed through illness, and to develop their subject knowledge and understanding to maximise their chances of success in SQA exams. Scholars are recommended by their IBD nurse to The Foundation and at that point Saturday School will work with the scholar and their parents to build a clear picture of the type of intervention and support that is required. From some additional support in a single subject, through to a fully bespoke learning plan delivered over an entire academic year, scholars are given the best possible chance of educational success.

The scholarship is backed by a team of generous donors and offers young people unlimited access to a highly successful and long-standing portfolio of support such as Prelim Masterclasses, Weekly Revision Lessons and Grade Booster Days. It also offers 24/7 online support for learners to submit questions to Saturday School’s fully qualified teachers: extra help is not just confined to the weekend, ensuring scholars are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools to catch up and excel in coursework, assessments and SQA exams.

Now in year three, The Catherine McEwan Foundation Scholarship has successfully assisted learners who, in some cases, would not have gone on to gain qualifications at all. Saturday School, backed by Derek and The Foundation, support young people and their parents to stabilise their educational progress, outlining the specific steps needed before looking ahead to securing the relevant qualifications. The fundamental aim is to support learners to gain qualifications; when they are on course for this, the focus changes to securing the highest possible grades across subjects.

Meet Joe, Scholar number 1!

Back in 2019, Joe was the first ever Scholar to join the programme. After having a healthy and active childhood, he was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease early in high school. He missed almost all of S3 as his health and energy declined, missing vital learning. Joe describes the impact his diagnosis had on his life and learning:

"As soon as I got Crohn's, it just stopped, dead in its tracks. Just like that. On the rare occasion I was in school, I wouldn't learn much as I would have been up the night before, feeling bad and unable to focus on school."

When The Scholarship was finally ready to begin, Joe was identified by his IBD Nurse and Scholarship Team Member, Vikki Garrick. He was recommended to the Foundation and Saturday School and with everything in place, he became the inaugural Catherine McEwan Foundation Scholar.

In just a few short months, Joe progressed from failing coursework and assessments in school to seeing huge progress, turning F grades into As and Bs.

"It sounded great, as an opportunity and one that I just wanted to take and it's made such an impact. I was the first person to benefit from the scholarship, and I'd just like to say how that helped me to get where I am today. The opportunity was given to me at the perfect time, having been very unwell earlier. The benefits have put me in the position to leave school and go to college and do what I want to do."

Joe went on to complete an HNC in Business and is now planning to study music at further or higher education level.

Amelia's story

Amelia joined Joe just a few weeks later in the first year of the Scholarship. Like Joe, she was identified by Vikki and the IBD team at The Royal Hospital, again, proving herself as an ideal candidate for the programme. She embraced it with maximum success, spending two years in the programme as she completed her National 5 and Higher courses.

The reality of living with Crohn's or Colitis is harsh. For secondary school students like Amelia, illness can lead to missing years of school. She was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis at the age of ten, missing a lot of in-school education over long periods of time:

"I managed to keep up with the work just enough to stay in all my classes but when I started doing my National 5s I began to struggle. I could learn the new things, but I didn't understand the basics."

Amelia saw almost instant success after her first week at Saturday School, transforming a score of 20% in a Chemistry assessment to 70% in her resit. Reflecting on this immediate impact, Amelia says:

"That result alone shows the incredible difference the scholarship makes. I found it so helpful for my National 5 and Highers, I want to emphasise the amount of help it has given for people like me and I'm sure many other kids who miss a lot of school."

She goes on to explain that part of her motivation to succeed was based on a negative prediction made on her chances of attaining in one particular subject:

“Saturday School offered a type of support that my teachers couldn’t. I then went on to get a B in my National 5 Chemistry exam, which no teacher thought I would get, with one telling me I’d be lucky to pass”.

Despite first day nerves, for all the scholars the relaxed, college-style approach, coupled with awareness and empathy for sufferers meant that it was easy to settle in. Amelia explained:

“I suffer from anxiety so was worried about the length of the classes and the fact that they were with other people. However, when I arrived, I was shown around, the staff were extremely welcoming which helped to ease my nerves. You call the teachers by their first names, which helps to create a relaxed environment. They provided any stationary, snacks or drinks that I might need. The length of the class was great as we went over some general things that everyone needed help with but there was plenty of time left for the personal help that everyone was given.”

