



**50 giving stories shared as part of
The Marketors' Trust's 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2026**

No 25: The head measurement that can save a baby's life



The Harry's HAT team.

Ask Caroline Coates about her son Harry, and the picture she paints is pure joy. He is a downhill mountain biker. At the charity's events in Parliament he can usually be found nerf-gunning MPs and tearing around the room. He is, in her words, living his best life. What makes that ordinary boyhood remarkable is that Harry was born with hydrocephalus, a life-threatening brain condition, and the reason he is thriving comes down to one thing: he was diagnosed early.



A young supporter with the Harry's Hat bobble hat, painted on for the day.

Hydrocephalus, once known as water on the brain, affects around one in every 770 babies born each year. "It's as common as Down syndrome and the number one reason for brain surgery in children," says Caroline, who founded Harry's Hydrocephalus Awareness Trust, known as Harry's Hat, after Harry, her fourth child, was diagnosed. Despite years working in health and social care, she had never heard of it. "When I was told about Harry's hydrocephalus, I went onto Google, despite being told not to, and it's a really scary place to be."

There is no cure, but there is treatment. Most children are fitted with a shunt, "an effective bit of plumbing," as Caroline puts it, that drains the fluid cushioning the brain. A nice aside for the curious: Roald Dahl helped develop the early shunt after his own son was injured. Left too late, though, the pressure on the brain can cause lifelong damage, from learning disability to hearing loss, even blindness. "The earlier they're diagnosed, the better the long-term outcome," she says. "The babies who are picked up later don't do well."

That single fact is what drives the charity's Get-A-Head campaign. In the UK, a baby's head is routinely measured just twice in the first year of life, while many developed countries measure it far more often. The average baby with hydrocephalus here is not picked up until four and a half months. "If we stop routine surveillance at six to eight weeks, we're missing opportunities," Caroline says. The campaign's goal is simple: every parent should leave hospital knowing why that first head circumference measurement, and the ones that follow, matter so much.

Victoria Glover puts it more plainly still. A journalist for thirteen years before her own son was diagnosed, she was, she admits, "completely caught on the back foot. I couldn't even pronounce the word." The experience lit a fire in her. "A head measurement isn't just a little metric to remind you how small your baby was. Your skull contains the most important organ in your body, so a head measurement is a very basic indicator of brain health. If we reframed it that way, loads more parents would be passionate about making sure it's checked."



The family at the heart of Harry's Hat.

For all their passion, Harry's HAT is tiny: four paid staff and a team of volunteers, most with their own lived experience. And that was the challenge The Marketers' Trust helped them solve. The charity had grown quickly and, Caroline says, "we look bigger than we are." Their materials, their website and their messages had not caught up. They needed to be clear about who they were, a user-led awareness and support charity rather than a medical helpline, and to say it in a way that families in the most frightening moment of their lives could trust.

Caroline is refreshingly honest about how it began. "The application I wrote was really rubbish, and I was really poorly when I wrote it. In my defence, I was in hospital at the time." She is equally honest that the charity's first hashtag, written as one word, could be read as something rather less printable. "I had a lot of learning to do." The Trust looked past the application. "They were lovely. We could just be honest and say, this is what we're struggling with."

What the grant funded was not just a single campaign but the foundations underneath one supporting the design of everything the charity put out, from the website to the way its messages read to a frightened parent. Just as importantly, it gave Caroline the evidence to make a case to her trustees: that marketing was not a luxury but core to the charity's purpose. That case created Victoria's role. "We were able to show that our messages were clearer, that we were meeting families' needs better," Caroline says. "The early diagnosis work had been a nice add-on. Now it's a key function of the charity, because Victoria can spearhead it."

Freed to focus, Victoria has widened the charity's reach from its base in the south to the north west, built relationships with more hospitals, and poured energy into video and family events. "Every time we do something new, it opens a new avenue," she says. "Lots of doors are opening." Those doors have led to parliamentary receptions, an event at Lambeth Palace, and a meeting with the creators of the Red Book, the personal health record every UK baby is given. One of the team's frustrations is that the Red Book has an explainer page for weight and for height, but none for head circumference. They are working to change that, so no measurement is ever taken without a parent understanding why.



Families at a Harry's Hat event.

The Get-A-Head campaign has since gathered more than 22,000 signatures and reached national audiences, including coverage on BBC Countryfile. But the moment that captures it best is a smaller one. A family with a six-month-old daughter, worried and searching online, found the Harry's HAT website. "Within twelve hours of finding our site and reading the symptoms, they took their child to the doctor, and she was in brain surgery within a day," Victoria says. "She had acute hydrocephalus. That family told us we saved their child's life. We would never make that claim ourselves, but they said it." Four of them have since had Harry's HAT bobble-hat tattoos, so that when someone asks what it means, they can pass the message on.

For Caroline, the Trust's real gift was a change of mind. "In charities, when things are tough, marketing is often the first thing to go. For us, it should be the last, because it's how we get our message across." She points to the brand itself, the little hats, the colours, the consistency. "When people meet us, they think we're much bigger than we are. It makes us a trusted source, and that matters enormously when you're a newly diagnosed family being inundated with information and you need to know who to trust."

Ask her what she would say to the Marketers who made it possible, and the answer goes beyond thanks. "Thank you, but also thank you for making us realise why marketing is so important."



 **Watch the Get-A-Head film:** https://youtu.be/c25zO_QV8PU

(the video embeds and plays on the website)

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