

2025 EDITION

# Willow

NEWS



Your support is helping seriously ill young adults across the UK to make precious memories with their loved ones

## Raffle

You could win a break at Center Parcs

## Exciting plans

Doubling the number of people we support over the next five years

## Our people

Read about some of our amazing beneficiaries, fundraisers and team

## Your support

How you can help make more Special Days possible



**"We'll be forever grateful to have had a few days where cancer wasn't part of our story, to have that time to forget our harsh reality, to have fun and just be mum, dad, Mia and Oscar. It meant the world to us."**

Ashley and her family tell us about spending precious time together on her Special Day



Willow was founded in 1999 by former Arsenal goalkeeper and TV presenter Bob Wilson and his wife Megs, as a lasting memorial to their daughter, Anna, who died of cancer aged 31.

The inspiration for Willow came from Anna's determination to live every moment to the full, spending as much time with family and friends as she could.

Over the last 25 years, Willow has supported more than 22,000 seriously ill young adults to do the same, helping them to create uplifting moments and precious memories with loved ones.



## Welcome to your Willow News

2024 was a huge year for Willow as we marked our 25th anniversary and passed the milestone of having supported 22,000 seriously ill young adults across the UK.

The experiences Willow creates give people the chance to make lasting memories with loved ones. They also provide the opportunity to take time out from days filled with treatments and medical appointments, things nobody expects to face in what should be the prime of their life.

Last year, Willow provided days out, breaks away and treat boxes filled with gifts for 1,257 young adults with a range of life-threatening illnesses, and in the first few months of 2025 we have already supported more than 300 people.

But with 21,000 young adults being diagnosed with a life-threatening condition each year, we are only scratching the surface. This is why we have developed ambitious plans to start scaling up our services over the next five years to be able to reach more people. We have also identified some key groups who need our support and will be working with partners and medical professionals to ensure this happens. You can read more about these exciting plans on page 6.

We would like to thank you for your support over the last 25 years. Willow wouldn't be the fantastic charity it is without you. Let's make more amazing experiences happen this year and beyond.

**David Seaman MBE & Frankie Seaman,**  
Honorary Presidents of Willow

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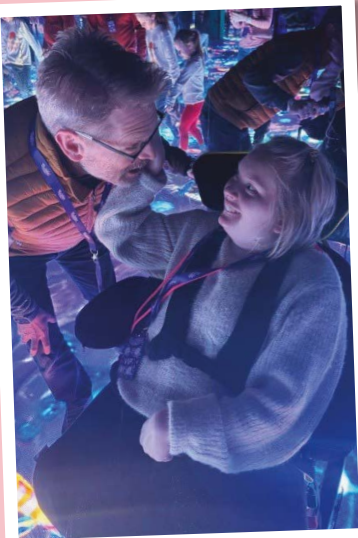
# Unforgettable Memories!

## Shantel

Shantel is 34 and lives in Leeds. She went into heart failure while pregnant and underwent a heart transplant. A trip to Legoland gave Shantel, her husband Renfold and Sire, their 16-month-old son, some much-needed time together.

"I loved seeing the happiness and joy on my son's face. After such a trying year of doctor's visits and surgery this experience made me feel a sense of normalcy and great joy. That little smile kept me going many days. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity!"

Willow  
Special Day  
Stories



## Ivy

**Eighteen-year-old Ivy from London has Mitochondrial Disease and is on a palliative care plan. Her mum Ruth accompanied her on her Special Day to Bubble Planet, which was a real treat for both of them.**

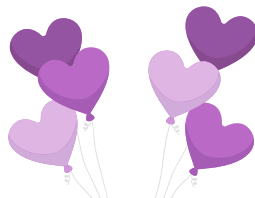
"Thank you again for organising a brilliant treat day for Ivy! It was such a great opportunity to take her out on a special adventure planned specifically for her and to take lots of amazing photos."

"My personal highlight was seeing Ivy enjoy herself with all the bubbles and a visual overload. It was an event that was perfect for her; she enjoyed every moment of it and we were able to give her all of our attention, which rarely happens at home as life runs at 100 miles an hour."

