


# 'We all need a place to hide': NHS workers take a breather – in pictures

Craig Easton and Lottie Davies 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024

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## 'We all need a place to hide': NHS workers take a breather – in pictures



▲ 'We try to keep morale up' ... Linda, linen supervisor at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. Photograph: Craig Easton

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Spela, clinical pharmacist, Midlothian Community Hospital

These large-scale portraits, still lives and personal testimonies document the quiet havens where NHS Lothian staff go during their busy days. Spela says: 'Ever since I started working here, I've sought out a little space for myself where I can relax and maybe do a quick mindfulness exercise for a break. Because I'm a keen gardener, I was very quickly attracted to the beautiful Cyrenians [homeless charity] garden.' *Havens: Stories and Portraits from NHS Lothian by Craig Easton and Lottie Davies is at Stills, Edinburgh until 13 July*

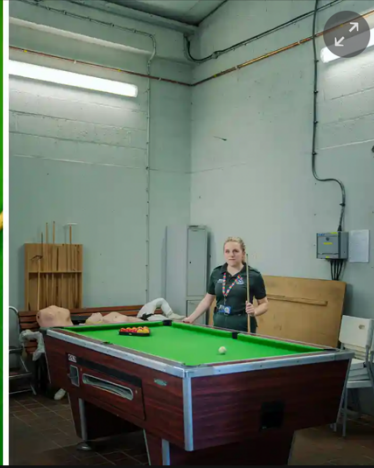
Photograph: All Photographs: Craig Easton/Lottie Davies, Interviews: Lottie Davies



**Cara, paramedic,  
Haddington ambulance  
station (listen to the audio)**

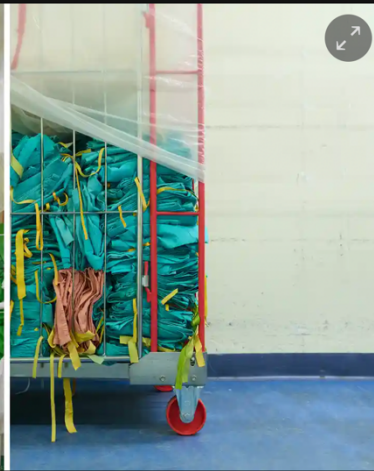
During their residency, Easton and Davies interviewed and photographed more than 70 NHS staff across the Lothians. The results give insight to the wellbeing and mental health needs of all those working in healthcare. Cara says: 'Because you talk to people all day or night, you want to have a cup of tea and chill out and not really talk to each other.

Sometimes, especially on the night shift, you'll find us all sleeping in here or in the computer room or playing pool, which I like to do'



**Linda, linen supervisor,  
Royal Infirmary of  
Edinburgh (listen to the  
audio)**

'Because we're in the basement and there's no windows or anything like that, every now and again I'll say we'll go up for five minutes and go outside, have a walk from one end of the hospital to the other. We try and keep the morale up as much as we can. When break time comes - usually lunchtime - we go outside and have our lunch. Or we have lunch here then we go outside for a walk or just stand and have a blether with other people like the domestics, the nurses, the porters, anybody'



**Emma, speech and  
language therapist, Royal  
Infirmary of Edinburgh  
(listen to the audio)**

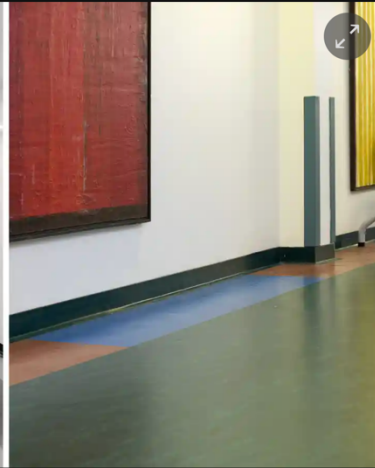
'My office is somewhere I can come and just be on my own. Sometimes I put music on while I'm tidying. I quite like to order and organise stuff, just making a list of things and working my way through, ticking things off quietly with nobody disturbing me. It's a lovely room. I know how lucky I am to have the space to come and sit in.'





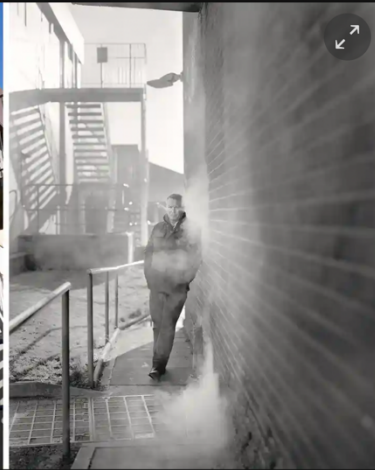
**Umar, doctor, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh**  
[\(listen to the audio\)](#)

'Every day is a demanding day. You have to come up with your own systems of managing it. There are the patients that have to be seen first thing in the morning, and then you put an artificial break in there by saying, "I'm going to walk to the coffee shop". It's not for the coffee; the coffee in hospital is horrible. It's just to get away. You need a place to hide. At the same time, where? You can't go for a two-hour chat with your friends about how difficult life is, so you just walk to the other end of the hospital and back'



