

Dame Laura Lee DBE, Chief Executive of Maggie's

From Nurse to Dame: Celebrating 25 years

1. OVERVIEW

Dame Laura Lee was pivotal in founding national cancer charity Maggie's and became its first member of staff in 1995, before the original centre opened in 1996. She has spent most of her adult life bringing a unique kind of cancer support to people with all kinds of cancer, and their families and friends, across the UK and abroad.

As Chief Executive Laura has overseen the growth of the organisation from the original centre at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh, to the 24 now to be found in the grounds of NHS hospitals across the UK and three independently run international centres. As well as acting as client for every new build, often designed by world renowned architects following Maggie's own brief, Laura has also overseen the development of Maggie's evidence-based programme of support to meet the practical, emotional and psychological needs of people living with cancer.

Under Laura's leadership, Maggie's was being visited up to 300,000 times a year by people in need of support before 2020 and with her guidance Maggie's has adapted quickly to the coronavirus crisis to offer support by phone, email and online, alongside offering face to face appointments within government guidelines, at a time people with cancer need Maggie's more than ever.

In the last 25 years Maggie's has made an incredible difference to the lives of people with cancer and Laura is determined that one day no one will have to go through cancer without having access to a Maggie's centre.

And Maggie's has never been needed more. With treatments delayed and, on many occasions, stopped, worsened outcomes and isolation, people with cancer have experienced heightened stress, anxiety, anger, fear and trauma. Under Laura's leadership Maggie's provided support 239,000 times in 2020, over the phone, online, by e-mail and face to face in centres while following all guidelines.

2. FROM CANCER NURSE TO DAME

Laura's career with Maggie's began in 1995, when she was thirty and working as a Clinical Oncology Nurse Specialist at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh. Here she met and gave chemotherapy to Maggie Keswick Jencks, who was being treated for advanced metastatic breast cancer.

The two women became friends, and during Maggie Keswick Jencks' treatment they began to talk about how much Maggie needed both practical and emotional support over and above her medical treatment. Both women knew just how many other people were in the same

predicament: 3,500 people were diagnosed with cancer at the Western General that year and the number of people diagnosed with, and surviving, cancer was, and still is, rising.

Between them, Maggie and Laura began to work out the fundamentals for the cancer caring centre to be based in the hospital grounds. It would work in partnership with the NHS but would be financially independent and run autonomously and would offer free support to anyone who needed it.

Maggie died in July 1995; six months later, in January of 1996, The Maggie Keswick Jencks Cancer Caring Centres Trust (Maggie's) was set up as a registered charity. Its objectives were to 'relieve suffering and distress and to further the health of persons with cancer, or having had cancer, and their families and carers...' With Laura at the helm, Maggie's Edinburgh opened in November 1996.

At this stage there were no plans to go beyond that one centre at the Western General, Edinburgh. But Laura believed that people with cancer needed the practical, emotional and psychological support Maggie's offered and plans were soon underway for centres in Glasgow, Dundee, Highlands, Fife and then across the rest of the UK.

In November 2008, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall became Maggie's President, and in 2019 Dame Laura Lee was awarded a Damehood for her services to people with cancer.

3. BUILDING THE MAGGIE'S NETWORK

For 25 years Laura has been at the helm of Maggie's as it's designed, built and run cancer centres across the UK and abroad. Laura, a trained nurse with no previous experience of working with architects, has now worked with some of the best architects in the world to design centres because she understood first hand how light, colour and a connection to nature can help people to feel better.

Every Maggie's is architecturally unique, yet they are all built around the same founding principle; that interior architecture and design can have an amazing, positive effect on health and well being. Maggie's centres are all built right alongside the hospital and are staffed by professionals with a healthcare background, but every centre is thoughtfully designed to be calming and welcoming; a place to escape from the clinical environment of the hospital.

Through her time at Maggie's Laura has experienced time and time again the positive affect our non-clinical spaces have on people with cancer. How a beautiful, considered and well designed space can make the people in them feel valued and safe. How great architecture, landscaping and considered artwork can create a space that allows people to express how they're feeling in a way a hospital space never could.

It is unlikely that anyone else has steered so many different architectural projects to fruition and with such acknowledged success.

Dame Laura Lee's honorary roles and judging panels:

- Judge of the Wolfson Economics Prize 2021
- Judge of the AJ Women in Architecture Awards, 2012-2017
- Honorary Doctorate from Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, in recognition of her work in improving the lives of people with cancer by placing patients and their families at the centre of service delivery, 2016
- Honorary Fellow of The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), 2009

Maggie's architectural accolades:

