



### **All aboard the Starlight express!**

Last Friday, Bluebell Railway helped Starlight Children's Foundation, the UK's leading wish granting charity for children and young people with serious and terminal illness, grant Daniel Bainbridge's wish of a lifetime

Ten-year-old Daniel from Abingdon was diagnosed shortly after birth with Neurofibromatosis, a genetic disease that causes tumours to grow along the nerves. Late in 2012, Daniel was also diagnosed with an optic pathway glioma and as a result of his illness, has undergone intense chemotherapy.

Despite all the challenges he has overcome, Daniel has remained positive, often cheering up other children on his ward. Daniel has always been interested in trains so Daniel's mum, Julia, wrote to Starlight, to ask them to help grant Daniel's wish to be a train driver.

Starlight Children's Foundation contacted Bluebell Railway and plans were put in place to grant Daniel's wish of a lifetime.

Daniel was very excited on the day of his wish and arrived at Bluebell Railway bright and early with his mum, Julia. He was met by Roger Garman, Communications Director at Bluebell Railway, and taken to the front of the train to meet the driver Ian and the fireman Michael. Michael invited Daniel up onto the train's engine for a footplate ride and Ian showed Daniel how to use the train's controls. In no time Daniel was shunting the train up and down the track full steam ahead! He also helped to refill the train with water before its next journey. When Daniel got off the train his clothes were very dirty but he had a big smile on his face!

It was then time for Daniel and his mum to take their seats on the train in their first class carriage and ride the railway from Sheffield Park to East Grinstead and back again. Roger acted as their tour guide for the journey and taught Daniel lots of interesting facts and pointed out the railway platforms where the movie *The Woman in Black* and *Downton Abbey* were filmed.

When Daniel and his mum arrived back at Sheffield Park they were taken to the Bluebell café and served a delicious tea. A table had been reserved especially for Daniel and his mum, full of complimentary sandwiches, éclairs, freshly made scones, lemon cake and tea and coffee! Roger presented Daniel with a postcard signed by the driver and fireman which he was delighted with. When Daniel wasn't looking, Roger gave Daniel's Mum his own personal green guard's flag which is something that Daniel has always really wanted! Roger told Daniel's mum to give it to him that evening as a surprise.

After all the excitement of the day Daniel and his mum headed to the luxury East Sussex National Hotel for some well deserved rest. The hotel had organised a very special meal for Daniel and offered to make him anything he wanted. He requested roast pork with crackling followed by chocolate chip ice-cream! The hotel also surprised Daniel with an incredible train cake in his room!

Julia said, *"Words cannot really describe how grateful we are to Starlight for making Daniel's wish come true. We could never have imagined the generosity and kindness that we have experienced this week. When asked to rate his experiences on a scale of 1-10, Daniel's answer was 20! Thank you seems very inadequate for everything you have done to make this such a magical time for Daniel."*

Holly Hague, from Starlight Children's Foundation who granted Daniel's wish, said, *"We are delighted to have granted Daniel's wish-of-lifetime and to create precious memories for his family to cherish. The positive focus that a Starlight wish brings really does have a beneficial effect and helps to restore the fun and magic of childhood. We are extremely grateful to Bluebell Railway and their wonderful staff for their assistance in helping make Daniel's wish come true."*

Roger Garman, Communications Director for Bluebell Railway, said, *"Steam Railways still captivate the imagination of children and adults alike. The team here at the Bluebell were delighted to be able to make Daniel's wish to drive a train come true and give him a day to remember."*

ENDS

## **Information**

To refer a child for a wish or to make a donation, please go online at [www.starlight.org.uk](http://www.starlight.org.uk). For every £1 you donate, 93p goes towards helping Starlight's very ill children.

For more information, please contact Laura Thomas, [laura.thomas@starlight.org.uk](mailto:laura.thomas@starlight.org.uk)/ 020 7262 2881 # 231.

Starlight grants once-in-a-lifetime wishes for seriously and terminally ill children, restoring the magic and fun of childhood and giving the whole family happy memories to share, whatever the future holds.

Starlight also creates entertainment in every hospital and hospice throughout the UK. Sick children go to Starlight parties, laugh their way through pantomimes, go out on Starlight Escapes, play games and watch films on the Starlight Fun Centre, and enjoy the toys and puzzles of the Starlight Distraction Box. Happy children respond better to treatment and Starlight helps children to forget about their illness and simply have a bit of fun.