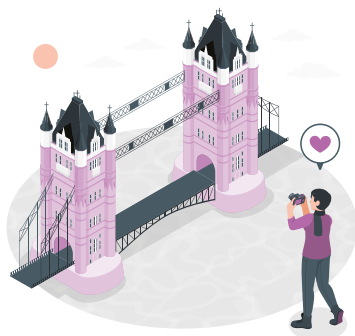


# Our year in numbers

## In 2024 we...



Celebrated **25** years of making a difference



Provided **777** days out or breaks to young adults living with life-threatening conditions



Helped **750** children to join their seriously ill parent on a Special Day

Sent bespoke treat boxes to **480** people



Welcomed four new ambassadors: Aaron Ramsdale, Alex Newman, Dan Field and Tom Rosenthal

Increased our volunteer hours by **24%** on 2023



Supported **112** young adults living with a less-survivable cancer



Opened our 8th charity shop

Brought our Special Treats service in-house



Launched two new events – Williamson's Walk and Catch of the Day

# Unforgettable Memories!

*Chloe*

**Chloe, 33, got some much-needed time away from the realities of her cervical cancer diagnosis and treatment and made unforgettable memories with her young family.**

"I have powered through because I have four children to keep going for, but unfortunately, sometimes it's at the expense of my own wellbeing. I have a long journey ahead in working on myself, and while I don't believe I'll ever be the same person again, I'm learning to love this new version of me and rediscover what brings me joy in life.

"My Special Break at Center Parcs Elveden Forest was, without a doubt, the best week we've had in a long time! Every single one of us, from the children to the adults, had an amazing time, and we've all said we'd definitely love to go again.

"It was a truly wholesome experience, not just for me but for the whole family. I hadn't realised how much we needed to reconnect and escape the demands of everyday life. We embraced every second and have left with memories to last a lifetime."



*Willow  
Special Day  
Stories*

## Meet Robson, our Community Fundraiser

Hello, my name is Robson and I am the Community Fundraising Officer here at Willow.

My primary role is to help people fundraising on our behalf by providing support, advice, and guidance throughout the entire process.

My focus is on community engagement and fostering relationships with various individuals and groups across the UK that support us, including schools, colleges, church organisations, women's institutes and sports clubs to name just a few.



If you are interested in fundraising for Willow, or have any questions around how to get started, please reach out to me on [robson.oreardon@willowfoundation.org.uk](mailto:robson.oreardon@willowfoundation.org.uk)

# Our plans for 2025 and beyond

**This year we will embark on a range of new projects, each with our beneficiaries at its heart. Our strategy includes ambitious plans to double the number of people Willow supports over the next five years. This means by our 30th anniversary in late 2029 we intend to be helping 2,400 seriously ill young adults each year to make magical memories with their loved ones.**

We have developed some key themes which will ensure that we continue to reach those who need us most, and these will shape our priorities as we move into the first phase of our growth plan:

## Medical urgency

Young adults who have a degenerative condition or have been given a short prognosis.



## Those least supported

This includes groups who struggle to find support elsewhere due to the nature of their illness.



## Representation and diversity

We strive to be an inclusive charity and our focus in this area will ensure that our support is representative of a range of patient groups across age, gender, region, ethnicity, disability and more.



## Financial situation

We will continue to support those facing financial hardship, whether as a result of their medical condition or otherwise. This will include those on low incomes, from areas of deprivation or who have had to give up work because of their illness.



# Supporting more young men with cancer

The first of our projects will be looking at how we can support more young men with cancer. We have identified that this is a group which is underrepresented in our services and aim to redress this balance through raising awareness and encouraging applications.

## Christian

**Christian, 23, recently finished treatment for Burkitt lymphoma and chose a relaxing break on the Isle of Skye in Scotland with his girlfriend Rosie.**

"We had a wonderful time! We can't thank you enough. The little cottage we stayed in was perfect - so quiet and peaceful. The weather was typical Scotland... wet and windy! But that didn't stop us getting out and doing plenty around the island! Thank you again for everything. Willow has been so generous and our time away was truly healing after what has been a very difficult period for both of us. I'll remember it as a lovely trip away for years to come!"