- Maggie's West London, a Richard Rogers Partnership-designed building at Charing Cross Hospital, won the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2009; Laura was awarded Client of the Year at the same time. The centre was also awarded the Building Better Healthcare Award – Judges Special Award for Best Primary Health Care Design in 2008.
- Maggie's Lanarkshire, designed by Reiach and Hall Architects, was on the RIBA Stirling Prize shortlist and the RIAS Andrew Doolan Award Best Building in Scotland shortlist in 2015.
- Maggie's Newcastle, designed by Ted Cullinan of Cullinan Studio Architects, won the RIBA Sustainability Award, RIBA Regional Award and the Building Better Healthcare Special Awards – Patients Choice all in 2013.
- Maggie's Glasgow, designed by Rem Koolhaas of OMA, was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize Award and won the Andrew Doolan Award in 2012.
- Maggie's Swansea, designed by Kisho Kurokawa Architects with Garbers & James, won a RIBA Regional Award and a RIBA Welsh Architecture Award in 2012.
- Maggie's Cheltenham, designed by Sir Richard MacCormac of MJP Architects, won a RIBA Regional Award in 2011.
- Maggie's Highlands, designed by David Page and Brian Park of Page\ Park Architects, won the RIAS Andrew Doolan Award 'Best Building in Scotland' in 2006.
- Maggie's Dundee, designed by Frank Gehry, won the Royal Fine Arts Commission for Scotland Building of the Year and the BSkyB Building of the Year in 2004.
- Maggie's Edinburgh, designed by Richard Murphy OBE of Richard Murphy Architects, won the RIBA Regional Award, included on the RIBA Stirling Prize Shortlist and won the RIBA/Department of Health National Award in 1997.

4. AREAS OF INTEREST

Dame Laura Lee is available for interviews both in person and remotely and is always happy and eager to discuss the issues that really matter to her. These include:

- Building a charity from foundation to growth
- Architecture, design and gardens - the impact on health and wellbeing
- Why every person with cancer deserves access to emotional and psychological support
- The devastating impact of COVID-19 on people with cancer

- Why a revolution in hospital design and a integrated care pathway is a pivotal moment to do more for people with cancer
- The future of cancer care
- The importance of emotional support for people with cancer
- How to live well with cancer

5. ABOUT MAGGIE'S

Maggie's has 25 years of experience and expertise providing free cancer support and information in centres across the UK. Built in the grounds of NHS cancer hospitals, the centres are warm and welcoming, and are run by expert staff who help people live well with cancer.

The centres provide a breathing space away from the hospital where a person living with cancer can meet people who understand what they're going through, or just take a moment to gather their thoughts.

Maggie's helps people take back control when cancer turns life upside down, with support for anything from treatment side effects to money worries. The centres' professional teams provide help and information and run groups and activities, all designed to make coping with cancer easier.

Maggie's knows that great design and architecture can help the people in need of support feel better – and also to help the professional staff to give the best possible cancer support. Every Maggie's is a unique place that fits perfectly into its surroundings – a home from home that's designed to feel nothing like a hospital.

Each centre is a calm, friendly and welcoming place, full of light and warmth. They all have a kitchen table at their heart, offer glimpses and views of nature and provide thoughtful spaces to find privacy, as well as places to come together as a group.

Maggie's believes everyone should have access to professional psychological and emotional support to help change the way they live with cancer.

Maggie's has been supporting people with cancer throughout the coronavirus crisis over the phone, email and through our online community. This support helped people 239,000 times during lockdown in 2020.

Maggie's are open to see people face to face. This support runs alongside our ongoing phone, email and digital support.

6. MAGGIE'S AND THE CORONAVIRUS

Dame Laura Lee's statement on the impact of the pandemic on people with cancer:

"There is no question that coronavirus has affected all of our lives, but the impact of the pandemic on people with cancer is often forgotten, traumatic and will be felt for many years to come.

"People now face a threefold psychological blow – the trauma of diagnosis, fear of treatment delays with possible worsened outcomes and the stress of isolation.

"Research even predicts that people are more likely to die from cancer now than 15 years ago.¹

"We have been supporting people with cancer, and their family and friends, for 25 years through a network of centres across the UK and internationally, yet we have never seen such extreme distress as we have seen during the pandemic.

"We now hear from people who have more advanced cancers, worsened outcomes and potentially a shorter life expectancy because of the coronavirus. It is now predicted that there could be as many as an additional 18,000 cancer deaths in the UK in the coming year.

"The impact of coronavirus on people living with cancer is likely to go on for many years, we know we will be supporting people through their stress, fear, anger and loneliness for a long time to come."

Stats and facts

Maggie's expects that the coronavirus crisis will impact cancer outcomes for years to come as the huge physical, psychological and emotional consequences of delayed diagnosis and missed treatments become realised.

In the last year Maggie's have heard from people with cancer experiencing unprecedented levels of trauma, fear and stress because of the devastating impact of the coronavirus.

- 1 in 3 treatments delayed²
- GP cancer referrals down by as much as 80%³
- As many as 18,000 additional deaths from cancer in the coming year⁴

¹ The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer deaths due to delays in diagnosis in England, UK: a national, population-based, modelling study. The Lancet, published July 20, 2020

² 1 in 3 people with cancer surveyed by CRUK in their Cancer Patient Experience Survey July 2020 said that their treatment had been impacted.

³ University College London Institute of Health Informatics and DATA-CAN: The Health Data Research Hub for Cancer, as published in HDRUK, Aug 2020. Lead author Dr Alvina Lai.

