



Stephen Gethins MP reviews

## Leo and the Lightning Dragons

by Gill White

Published by Fledgling Press. On sale in Waterstones, and all good bookshops, at £8.99 RRP. All royalties are being donated to CHAS.

*'Everybody in the Kingdom is supporting the brave knight Leo in his battle against his fearsome dragons. They try lots of different things to help defeat him, but eventually Leo realises that the most important thing to do is to believe in himself.'*

*'This beautifully illustrated book with a poignant and uplifting rhyming story encourages children to persevere and find strength in the face of adversity, even when it seems nothing is working.'*

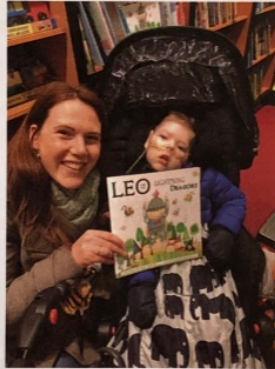
Leo is three years old. All his life he has suffered epileptic seizures; sometimes up to 170 a day will strike his little body. After being diagnosed with Ohtahara Syndrome at just a few months old, Leo continues to defy the odds; it is this battle with the lightning, or seizures, that inspired his mum, Gill White of St Andrews, to write about her hero, the knight in shining armour who overcomes the dragons and goes on to become a king.

In writing *Leo and the Lightning Dragons* for Leo's first birthday, Gill did not set out to publish a book. She intended to create a poster for Leo's room as a gift for her child who faces a constant battle and who deserves his own happy ending. However, with help from local artist Gilli B, Gill soon found herself developing not only a beautiful and incredibly touching story with quirky illustrations bringing Leo's battle to life, but a great resource for anyone, children in particular, to learn about courage and resilience. Like Leo, everyone has challenges – or dragons – to face.

*Leo and the Lightning Dragons* has something for everyone, from little ones who will love the colourful characters and rhymes, to older children gripped by the story of how Leo defeats the dragons. Gill's enthusiasm for sharing Leo's story with others shines through. It is clear to see why her book has been such a success. Just a week after it was published, Gill had to order a reprint. She has now gone on to develop the book with free storytelling events in nurseries and Waterstones book shops across Fife and Tayside, as well as after-school events in local libraries. Gill has been working with Maureen Phillip of PAMIS (Promoting A More Inclusive Society) to develop the book as a sensory story for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities. They have a series of sensory storytelling events planned over the summer, including visits to schools for children with additional support needs. On the first weekend of June she will take part in the Wildhood Festival at Tullibole Castle, Crook of Devon.

All royalties from the sale of the books are donated to the Children's Hospice Across Scotland (CHAS) which helps the family with both CHAS at Home service as well as respite care for Leo.

For more details on *Leo and the Lightning Dragons* visit [www.leetcodeandthelightningdragons.com](http://www.leetcodeandthelightningdragons.com)



Gill with Leo  
(Photo courtesy Gill White)

Gill White and her husband Andrew are also battling for Leo and other people with severe disabilities and mobility issues, who face barriers when it comes to accessibility.

St Andrews is a busy town, where residents, students, and visitors all enhance its culture and appeal. Huge steps forward like making the West Sands beach accessible to all is thanks to the Hamish Foundation, Tourism St Andrews, and others who supported the Beach Wheelchairs project.

However, St Andrews still lags behind other Fife towns in having fully accessible changing facilities, which are essential for those with severe disabilities. Gill knows only too well the challenges people face when out and about; both she and Andrew are supporters of the national Changing Places campaign by charity PAMIS.

"Leo has a life-shortening condition.

For us, it's about making as many memories with him as we can. As he gets older however, getting out and doing things with him becomes harder to do, as we cannot change him safely and with dignity unless he has appropriate toilet facilities. Sadly, these are few and far between. Fortunately, we have PAMIS on our side, an organisation committed to promoting inclusion and accessibility. They work to ensure that people like our son are included in society and treated with respect."

I have been happy to lend Gill and others my support. I am glad to see that plans for the redevelopment of the Fife Council toilet block at the Bruce Embankment car park will include the first Changing Places facility in the town. This is so important to St Andrews; if we want to be welcoming and inclusive then Changing Places facilities must be considered for every new public or commercial building if possible. St Andrews has taken huge strides in being dementia friendly – the same positive attitude must prevail for people with disabilities and mobility issues.