## Jason

**Jason, 36, from Merseyside is living with astrocytoma, a rare brain tumour. Willow organised a Special Break for him, his wife Naomi and their two children at Legoland.**

"Being diagnosed at such a young age was devastating beyond belief. You think it will never happen to you, so being told I had the world's most aggressive form of cancer and potentially had months to live, was heart wrenching. So many emotions flooded over me, but the biggest emotion is guilt. I feel guilty that my kids won't have me there as they grow up, and for my wife who has become my carer. Seeing the kids so happy and smiling constantly on our Special Break was priceless. It reminded us of happy times prior to my diagnosis. We would never have been able to afford this holiday as we are struggling on benefits due to me having to give up work and, although exhausting, it was an amazing few days away with the kids. They loved every second of it and we have so many photos to make into a memory scrap book."



## Bringing treat boxes in-house

Our treat boxes offer beneficiaries a tailor-made box of gifts to fulfil our aim of giving quality of time and quality of life. Every effort has been made to ensure a stress-free, seamless experience.

Being able to choose the items that make up their treat box, such as pamper products, cuddly toys, technology, sweet treats or sensory items, means each box is bespoke and contains exactly what the beneficiary wishes.

In August 2024 we brought our treat box service in-house, and the boxes are now packed by our wonderful volunteers. The cost savings we've seen from this are helping us to deliver bespoke treat boxes to more people who need them.



**You can help fill our boxes with much-needed treats by purchasing items from our Amazon Wishlist**



Shay

Shay is a regular visitor to Keech Hospice in Bedfordshire, where his support worker put him forward for a Willow treat box. His mum, Sharon, shared what it meant to him.

"My son Shay, who is bravely battling a Mitochondrial Disease, recently had the pleasure of receiving a treat box from Willow. For Shay, this gift box was more than just a collection of gifts. It was a treasured experience that allowed him to momentarily escape the challenges of his illness and immerse himself in the joy and wonder of discovery. The gift box served as a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there are moments of light and hope to be found thanks to the kindness and compassion of organisations like Willow."





# New partnerships

## Harkness Roses 1879

Harkness Roses have launched the 'Memories & Moments' rose; a beautiful new flower inspired by our mission to help seriously ill young adults create lasting memories.

£2.50 from each rose sold will be donated to Willow.



## Stevenage FC

We're excited to have been chosen as Stevenage Football Club's charity partner for the 2024/25 season... and the Willow logo is sitting front and centre of their third kit.

Stevenage FC's CEO Mike Pink said, "We are delighted to partner with Willow as our official charity this season. We have been working with them on a number of initiatives to help raise awareness and funds in support of the great work they do."



## Scamp & Dude

Clothing brand Scamp & Dude launched a fabulous new line on World Cancer Day (4 February) which honours secondary breast cancer campaigner Nicky Newman and her message to 'go grab life'.

Willow is one of the three charities benefitting from the sales of the jumpers, t-shirts, scarves and tote bags.



Could you, your employer or someone you know help by providing items that support delivery of a Special Day or treat box such as accommodation, transport, treatments or meals? Please do get in touch at [info@willowfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@willowfoundation.org.uk)

# Unforgettable Memories!

## Ashley

**Ashley lives in Walsall with her husband Alex and children Mia (12) and Oscar (10). They chose items from Ashley's living list to experience together as a family, which involved Afternoon Tea in London with a surprise guest and feeding giraffes at Woburn Safari Park.**

Willow  
Special Day  
Stories

"I was diagnosed with primary breast cancer in 2018, shortly after getting married. Just under two years after I'd got the all clear, I found a lump in my neck. I knew instantly that the cancer had come back. I was then diagnosed with incurable breast cancer at the age of 31.

"When people ask me how Mia and Oscar cope, my answer is always, "They don't know any different." It breaks my heart to say, but it's true. They've grown up understanding what cancer is and no child should have to know this.

