

Starlight Grants Harrison's Wish to Be a Zoo Keeper for the Day

Eight-year-old Harrison from Blandford St Mary in Dorset recently had his wish of a lifetime to be a zoo keeper for the day granted by Starlight Children's Foundation, the UK's leading wish granting charity for children with serious or terminal illnesses.

Harrison suffers from an undiagnosed condition which means he has a permanent tracheotomy and has to rely on a ventilator. He also uses a wheelchair from time to time as he struggles with a number of malformations with his hands, feet and spine and gets tired very quickly. Harrison has spent a lot of time in hospital having tests to identify his illness and also undergoing treatment.

Despite his condition Harrison is a fun loving boy who loves animals which include his pet rabbit, his two dogs and a cat. When he grows up Harrison has dreams of working in a zoo so it came as no surprise therefore, that when Harrison was referred to Starlight for a wish, he asked to be a zoo keeper for the day.

To make Harrison's dream come true, the charity asked one of its Ambassador's, wildlife expert and TV presenter Nigel Marven if he would help them grant Harrison's wish. Nigel jumped at the chance to help out as he loves nothing better than sharing his love of animals with such a young enthusiast. Nigel invited Harrison and his family, mum, Jody, grandma, Judith and family friend Kim to come and visit him at his home and meet some of his more unusual house guests!

Harrison was very excited to meet Nigel and hear all about his work and of course he couldn't wait to meet some of Nigel's "special friends". First up was Esmeralda the giant tortoise who was as interested to meet Harrison as Harrison was to meet her. Next was a Bull Frog who Harrison was a bit nervous of but soon learnt to relax around. Nigel's wife, Gill was on hand to show Harrison some more conventional animals including her ponies, and Harrison had a lovely ride around the fields which he adored. It was soon time to go because Nigel had arranged for Harrison to visit Bristol Zoo that afternoon and have a special behind the scenes tour. Before he left Nigel gave Harrison some special gifts including a signed DVD, a turkey egg and a real snakeskin!

Harrison arrived at Bristol Zoo in time for a special tour with the Zoo's senior curator, John Partridge. Harrison was very excited to meet one or two of the animals and couldn't believe it when he came face to face with an armadillo and a macaw and was lucky enough to feed Tarquin, the South American coati! He was able to see for himself exactly what a zoo keeper gets up to each day and learn more about some of the animals the zoo is helping as part of its animal conservation programme. It was soon time to go and Harrison was very sad to leave.

Jody, Harrison's mum said, "Harrison had the time of his life and everyone we met couldn't have been lovelier. We would particularly like to thank Nigel Marven for

giving up so much of his time and letting Harrison meet all the animals and also to everyone at Bristol Zoo who were all fantastic and really made Harrison feel special. He definitely wants to be a zoo keeper now!”

Information

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

For more information, please contact Janet Lindsay, janet@starlight.org.uk/ 020 7262 2881 # 230.

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.