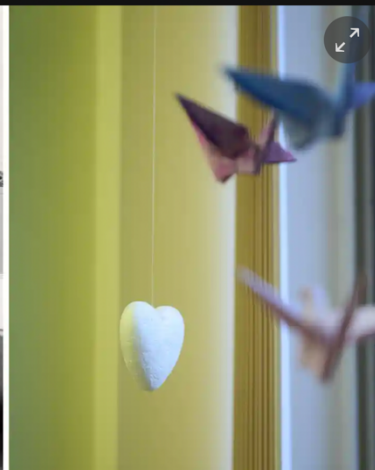
**Chris, site director, Western General Hospital**  
[\(listen to the audio\)](#)

'I walk to work. I started doing that during the pandemic. I'd always noticed this walkway as an interesting place to walk because of the steam that rises from the pathway, and it always makes me think of a New York sort of sidewalk. Coming into work, it's signalling the start of the day and getting ready for that. Going the other direction at the end of the day, there's a tangible sense of trying to leave the day's troubles behind and get back home'



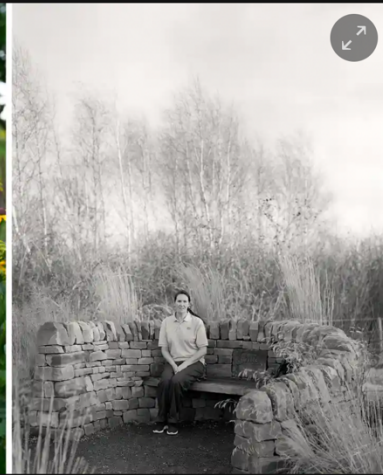
**Amal, consultant psychiatrist, St John's Hospital**  
[\(listen to the audio\)](#)

'My office is extremely drab. But it's a personal space where I can keep personal items that have been given to me over the years. So when I come in, I can remember that I'm a mother and sister and wife and daughter, I'm not just a consultant psychiatrist. I have a little doctor's case and a little heart that my son made me during the pandemic out of Lego and I have a little heart hanging in the window that my other child made me. I've also got a RNLI stress ball that my husband gave me to calm me down'



**Beverley, activities coordinator, Midlothian Community Hospital (listen to the audio)**

'I'll have my lunch break out here, or if I'm struggling I actually come here so I can't hear what's going on in the ward. The garden is run by volunteers. And you've got different sections - there's a vegetable patch, and you've got a flower section over there. And then this seat here. In the summer it's just all full of colours. And then there's a woodland bit over there with a swing'



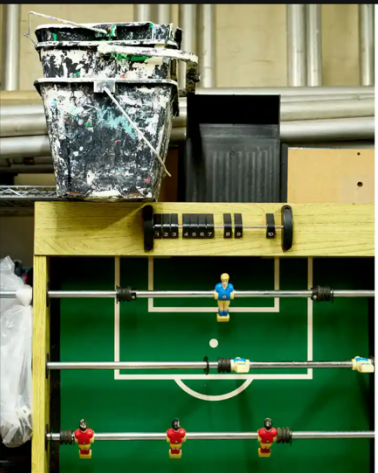
**Hannah, deputy charge nurse, A&E, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh (listen to the audio)**

'There was one shift in particular, I was very new, there was a lot going on and I said to the senior charge nurse at the time, "Can I just have a minute?". I didn't know where to go and I thought, "OK, the stock room of the resus area". It's always closed, always locked. And it was really close. So I walked in and I was like, "Ahhhh" - big sigh. Got myself together and then walked back out. And I was like, "Right, let's do this"



**Terry, painter, Royal Edinburgh Hospital (listen to the audio)**

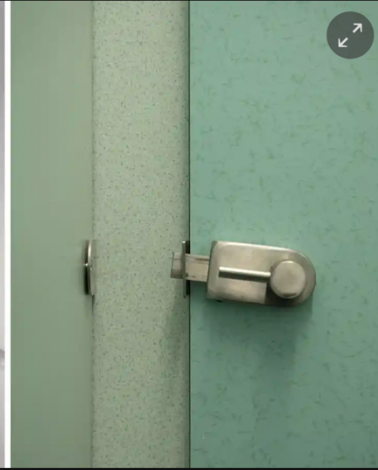
'I like coming to work. The place that I escape to, my storeroom, I call it my howf. Get in here, close the door, and I can do my wee projects at lunchtime and it's just nice and relaxing. I work five days a week. Normally I start at eight, finish at half past four, probably about three quarters of an hour of breaks over the day and I just come in here. That's it, just sit and chill out, read a book, read my paper, listen to Neil Diamond. It's my space. The wee spark keeps saying to me, "When you retire, I'm having it"'





**Jamie, senior charge nurse,  
Royal Edinburgh Hospital  
(listen to the audio)**

'I'm a slave to my mobile phone. It's basically the primary point of contact for clinicians and assessing teams to be able to get in touch with me and say, "I've got this person that's coming to hospital - can you help me?". At any given time of day I can be on two or three phone calls; it can be relentless at times. But I feel it's legitimate not to answer my phone when I'm sitting on the loo. It's somewhere where I can physically shut the door. I like to use one of the disabled toilets because it's got more room'



**Kelly, clinical support  
worker and ward clerk  
(listen to the audio)**

'This is the Novid room. We got it through Covid when we were able to come in here, but we were not allowed to speak about Covid inside. We could scream, shout, laugh, cry - it was a safe place to come and unwind have a cup of tea and chocolate and forget what's going on out on the ward.' *NHS Lothian Charity is the official charity of NHS Lothian and the only charity dedicated to supporting all its work, all its staff and all the patients and families it cares for. All Photographs: Craig Easton/Interviews: Lottie Davies*

