

PRESS RELEASE

CHANGING LIVES: BLACKPOOL EYE SERVICE CREATES 'MAGIC EYE' FOR EDWARD

THE BLACKPOOL based National Artificial Eye Service has changed the life of a four year old boy, who lost an eye through a rare form of cancer.

Edward Cassidy from Accrington, was diagnosed with Retinoblastoma in 2007 when at just 18 months old his mum noticed a white reflection on this right eye.

Retinoblastoma (Rb) is a rare form of eye cancer of early childhood that develops in the cells of the retina which is the light sensitive lining of eye. The most common symptom is an abnormal appearance of the pupil, which tends to reflect light as a white reflex, like a cat's eye. This white reflex is quite often picked up in photographs taken with a flash.

The cancer mainly affects children before the age of five and some children are born with the problem. Less than 5% of cases are diagnosed after the age of five years.

After diagnosis, Edward underwent an enucleation procedure, the removal of the tumour and the eye, at The Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, one of only two Retinoblastoma specialist hospitals in the country. A conformer, an eye shape 'shell', was then inserted until a bespoke artificial eye could be made by the National Artificial Eye Service (NAES).

Eight weeks after the removal of his eye, Edward had his initial assessment at one of NAES run clinics in Accrington. He was then fitted with a Blackpool-made temporary prosthesis, before being fitted with a specially made eye that matched his healthy eye.

Melanie Cassidy, Edward's mum, said: "I started to notice that Edward had a white reflection in his right eye that over time, became more noticeable. We took him to an optician who advised we contact our GP who referred Edward to our local hospital. The hospital immediately picked up that it was Retinoblastoma."

Melanie added: "From the numbness and shock of Edward's initial diagnosis and surgery to the confident little boy he is now, it would not have been possible without technicians in Blackpool who make the artificial eyes and the Orbital Prosthetists who fit them. When Edward had his first eye fitted, I cried as it was so life like. We now call his artificial eye his 'magic eye'. Cleaning Edward's new eye has become part of his daily routine, just liking cleaning his teeth and brushing his hair.

"I now work with the Childhood Eye Cancer Trust (CHECT) to support families going through new diagnoses of Retinoblastoma to offer them support when they need it most."

The National Artificial Eye Service provides artificial eyes to patients across England in 16 main hospital bases and 50 outreach clinics. All artificial eyes are hand made in

Blackpool to each patient's individual specification and then transported to clinics around the country.

Helen Loddington, Operational Manager for the NAES, said: "All the artificial eyes we provide are bespoke and handmade at our Blackpool headquarters, by specially trained Ocular Technicians. We also provide a full fitting and aftercare service at locations around England.

"This service is provided by a team of specially trained Orbital Prosthetists who hold clinics around the country. We are delighted to be able to help patients like Edward, who require prosthesis for a variety of reasons. It is especially important for us to build positive relationships with the children and their families, as we will be taking care of them and their prostheses for life"

Julia Morris, Family Support worker from CHECT commented: "The National Artificial Eye Service is invaluable to those children who lose an eye due to retinoblastoma as it is important that the eye looks and fits naturally so that they grow up with confidence in their appearance, just like Edward is doing."



Above: Edward, his mum Melanie and Granddad Harold Cassidy with Marcia Morrell from the NAES.

Note to Editor:

- The National Artificial Eye Service originated in the 1914-18 war. At that time it was known as 'The Army Spectacle Depot '. The aim of the service quickly changed from providing glasses to the supply of artificial eyes for those soldiers returning injured from the front.
 - The Childhood Eye Cancer Trust (CHECT) is a UK wide charity for families and individuals affected by retinoblastoma (Rb). They offer support and information, fund research and raise public awareness of this rare cancer.
 - They aim to raise awareness of Rb and funds to provide research into the condition.
 - CHECT also provide support and information to families and the children affected by Rb.
 - For further information about CHECT and Rb, please log onto www.checht.org.uk

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