For National 5, Amelia achieved English A, Maths A, Biology B and Chemistry B. She then went on to study Highers, gaining a Bs in Biology and Chemistry.

Scholarship: Year 2

After the success of year one, the scholarship team worked to increase the number of young people being reached. Backed once again by the incredible and generous support of donors, The Catherine McEwan Foundation continued to grow the program with Saturday School, supported again by the expertise of the IBD team at The Royal Hospital, using their knowledge of the young people and their families to guide the recommendation and recruitment of new scholars; young people most in need of educational support.

Interrupted by the huge impact of the pandemic and subsequent school closures, the scholarship team worked hard to maintain the offer of support, and despite the many barriers in their way, The Catherine McEwan Foundation Scholars continued to build on the success of the programme.

Keira

The first in the next chapter of success is Kiera, who was awarded a scholarship to complete National 5 Maths, Biology and English courses. She travelled from Ayrshire each weekend to Glasgow’s West End to join Saturday School’s Weekly Revision and Grade Booster classes.

As a parent of a young person living with IBD, there is balance to be struck between wanting the best educational success for your child whilst ensuring the single most important thing: their health and wellbeing. Aside from gaps in curricular knowledge, missing school leads to stress and anxiety, especially in students who are keen to do well. Tension forms as they desire to do well, prove themselves to their teachers, peers and parents; yet their health prevents them from accessing the education they need to thrive. Parents can find this challenging as they desperately want to help their children do well in school but can see

health deteriorating and concentration lagging. Keira's mum Gillian explains that her daughter's health was her main concern.

"I just wanted her to get better, rather than worrying about school and other things. I kept saying she could stay on at school for as long as she wanted and highlighting that there are always other things she could do to help that along. It didn't matter what I said. It was an important year last year and she was still worrying about school. She likes to do well and wants to get a good job."

Keira herself felt that the Maths classes gave her space to revise, enabling her to spend time at home, catching up with other subjects and boosting her grades. This presented a rather unknown benefit to the scholarship as Keira identifies that despite the extra time commitment required of her, it actually creates freedom and time elsewhere in her week to focus on other subjects outside of her scholarship plan. Finding the perfect balance and applying hard work and dedication has brought her excellent success.

Keira went on to gain an A in National 5 Maths, having been predicted for a B by her school. She also gained a B in both National 5 Biology and English - her school predicted grade for Biology was a D. She is now studying a range of Higher subjects at school.

More Success with Mashkal

Mashkal was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis in 2017 and the impact on his education quickly caused him concern.

"Last year was a tough year for me as I was having regular flare-ups and missed quite a bit of school. I did well in my National 5s but was worrying about my Highers as I had missed so much classwork. Vikki put me forward for the scholarship and I was accepted".

Gaps in learning are not the only issue created by IBD and the knock-on effect creates additional challenges for young people and families, meaning there are more problems faced than just the illness itself. Anne Marie, speaking on behalf of her son, Mashkal, feels that young people with IBD often feel alone at school:

"Not only do they miss school but their confidence goes right down, they start to feel withdrawn and don't feel good about themselves. There's something wrong, they don't want to talk about it. They are embarrassed by it because it is an embarrassing condition for young ones."

She feels that Mashkal's progress in school was hindered by thoughts like this and her difficulty to "make schools realise the impact that illness has on them," avoiding any risk that IBD symptoms are mistaken for "an upset stomach or something more trivial."

His education had always been a worry for Anne-Marie:

"There's nothing worse when you drop your child off at school, and you can see, in their face that they don't actually want to be there."

After only a few Saturday School sessions she noticed his confidence had improved and the experience "gave him a boost, brought him out of himself." He became a boy who "looked forward to going, he was never moaning and I never had to drag him there. He was really

up for it and enjoyed it every time he was there. He always came out and said that things were explained better for him there than at school and he felt they took more time for him.”

She felt that part of this stemmed from Mashkal’s realising that he wasn’t alone:

“To be in a room where there are potentially other people with the same challenges as you; it does make a difference.”

Mashkal felt that the general set up of the classes helped him get his learning back on track:

“The classes are great for me as they make me feel relaxed and confident to ask questions on things I’ve missed which would be hard for me in my normal class in school. With the classes being 80 minutes long, it gave more time to delve into the subject. It was more relaxed and the tutors were more approachable than my actual teachers. I just want to thank everyone for giving me this opportunity”.