"We'll be forever grateful to have had a few days where cancer wasn't part of our story, to have that time to forget our harsh reality, to have fun and just be mum, dad, Mia and Oscar. It meant the world to us.

"My time with my family is limited, but we've made some amazing core memories that will last forever because of Willow. Your support really does make a difference so from the bottom of my heart, I thank you."

## Alex

"Cancer has been a part of our daily lives for over six years. Some days it sits quietly in the background, other days it's loud and in your face.

"As a family we've always approached Ash's cancer journey by searching out the positives whilst supporting each other through the negatives. Whether it's a quiet or loud kind of day, it's not something you forget about or get a break from very often. But Willow gave us the opportunity to do just that and have a break from it all. A time to silence cancer and celebrate an incredible woman and two unbelievably brave kids while enjoying a bit of normality as a family.

"To see the kids smiling from ear to ear and the joy in Ash's face the whole time was truly magical."





## Mia and Oscar

"It's really tough having a mum who is very poorly. It makes us really sad to see her feeling ill and not being able to do as much as she used to, but it makes us realise just how important the memories we made on our Special Day will become.



"When we found out we were going to have a Special Day with Mum and Dad, we were so excited! We even got to choose some of the things we did - I picked Afternoon Tea, and Oscar wanted to do something with animals.

"Afternoon Tea was amazing! The cakes were 10/10. But the best part was feeding the giraffes at the safari park where we found out they love melons! If we could keep one each as a pet (imagine!), we'd call them Eden and Terrance.

"It was so nice to see Mum and Dad with the biggest smiles on their faces. Mum couldn't believe it when Duncan James surprised her during Afternoon Tea - he's her absolute favourite. She couldn't stop giggling!

"But what made the day truly special was just being together as a family, laughing, having fun, and making memories with Mum that we'll never forget. It felt unreal! We were happy, amazed, and so, so grateful."

**Ashley's Special Day was made possible by our wonderful partners at Red Letter Days.**

**Help more young families like Ashley's spend precious time together making magical memories.**





# Working together to help more people

Our Medical Advisors work closely with health professionals across the UK to help us reach more groups who may benefit from our services. They also ensure that everything we plan is safe and appropriate for the needs of our beneficiaries.

***“My role at Willow provides an opportunity to redress the balance by providing the patient and their loved ones an opportunity to look forward to a Special Day, and simply enjoy an activity, putting illness aside for a while.”***  
**Elaine, Medical Advisor at Willow**

We have been working on promoting our services to those who may not have heard of Willow, with a focus on young adults with rare diseases. Through targeted promotion we have been able to reach beneficiaries at palliative care units based in hospitals, hospices, renal units and transplant centres. We have also built relationships with other UK based charities and organisations.

***“The days out that Willow has provided for these young people means they can access opportunities that they would not normally be able to, make amazing memories with their families and be included the same as everyone else. We cannot thank you enough for providing this support to the wonderful young people that we care for.”***  
**Claire - Transition Navigator at Demelza Hospice.**





### Pink Ribbon Foundation

We work with The Pink Ribbon Foundation to create special moments for beneficiaries living with secondary breast cancer, like Chrissie, 37, who was diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer in October 2023 after discovering a small lump. She underwent intensive chemotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy but later learned the cancer had spread to her brain. In September 2024 she was given a prognosis of 12 months.



"I'm a great believer that if I can't change the outcome or end, I make the best of what I can. Spending time with my friends and family has been precious. I got the opportunity to enjoy a spa day with my mum and sister, an experience I won't forget. It was just a perfect day that I would not have been able to experience without Willow and Pink Ribbon. I will forever be grateful."



### Angelman UK

For International Angelman Day (15 February) Willow funded eight families affected by Angelman syndrome to attend a four-night group experience at Alton Towers, organised by Spread Your Wings charity.

The park was closed to members of the public which meant 200 young adults with additional needs were able to explore with their families without feeling overwhelmed. They experienced rollercoasters, waterpark rides and a selection of evening activities.



