Highlights Report Spring/Summer 2026

How your support enabled seriously ill 16 to 40-year-olds to make lasting memories

willow
special days for seriously ill young adults

Welcome

At the start of 2025, I shared our ambitious plans to scale up our yearly support of seriously ill young adults, to ultimately reach double the number of beneficiaries by Willow's 30th anniversary in 2029.

I'm pleased to share that we reached our target of supporting 1,400 beneficiaries in the first year of our growth plan, with a mix of Special Days and Special Treats. To date, Willow has now created more than 24,000 bespoke experiences for seriously ill young adults and their loved ones, making a huge impact at a time when it's needed most.

This growth was driven by our focus on several key themes and projects, including our work with young men living with cancer. We are about to embark upon the second year of this project, following a successful first year*, which saw a 34% increase in the number of applications from men like Phil from Devon whose story you can read overleaf.

A huge thank you to everyone who has supported our charity during the past year. Each and every one of you has helped us deliver more memory making experiences for our beneficiaries. Your support continues to make a real difference.

Jonathan Aves, Chief Executive Officer

**Project year: April 2025 to March 2026*

Phil's Special Break

Phil had been receiving treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia when he was introduced to Willow. He hadn't been on honeymoon with his wife, Claire, due to starting treatment the day after their wedding, so our Special Day Coordinator, Paula, suggested Nymetwood Treehouses for a romantic getaway.

"I was very unwell before diagnosis but the treatment was even worse. Things have been difficult financially. My wife and I sold our house and moved in with my parents so they could help look after me and we weren't trying to pay the mortgage on a single part-time salary.

"I had forgotten how regenerative these experiences could be. It was very serene - it felt a million miles away from the hospital, like a breath of fresh air."

Service themes and projects

In 2025 we announced our new five-year strategy to double Willow's impact by 2029, which marks 30 years since the charity was founded.

To aid our growth over the next five years and ensure we continue to reach those who need us most, we are working with a series of key themes. These represent our long-term commitment to supporting specific underrepresented groups of people.

- **MEDICAL URGENCY**
- **LEAST SUPPORTED**
- **INCLUSION**
- **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP**

As part of these key themes, we have delivered a number of projects, including:

INCLUSION: YOUNG MEN WITH CANCER

As part of our focus on inclusion we are rebalancing the representation of men with cancer in our beneficiary pool. Due to a reluctance amongst men to seek medical advice and support this has been historically low.

Since starting this project in April 2025, we have seen a 34% increase in the number of applications from young men living with cancer, resulting in 13% growth in the number of Special Days delivered.

LEAST SUPPORTED: RARE DISEASES

Under our least supported theme, we continue to reach more beneficiaries with rare conditions (as listed on the Global Genes Database).This group have less support due to lack of awareness and charities typically focusing on more prevalent conditions.

In 2025 Willow supported 692 young adults living with a rare disease or rare cancer, making up 46% of our total support. To date, this is the highest number of beneficiaries with rare diseases we have provided special experiences to, in a given year. This is thanks, in part, to our work with medical professionals. Last year, 177 new medical professionals working in the rare disease community introduced their patients to Willow.

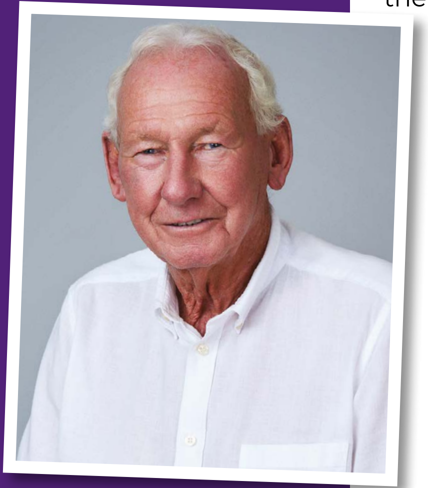
Under our **medical urgency** theme, we support young adults in their final months of life. Last year we gave precious memories to almost 200 families facing this difficult situation. In 2026 we will introduce our **financial hardship** project. This focuses on young adults out of work due to illness, on low or reduced income, or from the most deprived areas of the UK.

