

Lewis looks to the future in his battle with eczema

STAFF REPORTER

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AS SOON as Lewis Macdonald was born, his mum noticed his skin looked different to other babies.

It was always red, inflamed and angry and Lewis wouldn't sleep. After many trips to their GP, mum Karen had a diagnosis - eczema.

Karen, 44, from Caerphilly said: "We suspected it was eczema from birth so it was a bit of a relief to get the diagnosis and we thought we would be given the right cream to try and then we could fix the problem and move on. But we were very wrong."

Eczema is a chronic skin condition and Lewis has a severe case that causes his skin to be very red and painful as well as sensitive to the sunshine. His skin can be so inflamed at times that he has had to miss a lot of school and activities that a normal 10-year-old boy would normally do.

Karen, who works at the Intellectual Property office in Newport along with husband Robert, said: "I've lost count of the number of moisturisers, creams, steroids and tablets we have tried and while some work for a little while they seem to lose their effectiveness eventually and we need to move on to the next strength level. It's been a long battle and it feels like it's taken over our lives."

Lewis' condition means he needs to be covered head to toe in cream four times daily and is currently on strong immunosuppressants that weaken the



Lewis Macdonald has suffered with eczema since birth

immune system, meaning he can catch other ailments easily.

"It's been very frustrating and you can feel quite alone, while many kids have eczema, most can be treated with moisturisers so I felt very alone, and Lewis always asked why he was different.

"When he has a bad flare up, he looks like he's been scalded with boiling hot water and we have had some very thoughtless comments from strangers. "People have asked why we haven't put sun lotion on or just stare and of course it gets to him, he is often down about his skin and doesn't want to leave the house."

A new group launched in Wales has been a great support for the family. Eczema Outreach Support was a Scottish charity that expanded into England and Wales last year and had its first meet up in Cardiff last month. The free service offers support and advice for families dealing with eczema, as well as helping families to interact with others in a similar situation.

Karen said: "We found

the charity to be a great source of support, they put us in touch with another family going through a very similar experience and it is great to have someone that understands. Our family support worker has been brilliant, she understands what we are going through and has advice and strategies to help us cope."

Today Lewis has his condition under better control and his attendance at school has improved. There is a new medicine that is being trialled and the family hope it will really help the Hendredenny Park Primary pupil.

Lewis, who is going into year six, said: "I don't like having eczema and wish it would go away forever. All my friends at school are really nice about it and know why I am sore and red."

Services from Eczema Outreach Support are now available for people living in Wales. The free service gives support and advice for families living with eczema. To register and receive a free welcome pack visit eos.org.uk



Today Lewis has his condition under better control

Train chiefs apologise for more issues

TRANSPORT for Wales Rail Services has apologised to passengers who have suffered overcrowding or cancelled trains recently - and revealed another delay to promised additional rolling stock.

The franchise operator has numerous trains out of service for modifications, refurbishment and repairs.

The result has been felt by commuters and long-distance travellers.

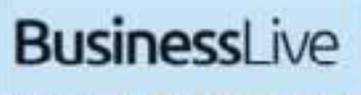
Some Valley Lines trains at peak times have had only two coaches instead of the usual four.

Most cancellations have been attributed to "more trains than usual needing repairs at the same time", with some being down to a shortage of train crew.

Colin Lea, customer experience director at TFW, said: "We recognise that some services have been more crowded than usual in recent days and we would like to apologise to customers for the difficult conditions.

"This is down to a combination of carrying out essential accessibility upgrade work and the fitting of new technology which we are confident will improve reliability in the long term.

"A number of our trains have suffered damage while in service and our engineers are working hard to repair these."



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