# Thank you to our wonderful fundraisers and donors

We are always humbled by people who have either experienced a Willow Special Day first hand, or have seen the impact it has had on a friend or loved one and want to give back to the charity to help others to have their own Special Day.

## Jamie

Jamie's sister Nicola received a treat box from Willow when she was diagnosed with cancer. Jamie saw how much it meant to Nicola and wanted to help others have the same experience. Jamie completed the two-day 100 mile coast-to-coast Rat Race in Scotland in just one day! And if that wasn't enough, on New Years Eve Jamie went on to complete four marathons on four different pieces of gym equipment in 16 hours. What a way to see in 2025 and raise a staggering £9,000 for Willow!



## Kimberley

Kimberley was first diagnosed with cancer when she was just 13 months old and has received a further four diagnoses since. In 2016, Willow arranged for Kimberley and her family to attend a performance of Matilda the Musical in London's West End.

"To this day, those memories of that trip means so much to me. It brought so much light back into my life at that time to be able to go and enjoy some form of normality after not having it for so long."

To show her appreciation for Willow, Kimberley has arranged a gala in Wakefield this May with Willow as one of the benefitting charities.

**Diane**

As Lady Captain for the Kilnwick Percy Golf Club, Diane chose Willow as her joint charity after we arranged a Special Day for someone close to her.

"Hatty and her family received a Special Day from Willow and I know just how much it has meant to them. Hatty is a very special person and in my Captain's year I wanted to support the charity which has supported her."

Have you got a fundraising idea you would like to discuss? Contact [fundraising@willowfoundation.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@willowfoundation.org.uk) and we will help you bring your idea to life.



# Willow 10K, Sunday 12 October, Hatfield House



Willow's annual 10K is a great race, whatever your level of experience. Run or walk the route through the picturesque grounds of Hatfield House while our marshals cheer you along.

Sign up for the 10K, 5K or our 1.8km Family Fun Run and bring your friends and family - there's something for everyone at this fun-packed event!



**Sign up today  
and make more  
Special Days  
possible.**



## SIGN UP FOR AN EVENT NEAR YOU

There are hundreds of events all across the UK that you can get involved in. From a local 5k to a half marathon, a skydive or a trek, there is sure to be something that appeals. Check out our events calendar for more details.



# Behind the scenes as a Special Day Coordinator

**When somebody is going through such difficult times, the prospect of a Special Day not only gives them something lovely to look forward to but can also take their mind away from the daily routine of hospital visits and treatment.**

For some beneficiaries, planning a treat for all the family can be overwhelming, so we take all that stress away and that's when their Special Day experience begins. We get to know each person as an individual, asking questions about their interests and who they would like to join them on their Special Day. We offer suggestions and guidance to help them choose exactly the right experience.

We always try our best to make things that little bit more 'special'. This could be something simple such as a room upgrade on a short break, through to reaching out to their favourite celebrity or organisers of a sold-out event (because sometimes dreams do come true!).

We work as a close team, supporting each other through our more challenging Special Days. Many



people we support require specialised transport and medical equipment to enable them to spend time away from home or hospital. We look into every detail of their experience to ensure that it runs smoothly from start to finish. For those unable to leave home, we bring a Special Day to them.

We recently introduced an out of hours on-call system to deal with anything urgent such as a beneficiary falling ill before or during their Special Day or an unforeseen closure on transport. If this happens, we do everything we can to find a solution.

Being a Special Day Coordinator is one of the most rewarding jobs, truly like no other.



# Unforgettable Memories!

## Ella

**Ella was diagnosed with metastatic bowel cancer aged just 39. We were contacted by one of the palliative care nurses at her hospital who told us that Ella had hoped to attend Glastonbury Festival but it had been deemed impossible as she was too ill. Our coordinator Mary, worked with Ella's friends and family to arrange EllaFest - her very own festival at home.**

"I had so much fun at EllaFest. I have always wanted goats and never thought I would get the chance to be with them. The photo booth was amazing, and being able to capture those special memories has been incredible. The entire experience was incredible and I've had such an amazing time."