About Willow

Willow is a national charity providing uplifting experiences for seriously ill 16 to 40-year-olds, giving them the opportunity to step away from the challenges of a diagnosis and create meaningful moments that become lasting memories.

From our handpicked treat boxes to fun days and breaks for all the family, Willow delivers a much-needed boost and brings loved ones together for quality time and to fulfil lifelong wishes.

Willow was founded more than 25 years ago by former Arsenal goalkeeper and TV presenter, Bob Wilson and his late wife Megs, as a lasting memorial to their daughter Anna, who died of cancer aged 31. The inspiration for the charity came from the family's resolve to make the most of every moment, even in the most difficult of circumstances.



The reality of life

Every year approximately 16,000 people aged 16 to 40 are diagnosed with cancer. A further 5,000 young people living with degenerative, genetic and metabolic illnesses, become eligible for our services when they turn 16, or are diagnosed in our age range.

When a young adult is diagnosed with a serious illness, anxiety and sadness enter their lives and futures are changed in an instant. Beneficiaries tell us how uncertainty about the future, loss of identity and feelings of isolation from others their age, are affecting their mental health.

Lives are put on hold to focus on treatment plans and medical appointments begin to dictate everyday life. Loved ones are affected too, with partners or parents stepping away from careers temporarily to become carers.

Serious illness is unpredictable and the physical toll of the treatments is harsh. Some will make a full recovery while others will learn to live with a new normal post treatment. Sadly, even after rounds of debilitating treatment, around half of the young adults we support will have to accept a shortened life expectancy.

with a serious illness

"Due to my treatment, my university could not support me and I have had to withdraw from my dream course. I have been left grieving the Maria I was and am just starting to come to terms with my new normal. I parent differently, I am still not able to work and I am trying to manage."

Maria, 36, was diagnosed with breast cancer

"Having cancer doesn't just affect the person, it affects your loved ones around you. That was definitely the case for me. Everything felt like it stopped. Low immunity meant being overly cautious and not being able to do the things I could normally do like playing football, hanging out with friends or going out for meals."

Ferdinand, 32, was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma

"Before Ryan's illness became obvious, he was just like any other child. He was progressing well through school until things suddenly became difficult him. He lost his vision and then came the diagnosis which was devastating. Ryan's mobility has been declining and he is almost permanently wheelchair bound. He's losing his ability to talk and suffers with epileptic seizures. This has been a hard adjustment for him realising that he can't do the things he once loved."

Leanne talks about her son, Ryan, 20, who lives with Batten disease

Through our Special Days, Breaks and Treats, we help seriously ill young adults and their loved ones take a moment out. For people like Maria, a Special Break gives the opportunity to make new memories as she comes to terms with the 'new normal'. Meanwhile, an interactive day out with his family enabled Ryan to enjoy himself again and for Ferdinand, Willow's involvement meant he enjoyed time with his best friend, something he will always remember.

Special Days and Breaks in 2025

In 2025 we delivered 804 Special Days and Breaks

Gender:

Female **65%**

Male **34%**

Non-binary and transgender **1%**

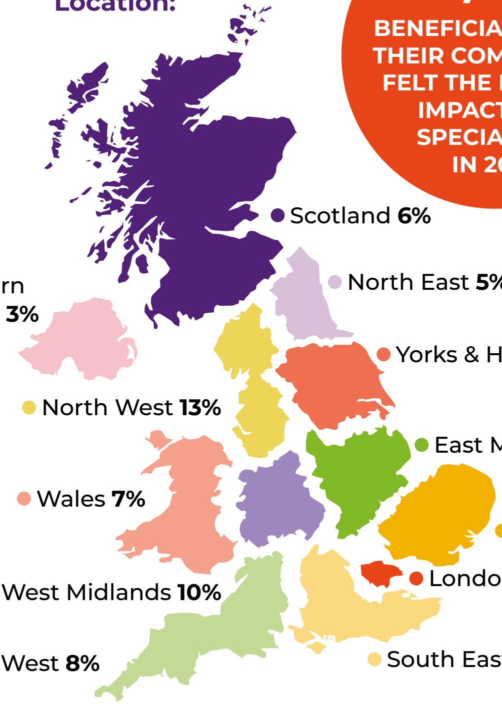
Age:

16-20 **15%**

21-30 **39%**

31-40 **46%**

Location:



2,781

BENEFICIARIES AND THEIR COMPANIONS FELT THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF A SPECIAL DAY IN 2025

Condition	%
Cancer	**82**
Gastro-Intestinal	**5**
Gynaecology	**5**
Haematology	**20**
Head and Neck	**1**
Neurology	**8**
Sarcoma	**6**
Urology	**4**
Other	**33**
Degenerative & genetic	**18**
Haematology	**1**
Neurodegenerative	**5**
Organ Failure	**4**
Respiratory	**1**
Other	**7**

Curable vs Incurable	%
Curable	**50**
Incurable	**50**

Jack's Special Break

28-year-old Jack from South Yorkshire is a secondary school teacher and was receiving treatment for melanoma when he heard about Willow.

"I have a passion for helping young people, and outside of work, I love football and golf, as well as spending time with my family and our golden retriever, Ru. My diagnosis has massively impacted my ability to work, as well as complete daily activities.

"My partner and family have been so crucial in getting me through the tough times. Without them, I wouldn't have been able to do it."

Anna, our Special Day Coordinator, organised for Jack and his partner, Natalie, to enjoy an overnight stay at Treetops Hideouts in North Yorkshire where they were surrounded by nature.

"The Special Break made me and Natalie so happy. We loved spending time together with no distractions and it was the first time in as long as we can remember that we truly relaxed. We didn't want to leave. My time away has given me lifelong memories and feelings that I will never forget - mainly the happiness and love I felt in my partner's company. Thank you for this."

Natalie added:
"We filled our time with lots of things we love and the Special Break allowed us to create memories that we will keep for a lifetime.

It had a positive impact on Jack as he relaxed and forget about all the medical appointments and news. The highlight was the entire experience of being able to escape and feel 'normal' again."

Jodie's Special Treat

Jodie is 33 and lives in Devon. When she was four weeks old, she was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis and since 2018, has been on the waiting list for a lung transplant.

"I try to live as normal a life as I can between treatments and hospital visits and not let cystic fibrosis get in my way but in 2017 my health started deteriorating. Breathing became difficult, visiting friends and having holidays became almost impossible and I needed to start using oxygen. I developed sepsis later that year and almost died.

"Once I was fit enough, I was added to the national transplant waiting list, where I am still waiting. I have received 17 calls for lungs but for various reasons surgery couldn't go ahead. It's incredibly hard waiting to hear, but I am always mindful of each potential donor and their family who are going through much worse them I am.

"When I was sent a Special Treat from Willow I was so grateful and touched, it was as if they knew I needed a pick-me-up. The box was packed full of treats including heat pouches, chocolates, bed socks, toiletries, accessories and other lovely things. It came at the perfect time and really lifted my mood and spirit, which in turn had a positive impact on my physical and mental health."

Special Treats in 2025

In 2025, 709 beneficiaries opened a Special Treat

Gender:

Female
71%

Male
28%

Non-binary and transgender
1%

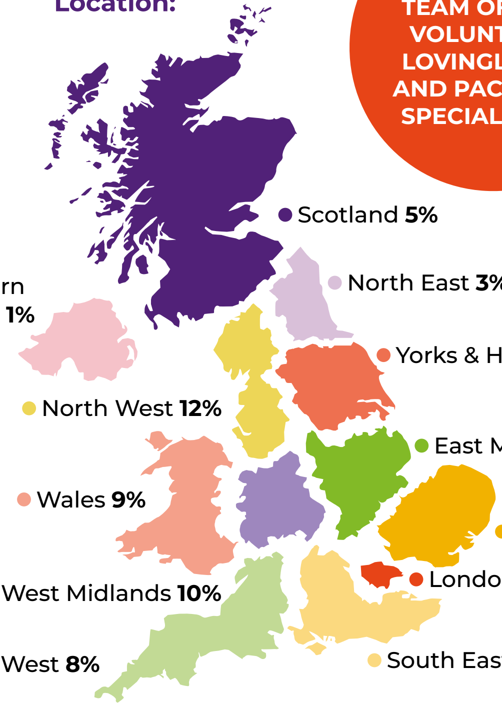
Age:

16-20
20%

21-30
30%

31-40
50%

Location:



A DEDICATED TEAM OF FOUR VOLUNTEERS, LOVINGLY PICK AND PACK EACH SPECIAL TREAT

Condition	**%**
Cancer	**48**
Gastro-Intestinal	**4**
Gynaecology	**2**
Haematology	**10**
Head and Neck	**0**
Neurology	**4**
Sarcoma	**4**
Urology	**2**
Other	**22**
Degenerative & genetic	**52**
Haematology	**0**
Neurodegenerative	**24**
Organ Failure	**7**
Respiratory	**11**
Other	**10**

Curable vs Incurable	**%**
Curable	**25**
Incurable	**75**

The importance of Group Days

Following on from the success and the positive feedback we received from our first Group Day initiative in 2024, we delivered three group initiatives in 2025. Group Days are organised for young people living with rare diseases that often result in complex needs. Due to the nature of their condition, they will find there is less support available.

By bringing groups of beneficiaries together, we encourage friendship and connection and reduce feelings of isolation for all involved. We worked in partnership with charities such as Spread Your Wings and the MPS Society to deliver these events.

Bringing families together at Alton Towers

We gave six families the opportunity to attend the annual Angelman weekend at Alton Towers. Helen is Mum to twins, Kate and Olivia, who both live with Angelman syndrome:

“Having twins with Angelman was hard as the girls were in and out of hospital for many years. There have been tears along the way but also moments of joy and happiness.

Both girls came with me to the weekend, which was only possible because their carers also attended. The carers also got a better insight into life with Angelman as they met other families.”

Connecting young adults living with MPS (mucopolysaccharide diseases)

In November 2025, we arranged for 17 people living with various types of MPS, along with four carers, to meet for dinner in Manchester before enjoying an overnight stay in the city. Each attendee also received a Special Treat.

Sam is 23 and lives with Pseudo-Hurler polydystrophy: “My illness completely changed my parents’ lives. I need a lot of care, and I’ve had to go to countless appointments and have had many major surgeries. I couldn’t do a lot of things that friends or my brother did. Although it’s hard, my disease is a part of me, but it doesn’t define me as a person.

I wanted to spend time with other people who have had similar experiences and not worry about our health. It’s proved that we can have our independence, we’re not confined to our homes, and we can have a good time.”

Our work with medical professionals

Over the years, we have built a solid network of medical professionals and key workers who help ensure we reach eligible patients and raise awareness about Willow through their networks across the UK.

Willow employs two part-time nurses who use their expertise and networks to extend our reach through outreach work. They attend events and medical conferences such as the RAREsummit, aimed at those living with rare diseases, and the BSG (British Sarcoma Group) Annual Conference, to support with our work helping more young men with cancer.

Gavin, Lead Cancer Nurse at Guy's Hospital said: "My patients always have such a wonderful experience and their Special Day or Special Treat gives them something to look forward to and bring a smile to their face."

98%

OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WOULD RECOMMEND WILLOW

Jenny, a Secondary Breast Cancer Nurse Specialist at The Christie NHS Foundation Trust commented on the positive impact a Special Day not only has on the beneficiary, but also on medical professionals who see their patients through the most difficult times: "Families have been able to step aside from cancer for the day or weekend and do something special with their families. [Willow's work] is so impactful for everyone and the memories created last forever.

Our job is consumed with pain and sadness and being there for the worst part of people's lives. To be part of something so wonderful is so uplifting for nurses. We get sent the most beautiful photos of their Special Day which we keep and it gives us strength to keep going."

Our impact

Every Special Day, Break and Treat is personal and designed around the beneficiary's interests, wishes and physical needs. Our Special Days team work closely with each individual, their families and medical team, to plan positive and uplifting experiences.

