

STAR SURVIVOR HANNAH, 16, TAKES UP LEUKAEMIA DRIVE

11:00 - 15 November 2007

Little star Hannah Drinkwater survived childhood cancer and is now helping to raise the profile of other brave youngsters battling the disease.

The 16-year-old former Coombeshead College pupil from Newton Abbot, hopes to become a doctor after overcoming leukaemia. Last year Hannah was presented with a Little Star award from Cancer Research UK, and now she is appealing for other children to be put forward for the award.



Hannah's story began in March 1997 when she developed a cough and a rash on her legs, which worried her mum, Ingrid Davie.

"Hannah was constantly deteriorating over a month and it set off alarm bells as she was always a healthy girl," said Mrs Davie.



Within weeks, Hannah had undergone several tests and was diagnosed with acute myloid leukaemia at Bristol Children's Hospital before starting chemotherapy.

The first month of treatment took place in Bristol, after which tests showed the leukaemia had dropped from 89 per cent of her cells to below 15 per cent.

But despite these promising signs, Mrs Davie said it was a difficult time when Hannah lost her hair.

She said: "One night she was eating her tea and the hair was just falling out."

Hannah added: "I love my hair and losing it was one of the worst bits. For a little girl, it is very much part of you and you lose eyebrows and eyelashes too. When it all fell out, I saw it in a mirror and I screamed."

Hannah was moved back to hospital in Exeter for the next three months of chemotherapy before being put forward for a bone marrow transplant in July 1997.

The transplant took place in Bristol after a 10-day course of radiotherapy designed to kill off the final leukaemia cells.

Mrs Davie said: "She had a very inflamed stomach and the doctors told me 'all you have to do now is pray'."

The next six to eight weeks were 'horrible' as Hannah was drained of energy and struggled

with simple tasks like using mouthwash.

Hannah said: "I couldn't be bothered to get out of bed, it was too much effort."

Mrs Davie said Hannah was a 'stubborn' patient and initially found it difficult to cope with visitors.

Hannah was eventually allowed home in September and went back to school a month later.

Mrs Davie said: "They were good at school. There was a bit of staring and some bullying, but she stuck up for herself.

"Even though her hair hadn't come back, sometimes she would take her hat off at school.

"She grew a lot more confident and she showed when she was angry. Her personality grew and got very confident talking to the doctors."

Hannah still has regular check-ups and says at times she feels like 'a research patient'.

She explained: "I have to see a cardiologist as I have a weak heart, and an eye specialist as I have cataracts.

"I want to be a doctor and do paediatrics and oncology and if that doesn't happen, I would like to do paediatric nursing.

"I don't think I would have chosen this if I hadn't been ill."

One thing Hannah has been told is that she will not be able to have children of her own.

But despite her health problems, Hannah helps out by volunteering in her local CLIC Sargent shop and recently raised more than £100 for the charity by dressing up in her pyjamas for her shift.

Tom Bourton, spokesman for Cancer Research UK, said: "This is the fifth year Little Star awards have recognised the nation's child cancer patients and survivors, identifying the unique challenges faced by young people diagnosed with cancer."

Each and every child nominated will receive the accolade in the form of a Little Star trophy, a certificate signed by celebrities including Dr Who Star David Tennant and Kylie Minogue, and a goody bag courtesy of Disney, HarperCollins books, Jetix children's TV and Orion Children's Books.

The awards are open to all under-17s who have cancer or have undergone treatment for the disease in the last five years. Only one nomination per child is necessary.

To nominate a Little Star email littlestar@cancer.org.uk or call 0113 231 9828 to request a nomination form.