Ella passed away just a couple of months after her Special Day, making EllaFest all the more meaningful for her friends and family who got to enjoy it with her.



## Harry

**Ten year old Harry recently accompanied his mum Shona, who has progressive myopathy, on her Special Day at West Midlands Safari Park**

"Thank you for our amazing day at West Midlands Safari Park. My mum is very poorly with an illness that stops her muscles working, so it was such a treat for all of us to be able to go out for the day. It made me feel so happy to spend time with my mum and do fun things. My favourite parts of my day had to be the science show, seeing the red panda (my favourite animal) and my mum being able to see me on the rollercoasters!

"This day made me feel so grateful that it encouraged me to raise money for Willow too. I raised £475 by doing 50 sit ups a day for a month. This made me so happy because I hope other children will now also get a chance to spend a day with their poorly parents. Thank you Willow, love from Harry."



# Celebrating your loved one

**We are proud to partner with MuchLoved to help you create a space where you can celebrate your loved ones. Our ambassador Alex Newman set up a MuchLoved page when he lost his wife Nikki to metastatic breast cancer in September 2023:**

“Starting Nikki’s MuchLoved page really brought me comfort. Unexpectedly so. I think creating it hugely started a healing process for me. Just seeing the love out there for Nikki was phenomenal and it grew into something of a passion for me.

“It was weirdly cathartic at a time that I was in a very low place. Seeing all the positive messages and donations put a massive smile on my face when I didn’t think would be possible.

“My advice for someone setting up a MuchLoved page is just go with your gut and try to make it the page that they would want. Nikki would probably say, ‘oh, you should have used this colour or that colour’ but she would love that it was doing good by raising money for a charity that was so close to her heart”.



**To set up a free MuchLoved tribute page or to hear more about Alex’s experience, scan the QR code or visit [www.willowfoundation.org.uk/much-loved](http://www.willowfoundation.org.uk/much-loved)**



## Leaving a gift to Willow

By pledging a gift in your will you are supporting a future where more special moments and memories can be made every day.

If you would like to know more about leaving a gift in your will, please contact [kathryn.craven@willowfoundation.org.uk](mailto:kathryn.craven@willowfoundation.org.uk) to request your legacy information pack.



# Could you give the gift of your time?

We couldn't help as many people as we do if it wasn't for our wonderful volunteers. Last year, they gave an amazing 30,164 hours of support! From helping create Special Days or supporting our office-based teams to delivering talks in their local community or attending our events, every hour makes a difference!

## Derek

"You immediately see and feel that Willow is providing something for 'real people' for whom a Special Day really is very special. And if any greater motivation is required, hearing beneficiaries speak about the impact that Willow has had on them and their family certainly provides it. I'm very happy and proud to count myself amongst the Willow family."



If you have skills that don't quite match any of the roles currently advertised, we would still love to hear from you. Please get in touch at [jo.tredgett@willowfoundation.org.uk](mailto:jo.tredgett@willowfoundation.org.uk)

**Help us to tell more people about Willow. We have volunteer opportunities available at our office in Hertfordshire, remotely from home or at community events local to you.**



## Play the Willow Lottery

Did you know that for just £1 a week you could win with Willow by playing our lottery? With a top weekly prize of £25,000 plus the knowledge that you're helping seriously ill 16 to 40-year-olds make precious memories, it really is a win/ win for all!



**Sign up now for your chance to win!**



# Willow Raffle

**WIN AN AMAZING  
SPECIAL BREAK AT  
CENTER PARCS!**



**The Willow Raffle is back with a fantastic prize for 2025.**

**Get your tickets today to be in with a chance of winning.**

**1st prize** A break at Center Parcs for up to four people

**2nd prize** £250 cash

**3rd prize** £100 cash

**Draw closing date 31 July 2025**  
*(any tickets purchased after this time will be treated as donations)*

**Draw date 12 August 2025**

[www.willowfoundation.org.uk/raffle](http://www.willowfoundation.org.uk/raffle)



Scan the  
QR Code to  
purchase tickets  
or visit the link

## Keep in touch

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