97%

said it was a focus away from their illness

> "Receiving the treat box from Willow was such a bright moment amid all of this. It felt like a real treat at exactly the right time. I'm especially looking forward to starting the embroidery kit, which will be a lovely distraction while waiting for my surgery results."
>
> **Vicky, 40, received treatment for breast cancer**

99%

said it gave them the opportunity to spend quality time with loved ones

> "My Special Day was beautiful. As it's difficult for me to go outside due to my condition, I don't see my best friend much. To make memories and share this special moment with him was amazing."
>
> **Mehjabin, 39, lives with dystrophic epidermolysis bullosa, a rare condition where skin layers bind together**

98%

said it had a positive impact on their mental health

> "My Special Day has given me wonderful memories with my wife. I will always remember feeling completely at ease and cared for. These memories are special not just for the indulgence but for the sense of calm, connection and gratitude they brought."
>
> **Bruno, 28, was diagnosed with B-cell lymphoma**

**Covers period 1 January – 31 December 2025. Out of 341 beneficiaries surveyed.*

How we raise our income*

Trusts & Foundations

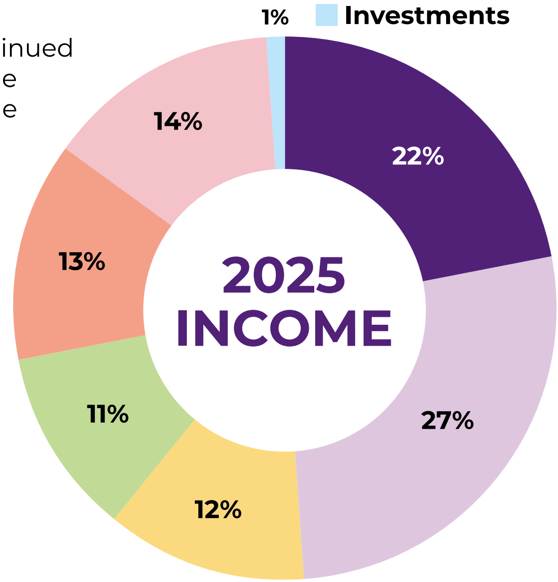
A number of long term supporters continued their valuable grant giving, including the Michael Cornish Charitable Trust and the Roger Counter Foundation. We also welcomed new donations from The James Cowper Kreston Foundation and the Banham Foundation.

Individual Giving & Legacies

We took part in the Big Give appeal, with all donations doubled thanks to the support of our pledger and the Reed Foundation. We were humbled to benefit from three legacy donations.

Corporate Partnerships

Long term partner De Vere held their first ever gala ball, with Willow as one of the benefitting partners. We also welcomed Jordan's Cereals as a new corporate supporter.



Major Events

Led by our flagship events the Willow Ball and the London Football Awards (LFA). We were proud to welcome MiQ as LFA headline sponsor. A third party event, A Night to Remember, delivered significant income.

Retail

Our chain of charity shops continued to deliver a regular and sustainable income, alongside raising Willow's profile in their local communities.

Community & Challenge

We launched Streaming for Willow with our Ambassador Aaron Ramsdale and the influencer Angry Ginge. We added the Willow Firewalk to our fundraising calendar, supported by Blackpoint Recruitment and the Welwyn BID.

**These figures are draft subject to year end adjustments and auditor review.*

Willow in numbers

In 2025 and early 2026, we introduced new fundraising events, celebrated key milestones at our shops and increased our reach with high profile awareness opportunities. Here are some of the highlights:

More than **11,000** people logged on to get involved in the launch of Streaming for Willow with Aaron Ramsdale and Angry Ginge

Our shops in Welwyn Garden City, Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead all celebrated **10 years** of trading in 2025

The Frogmore Golf Day returned for its **5th year** in September

Hundreds of selfies were taken with our ambassadors at the ICAP Charity Day

More than **700** supporters sang Christmas Carols in St Albans Cathedral during our annual carol concert

We were featured on London's Piccadilly Lights on **2** occasions, helping raise awareness of Willow and the London Football Awards

13

awards were given out at the 2026 London Football Awards

9
trekkers climbed Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa

157.2
miles covered by our six London Marathon runners

240
guests joined us at The Dorchester for the 2025 Willow Ball

680
runners and walkers took part in the Willow 10K, the highest number since Covid

10
metres of hot coals braved at our first firewalk fundraiser

More than **1,300** hours of fishing was done at Catch of the Day

8
comedians took to the stage during Willow's Comedy Night

BBC Gardeners' World Live

1
award winning, Willow inspired garden created by beneficiary, Jan, at BBC Gardeners' World Live

7
volunteers received Room to Reward vouchers as a thank you for their contributions

Room to Reward

15,000ft
the height our adrenaline seeking skydivers leapt from

Going the extra mile for our beneficiaries

At Willow, we rely on the generosity of our supporters to fund our much-needed services. Most support is received in financial donations, but gifts in kind and volunteering are a significant part of our service delivery.