⁴ University College London Institute of Health Informatics and DATA-CAN: The Health Data Research Hub for Cancer, as published in HDRUK, Aug 2020. Lead author Dr Alvina Lai.

- Increased demand for our support now and over the coming years

How Maggie's has supported people with cancer through the coronavirus crisis

With many people with cancer spending much of the last year self-isolating and facing changes or delays to treatment, Maggie's has been supporting people with cancer throughout the coronavirus crisis over the phone, email and online, alongside face to face appointments. This support helped people with cancer 239,000 times in 2020.

Maggie's has received many calls from people with cancer realising they might die early with coronavirus ; who couldn't say a proper goodbye to their loved ones, knowing their last days may be spent stuck at home or in hospital, alone; who were devastated that clinical trials stopped to prioritise coronavirus studies, and research was halted.

Each Maggie's centre across the UK continues to offer support from a team of professional staff by phone, email or online via Teams or Zoom as well as face to face support. Social distancing, hygiene and safety measures are in place at every centre in line with all guidelines. Tailored specialist help is offered as well as stress management, benefits advice and appointments with a psychologist.

7. THE PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT AT MAGGIE'S

A cancer diagnosis changes lives, and the weeks after can be the most difficult and challenging. Maggie's is here from that moment to provide free cancer support and information from our centre and online.

Help with money worries

Maggie's can tell people what they are entitled to and help with things like parking permits and extra money you may be able to claim.

Professional staff

Maggie's are here to listen to concerns and guide people to the right information. No appointment is needed – just come in.

Courses and workshops

Courses and workshops are designed to help people to live well with cancer and we'll help people find what's most appropriate.

Support groups

Maggie's run groups where people can meet others in a similar situation and get information about your type of cancer.

Friends and family

Maggie's can help people find ways to have difficult conversations, support people as they come to terms with changes in their lives or help people to adapt to a new role as a carer.

8. MAGGIE'S TIMELINE

- 1988 – Maggie Keswick Jencks is first diagnosed with breast cancer.
- 1993 – Maggie's breast cancer returns.
- 1994 – Maggie writes 'A view from the front line', a publication about her experience.
- 1994 – Maggie and her oncology nurse Laura Lee develop early plans for a 'Cancer Caring Centre'.
- 1995 – Architect Richard Murphy produces a plan to convert a stable building at Western General Hospital in Edinburgh.
- 1995 – On 8 July, Maggie dies. The blueprints for what would become the very first Maggie's centre were on her hospital bed.
- 1996 – Maggie's Edinburgh opens.
- 2000 – An extension to Maggie's Edinburgh is opened.
- 2002 – Maggie's Glasgow opens.
- 2003 – Maggie's Dundee opens.
- 2005 – Maggie's Highlands opens.
- 2006 – Maggie's Fife opens.
- 2008 – Maggie's West London opens.
- 2008 – HRH, The Duchess of Cornwall becomes Maggie's President
- 2010 – Maggie's Cheltenham opens.
- 2011 – Maggie's Glasgow Gartnavel, Maggie's Nottingham and Maggie's Swansea open.
- 2012 – Maggie's Cambridge (interim) opens, formed following a merger with Wallace Cancer Care.
- 2013 – Maggie's Newcastle, Maggie's Aberdeen and Maggie's Hong Kong open.
- 2014 – Maggie's Lanarkshire, Maggie's Oxford and Maggie's Merseyside (interim) open.
- 2016 – Maggie's Manchester, Maggie's Tokyo and Maggie's at the Royal Free (interim) open. The centre at the Royal Free is formed following a merger with the Cancerkin charity.
- 2017 – Maggie's Forth Valley, Maggie's Oldham and Maggie's Barts open.
- 2017 – Maggie's merges with online charity Ellie's Friends.
- 2018 – Maggie's Edinburgh second extension opens.
- 2019 – Maggie's Cardiff and Kálida Barcelona open.
- 2019 – Laura Lee awarded DBE.
- 2020 – Maggie's Leeds and Maggie's at the Royal Marsden officially open. Maggie's supports people with cancer 239,000 times throughout the coronavirus crisis.
- 2021 – Maggie's Southampton and Maggie's Merseyside (permanent) open

For more information about Dame Laura Lee and to interview her please contact Samantha Booth on

Samantha.Booth@maggies.org or 07825 056 394.



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About Maggie's

- Maggie's has 25 years of experience providing free cancer support and information in centres across the UK.
- Built in the grounds of NHS cancer hospitals, the centres are warm and welcoming, and run by expert staff who help people live well with cancer.
- Maggie's has been supporting people with cancer throughout the coronavirus crisis over the phone, email and online. This support has helped people 239,000 times during 2020.
- Maggie's centres are open to see people. This support runs alongside our ongoing phone, email and digital support.
- The first centre opened in Edinburgh in 1996. Maggie's now has 24 centres in the UK and a growing international network.
- Maggie's is funded by voluntary donations.
- Maggie's President is HRH The Duchess of Cornwall.
- Maggie's Chief Executive, Laura Lee was awarded a Damehood in 2019 for her services to people with cancer.
- For more information visit maggies.org