



View towards the Sycamore Gap Tree on Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland before it was illegally felled last Autumn - credit National Trust Images, John Millar

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## Northumbria lecturer receives a 'Trees of Hope' Sycamore Gap sapling

[Cath Darling](#), a Senior Research Associate in [Occupational Therapy](#) at Northumbria University, has been named as one of just 49 recipients of a sapling from the much-loved Sycamore Gap tree which was felled last year.

Almost 500 applications were received from individuals, groups and organisations across the UK for the 49 saplings – one to represent each foot in height that the tree was at the time of its illegal felling.



Cath Darling

Alongside her teaching and research, Cath also runs a nature-based bereavement support service for adults and children in North Tyneside. [Elemental Occupational Therapy](#) supports people to navigate their grief and regain a sense of balance and purpose whilst engaging with nature and the outdoors.

Cath was encouraged by some of her clients to apply for a sapling and plans to plant the tree in a public space in the coastal area.

The saplings are currently being cared for at the National Trust's Plant Conservation Centre. The Trust believes they should be strong and sturdy enough to be planted out next winter.



A Sycamore Gap sapling at the National Trust Plant Conservation Centre, summer 2024 ©National Trust Images James Dobson

Cath hopes that the Elemental Occupational Therapy tree will represent triumph over adversity and healing after loss, serving as a legacy for those loved ones that have died and also provide a contemplative space for the bereaved to visit.

Cath, who teaches in Northumbria's Department of [Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing](#), said: "Bereavement has a significant impact upon both physical and mental health conditions. Connecting to nature and the outdoors has been proven to improve health outcomes and access meaningful relief.

“Our Tree of Hope will enable us to provide a very special place for those living with loss to visit and will hopefully initiate conversations about the impact that loss has upon us all.”

The new homes for the saplings will all be in publicly accessible spaces across the UK, enabling many more people to feel part of the iconic Sycamore Gap tree’s legacy.

Other recipients of saplings include The Rob Burrow Centre for Motor Neurone Disease which will open next year in Leeds, Holly’s Hope in conjunction with Hexham Abbey in Northumberland, and The Tree Sanctuary and Tree Amigos in Coventry.

Andrew Poad, General Manager for the National Trust’s Hadrian Wall properties, said: “Each and every application for a ‘Tree of Hope’ told heartfelt stories of people’s emotional connections to the Sycamore Gap tree and the importance of nature. They spoke of loss, hope and regeneration from all four corners of the country, from towns, schools, colleges, community groups, hospitals and hospices, it’s been a privilege to read them all.

“The tree meant so much to so many and through the ‘Trees of Hope’ initiative we are helping reach people across the nation, for generations to come.

“Each sapling will carry a message of hope with it as they start a new chapter not just for the tree but for all the 49 people and communities that will receive a sapling next year.”

The entries were judged by a panel of experts from the National Trust led by independent judge and arboriculture specialist Catherine Nuttgens.

Catherine commented: “The Sycamore is one of the most architecturally beautiful trees in our landscape. In summer, their dark green leaves create a canopy that looks almost like broccoli, while in winter, they create a silhouette that perfectly depicts what we think of when we think of a tree.

“The loss of any tree can evoke strong emotions - none more so than the Sycamore Gap tree. Its destruction felt utterly senseless, destroying the simple joy it brought to so many people for so many reasons. But the ‘Trees



of Hope initiative has kept that sense of joy and hope alive, and it has been truly humbling to read through so many applications but a difficult task to select the final 49 recipients.

“The stories have come from every corner of the UK and every walk of life. Their words reflect the hope and kindness that human beings are capable of, which feels like such a fitting response to the loss of this precious tree.”

To follow the journey of Cath’s sapling and learn more about the work of Elemental Occupational Therapy follow [@elementalocctherapy](https://www.instagram.com/elementalocctherapy) on Instagram.

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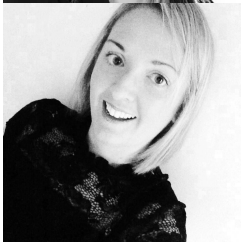
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