Our service team enjoy significant volunteer support. Operating at the sharp end of our work, they have 20+ volunteers who each give half a day of their time each week. They may process service applications, research destination options for our experiences or write Special Day itineraries. It is our aim to ensure that volunteer hours in services are at least 20% of paid hours. So, as the team grows due to the planned service growth, so will the volunteer hours.

During 2025, we received gifts in kind or discounts to the value of £241,913 and below are examples of companies who have generously supported us:

Keel Toys

When our volunteer Caroline heard that a beneficiary had been given a London themed bear ahead of their Special Day in London, she wondered if she could make this happen for others too. She wrote to Keel Toys, and we were delighted when they generously donated 240 London Guardsman Bears as a lasting keepsake for our beneficiaries.

Fallow

Fallow have been a generous supporter for the past four years gifting meals to our beneficiaries at their London restaurant. They really look after our families who dine there. Recently they extended their support to include meals for our young adults at their newer restaurants Fowl and Roe.

Lindt

Lindt have gone above and beyond with donations of various chocolates and Easter treats for the past couple of years. Alongside being placed in our treat boxes, these have been gifted to young people ahead of their experience too.

Leonardo Royal Edinburgh Hotel

Another generous supporter is the Leonardo Royal Hotel in Edinburgh. For the past two years they have helped us deliver a few Special Breaks in Edinburgh for our beneficiaries, gifting the overnight stays to Willow. The team at Leonardo understand what we try to achieve and have started to add a few special touches, such as a highland cow teddy gift and a welcome card, making our beneficiaries' stays personal and memorable.

What’s ahead for 2026

As we head into the second year of our growth plan, we will:

Growth

- Deliver more than 1,500 experiences for seriously ill young adults
- Build upon our work to support more young men with cancer as we embark on the second year of this project
- Start our new project that aims to support those facing financial hardship whilst living with serious illness
- Deliver group experiences that build social connection and reduce isolation amongst young people living with rare diseases

Sustainability

- Develop and increase engagement with our volunteers
- Identify and prioritise sustainable giving opportunities focusing on regular giving, legacies and retail
- Maximise the use of existing resources to improve efficiency

Impact

- Encourage long-term engagement with beneficiaries and their networks
- Showcase Willow across all relevant external platforms to raise awareness of our work
- Continue and evolve our impact measurement process
- Assess and evaluate beneficiary feedback, so that we can continue delivering high quality experiences

In loving memory

Former Tottenham Hotspur and England forward, **Martin Chivers,** was a Willow Ambassador and a keen supporter of the charity from the beginning. As a regular attendee at our events, Martin was loved, and will be missed, by many.

Steve Blight was a friend of Willow for more than 20 years. He was a generous and staunch supporter of our events and always seen at our golf days. His love of Willow was second only to his love of Arsenal.

We remember **Peter Olsen** with great fondness. His philanthropic giving to Willow and other charities was driven by a desire to 'make a difference'. He certainly did!

We thank our Life President, Honorary Presidents, Trustees, Ambassadors, Fundraising board and committees for giving their time so generously. We value the knowledge, experience, drive and ideas that they bring to Willow. Their long-term commitment is key to the success of our charity

Life President
Bob Wilson OBE

Honorary Presidents
David Seaman MBE
Frankie Seaman

Trustees
Richard King
Dave Waddington CBE
Elena Ciallie
Glyn Taylor
Martin Ryan
Vanessa Steel
Paul Phedon
Sangita Shah
James Newman
Jack Wrigglesworth

Ambassadors
Natasha Kaplinsky OBE
Pat Jennings OBE
Mary Nightingale
Theo Walcott
Jim Rosenthal
Linda Lusardi
Sam Kane
Lee Dixon
Gary Mabbutt MBE
Simon McCoy
Ian Poulter
Gary Lewin
Ian Wright MBE
Ossie Ardiles
Katie Swan
Alfie Boe OBE
Leah Williamson CBE
Mica Paris MBE
Daniel Field
Alex Newman
Petr Čech
Aaron Ramsdale
Tom Rosenthal

