



Ruth Radley

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Location: Britain



What I do: Providing spiritual care and support to children and families as part of the multi-faith chaplaincy team at Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Hi everyone,

My manager said to me the other day, "Ruth, it's no wonder we struggle at times to describe what we do. In less than 48 hours you have already helped run a bereavement event, attended a palliative meeting, run a multi-faith event, seen patients and done some staff support offsite!" We do many more different things too, it is certainly a very varied job, and I love the variety.

In my last letter, I told you we were hoping to have our chicks back again at Easter! I am SO pleased to report that we were indeed able to do so! We hatched two chicks and they brought SO much hope and joy with them, more so than in any other year I think. As usual there was a steady stream of people and we had some regular patients who came every day – even multiple times a day! Even now, almost two months after they left us to go to their good home, people are asking me how they are doing. You may remember that one of the objectives we have in doing this is to help children have conversations around loss and disappointment (e.g. if eggs do not hatch or a chick is too weak to survive, etc). As well as a game which was used for the first time this year (having been developed pre-lockdown in 2020) we had a couple of stories written by me. One of these we made into a small video, do check it out if you would like to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGJ0dcI64N0> – we encouraged parents to watch this with their child. The chicks have now gone to their new home, where they were immediately cuddled and are being very well looked after.



Our gorgeous 2023 chicks

We have also held our first in-person bereavement service since the beginning of the pandemic. It was so lovely to be back in person after three online services had been recorded and streamed. We had chaplains on the end of phones if people needed to talk, and we gave people the opportunity to come to the garden area of the hospital to collect a small gift afterwards for the second two, but being back in person was amazing. In that time, sadly, many more families have been bereaved, so there was a large number who were coming for the first time. I was working with the siblings once again, with an almost new team but it was so good to be able to do that again, the team were all fantastic and worked really hard and once again the children's artwork was placed alongside photos of their siblings on the display.

It's been an incredibly busy first half of the year, at times really hard to fit everything in! We have celebrated Chinese New Year (the Year of the Rabbit, so we had some furry friends join us – we have no

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idea what that means for the Year of the Dragon or Tiger!) as well as Holi, Purim, Easter, Vaisakhi and Vesak. It has been relentless and exhausting, but so good. This has been alongside our normal work of staff support, patient support and all the other things we are involved in. As I write, we are planning Eid al Adha. Last year we were able to once again celebrate in person, so we are really looking forward to growing this once again. As usual we are looking to have activities, food, music, but for the first time we are also hoping to have alpacas join us. Camels are important in this festival as the highest sacrifice one can give, and alpacas are related to camels – I would LOVE to have a camel visit us, but I am not sure even I could get that past the powers that be! I am hoping we will be able to have some donkeys in over the summer holidays and enjoy a summery day outside with games etc, but we will see! Animals manage to encourage people and support their mental health in a way that we simply can't. When we have animals visit us, we are always very mindful of their welfare. If they

need a break, we will ensure they have it, and will explain to the children (and adults) why they are not available at that time.

I have also had the privilege of speaking to two groups of international nurses who have come to work alongside us. As well as introducing the chaplaincy team and the services we offer to staff, patients and families, it's been good to share that I understand the challenges (and joys) of moving countries and that there are others in our team who understand that as well. I can't imagine how it must feel for these new nurses, leaving everything behind and coming to a situation which is currently rather unsettled with lots of staffing issues and strikes etc. But of course within this they are joining great teams of nurses who are working incredibly hard and are totally dedicated to their patients and their families.

Once again, thank you for your continued support and belief in what is happening here in Birmingham.

Take care
Ruth



Photos from top to bottom: Our table to celebrate Vesak – we print more mindfulness cards each year and have such a great time connecting with staff and families; with one of our incredibly soft rabbits for Chinese New Year. They had lots of cuddles from both children and staff and settled down every time; activities for the chick project: pin the beak on the chick and our countdown



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Jesus never gives up. Neither should we. We live in a fractured, hurting world. It can be tempting to give up: on hope, on people, on the idea that things can ever change. Yet, Jesus invites us to follow him on a journey to the edges. Find out more at churchmissionsociety.org/nevergiveup

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