



Lisa Ternent (left) and Denise Crawford (right) with patient Sienna Steele, aged 10.

Nov 07, 2022 15:00 GMT

Technician wins support from iconic fashion brand to help children in hospital

A talented technician from Northumbria University has received support from a luxury North-East headquartered fashionwear retailer in her mission to adapt clothing for children receiving vital treatment.

Denise Crawford, a sewing machinist by trade who works at Northumbria University's [School of Design](#), was inspired to start modifying t-shirts for children in Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) when her grandson, Finnley, was undergoing chemotherapy treatment for a brain tumour at the

hospital in 2020.

Denise explained: “When children are having chemotherapy, as part of the treatment they often have a portacath or Hickman lines implanted in their chest to be accessed when having blood taken or to receive intravenous chemotherapy treatment. This usually requires the child to remove their top or take an arm out of a sleeve, which isn't always the best way for staff to have clear access. The anxiety or worry in removing clothing can make an already difficult time worse for children, particularly older girls.

“Whilst on the ward one day, my daughter-in-law and grandson were speaking to the play specialist, Lisa, who helps the children to feel as comfortable as possible while receiving their treatment. She showed them some t-shirts she'd received from a charity in America with zips in to make access easier and more comfortable for the children, but finding the right size for each child was taking a long time.

“I decided to put some zips in Finnley's t-shirts so he had different ones to wear that were the correct size for him. I realised that this could be useful for other patients so I continued to buy different styles and sizes of t-shirts, put zips in them and donate them to the ward for other children.”

Since coming up with her novel idea, Denise has sent dozens of t-shirts to Ward 14 in the paediatric oncology day unit at the RVI's Great North Children's Hospital. Now her innovation has caught the attention of one of the country's most prominent fashionwear retailers, Barbour, a fifth-generation family-owned business that has been trading from its South Shields base since 1894.

Synonymous with the iconic wax cotton jacket and now trading in more than 55 countries, Barbour has donated more than 100 t-shirts which have been customised by Denise and her colleagues for children in the RVI.

Lisa Ternent, Nursery Nurse on Ward 14, said: “Our patients are anxious about having their ports accessed and removing a t-shirt can be difficult as this is often their security blanket.

“The zip t-shirts make the procedure a lot easier and more positive. When Denise started adapting the t-shirts, it was a massive help to the ward and

patients. She is fabulous and we can't thank her enough."

Denise said she plans to continue supplying the RVI with customised t-shirts. Previously she purchased t-shirts from local high street stores and modified them with zips in the morning before starting work. She joined Northumbria University 16 years ago following a 20-year career as a sewing machinist in the garment industry.

"I really enjoy working with students to solve problems and create some of the wonderful designs they come up with," said Denise. "There are never two days the same and I love that I never know what the next challenge will be."

Kristen Pickering, Assistant Professor at Northumbria School of Design, said: "This is a commendable effort from Denise and her colleagues, one that has identified and tackled a real-world issue currently affecting hospital staff and young patients. This fantastic initiative also highlights how design can be successfully applied across different disciplines and social contexts."

Northumbria School of Design offer programmes in industrial, fashion, communication and innovation design, with students often exploring how design is used in the beauty industry as well as in society and culture. Art and Design at Northumbria was ranked fourth in the UK for research power in the [2021 Research Excellence Framework \(REF 2021\)](#).

Any other suppliers who would like to donate t-shirts can contact Denise at d.crawford@northumbria.ac.uk

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