Fundraising Board
Tony Gibbon - Chair
Jason Dreyer
Gavin de Klerk
Christoher Murray
Trevor Racke
Neil Thompson

Ball Committee
Claire Chauhan
Frankie Seaman
Vanessa Steel
Bob Wilson
Georgina Ramsdale

London Football Awards Committee
Stuart Burrage
Danny Simmonds
Gillian Hoffman
Gareth Parker
Akshay Madhavan
Ollie Gill
Paul Hutton

Thank you from everyone at Willow

Willow is thankful for the generosity of all supporters, including our generous benefactors and those who wish to remain anonymous. We also remember, and are grateful to those who have left a legacy to support beneficiaries for years to come. Thank you to those who did so in 2025.

67 Pall Mall
Aaron & Georgina Ramsdale
Alan Gaby
Alex and Claire Reeves
Alexion Charitable Foundation
Ambassador Theatre Group
Angus Barnes and Loyton Estates
Anna and Paul White MBE
Arsenal FC
Barclays
Basil Samuel Charitable Trust
Bea Copus Croggon
Beauty Banks
Big Cat Sanctuary
Bob Weston
BW Workplace Experts
Capital Industrial LLP
Center Parcs
Chelsea FC
Chris and Jo Bayne
Claire & Ket Chauhan
CLI Dartriver Ltd
CloudClevr
Colchester Zoo
Concord London Developments Limited
Daniel McGahon
Darren Comber
David Dein
David Ravel
David Roberts
De Vere
Dover Gooners
Ernst & Young
Experience More Limited
Fairlands Valley Spartans
Fallow restaurant
Festival Republic
Folk by the Oak
Forest Holidays
Frank Capital
Frogmore
FT Strategies
Gideon Kasler & Associates LLP
Glencore
Gurman and Mina Hundal
Gwenda Chadwick
Hand Picked Hotels
Harman Hundal
Harvey Soning
Harwood Park Crematorium & Memorial Gardens
HG Recruitment Solutions
Hireworks
HSS ProService
Hugh and Mindi Byrne
James Cowper Kreston Foundation
Jan O'Brien
JBD Events Limited
JD Outdoors - Fishing Republic
Jekyll & Hideout
Jemaine Saville
Jess Harding & JBD Events
John Barbour
John James Bristol Foundation
Jordans Cereals
Katey and Jon Jorgensen
Landsec
Lapland UK
Lazari Assets Limited
Lee Puri
Leonardo Hotels
LGT Wealth Management
Lindner Prater Ltd
Liverpool Football Club
Lords Cricket Ground
Martin Hughes
Martin Ryan
Max Zanni
Mel and Aidan Bartlett
Melvin and Alison Wright
Michael and Viviana Hirschmann
Michael Harrison
Mike and Eve Audis
Millenium Gloucester Hotel
MiQ
Multiplex
Neil Dudman
Newmark
Nicki Swan
Nima Sarikhani
Nymetwood Treehouses
Opes International
Paypal Giving Fund
Penny Bibby
Peter Fineman
Pink Ribbon Foundation
Pro Project Promotions and Graham Stack
Rachel Davis
RFU
Richard Bernstein
Richard Davis
Rob and Helen Parkinson
Rob Sanderson
Roger Orf
Sally Sherling
Sangita Shah
Scamp & Dude
Silverstone Circuits Limited
Simmons Bakers
St Andrews Golf Course
Stevenage Football Club
T Clarke PLC
Target Darts
Tastecard
Teresa Curtis
The Andor Charitable Trust
The Arsenal Foundation
The Banham Foundation
The Edward Showler Foundation
The Fidelis Partnership
The Geoff & Fiona Squire Foundation
The John Young Charitable Settlement
The Michael Cornish Charitable Trust
The Patrick and Helena Frost Foundation
The Pierrepont Trust
The Richard Harris Charitable Trust
The Ripley Trust
The Roger Counter Foundation
The Tompkins Foundation
Theo Paphitis
Theo Walcott
Tony and Pat Lennon
TP ICAP plc
UFC
West Midlands Safari Park
Weston Homes
Wrights Estate Agents

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special days for seriously ill young adults

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