In 2021, Mashkal was able to secure 5 Higher qualifications, gaining an A in English and passes in Maths, Physics and Chemistry.

Ewan

The final scholar to feature in this case study is Ewan, and like all others, he has maximised the opportunity. Combined with his own dedication and drive, he has put himself in one of the most sought-after places among all young people of his age and stage: university!

Despite this success, Euan and his parents were concerned that in some cases, lack of understanding of IBD can have negative implications. Dad, Stuart, feels that increased awareness of the challenges of IBD would help avoid exacerbating the situation his son was in. A vicious circle can be created where the stress and anxiety a young person suffers is caused mainly by the burden of schoolwork, assessment and the pressure to catch up leads to an increase of the IBD symptoms.

Failure to understand the illness is one of the reasons that led to the formation of the scholarship. Derek McEwan, Founder of the Catherine McEwan Foundation strongly feels that “any proposal to support young people suffering from IBD with their education must be one which allows for flexibility, taking into account the often sudden and unpredictable symptoms of the condition.” Derek’s vision, not just for the Scholarship but for the entire charity is clear: “My job, and the job of the foundation, is simple, it is to help people.”

He goes on to explain the day-to-day running of the classes which scholars take part in:

“At Saturday School, scholars are in classes with students from all over Central Scotland and their condition is not highlighted or shared; however, there is power in knowing that there are other scholarship students – whether they know who they are or not. All students are treated the same, as adults, and if one does need to excuse themselves, or wants a bottle of water, permission is not sought, alleviating any potential anxieties or awkward conversations!”

First day apprehensions are also felt by parents and Ewan’s mum, Vicki was more worried about Ewan’s first day than he was:

“As a mum, seeing what Ewan went through in the last couple of years, I just wanted to wrap him up in cotton wool and make sure that he was ok. Suddenly, Saturday School came around and Ewan was offered the scholarship. We were really excited for him. It was a good thing for him but I was worried. I wanted to keep him close to me and didn’t want to change his routine, especially by branching out into something new, with people we’d never met, new teachers.”

Ewan, however, wasn’t fazed and “took everything in his stride.” He explains how Saturday School lessons differ from school. “It’s not like a class. It’s more like a group of people, doing the same subject, getting a bit of extra help. It’s very natural going in. It wasn’t like this is a class where you’re told, this is what you’ll do. It was more like, on you come and we can do this and we can do that.” .

Ewan felt that he was often taught in a different way to how he was at school and this gave him extra methods and skills to use when answering questions, particularly if he hadn’t picked up what he needed to in school.

At the end of S5, Ewan passed his SQA Highers gaining a B in Higher Maths, Physics, Graphic Communication, and Design and Manufacture, and a C in English.

Despite it being increasingly unusual for students to leave school after S5, Ewan applied for university, choosing to skip S6. In the summer of 2021, he was accepted to study a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering at Glasgow Caledonian University. His dad believes much of the success is down to his time as a Catherine McEwan Foundation Scholar.

“It would not have been possible without the scholarship, the support of Derek and the foundation, the IBD team and the teaching skills of Saturday School, and of course some real hard work by Ewan himself!”

Building on success: next steps

Working in partnership with Saturday School and backed by generous donors, Derek and The foundation have created a scholarship programme where young people are placed into a caring and nurturing learning environment to support their education. A fundamental part of the programme is to ensure that scholars reach their full potential and attain the grades they are capable of, despite having missed vital knowledge when unable to attend school. This report has identified and reflected on the early years of the programme, from inception to first delivery, celebrating the successes it has brought to a small number of people.

As the programme moves through year three and beyond, The foundation will upscale and include more young people from more places with plans to widen scholarship access, building relationships with other health boards and schools across Central Scotland.

Expansion to earlier years will see scholarships awarded to pupils as young as S3, while the introduction of a formalised application process will further improve the recruitment process and awareness raising of the programme.

Finally, The Foundation will appoint a Scholarship Manager to serve as a direct line of contact for the scholarship team, parents, schools, health professionals and most

importantly scholars. Their role, like Derek's vision for the charity will be simple: to help people.

For more information on Saturday School Ltd and their Scholarship Programme, visit:

<https://www.saturdayschoolglasgow.com/scholarships>

DRAFT