

2026 EDITION



NEWS willow

You make it possible for 16 to 40-year-olds who are facing a life-threatening illness to make precious memories with their loved ones



What's inside?

Special days you made happen

Project updates and new initiatives

Your chance to win a break at Center Parcs

Ways to support

“Thank you for creating something truly magical and helping me make memories with my friends that I will treasure”

Rich



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 just 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.

Welcome to your Willow News

At the start of 2025, we shared our vision for Willow's future. We hope to reach more seriously ill young adults than ever before, with the goal of doubling our support by our 30th anniversary in 2029.



To date, you've helped create more than 24,000 special experiences for seriously ill young adults and their loved ones. That's 24,000 moments of joy, connection and relief during some of life's most difficult times.

One area close to our hearts this year has been our work with young men living with cancer. In the first year of the project, we've seen a 13% increase in the number of Special Days created for this group. This included Rich from Kent, whose story I hope you'll take a moment to read in the middle pages of this newsletter. It's a reminder of why this work matters so much.

"You've helped create more than 24,000 special experiences for seriously ill young adults and their loved ones."

None of this would be possible without you. Whether you have benefitted from our services, donated, fundraised or advocated for Willow, your ongoing support helps create memories that last a lifetime for the people who need them most. From everyone at Willow, thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

Dominic Heath, Director of Services

Want to know more about our work and how you can get involved? Sign up to our mailing list at willowfoundation.org.uk/#email-sign-up or scan the QR code



FOLLOW US

 @willowfoundation

 @willowfoundation

 @willow_foundation

 @willow-foundation

Helping families make precious memories

Li

Li lives in Oxfordshire with her husband and two young children. Following a diagnosis of breast and axilla cancer, we arranged her dream trip to Scotland, giving her and her family something to look forward to during treatment.



*Willow
Special Day
Stories*

“Two years ago, my life changed in an instant. As a nurse and a mother to two young children who were just two and four years old at the time, I was diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer. Suddenly everything I knew was turned on its head.

“I’ve spent 18 months in active treatment undergoing chemotherapy, radiotherapy and a mastectomy. Juggling hospital visits, parenting and work was exhausting, both physically and emotionally. When I learned that Hazel, my Senior Specialist Breast Nurse, had referred me to Willow, I was reminded that even in the midst of uncertainty, we deserve moments of peace and distraction from the challenges we’re facing.

“I have always wanted to visit and explore Scotland and Willow were able to make that wish come true by arranging a campervan trip for me and my family. We set out on an adventure through the Scottish Highlands taking in breathtaking scenery and sights. It was a very special trip, coinciding with mine and Rob’s 10th wedding anniversary, making it even more unforgettable. I would sincerely like to express my gratitude to Willow for making this experience possible and providing a welcome distraction from everything we’ve been going through as a family.”

There are many more families like Li’s hoping for moments like this

We can only continue to provide these experiences with your support. By giving a monthly gift, you will help more people like Li take time out and spend precious moments with friends and family doing something that means so much to them.



2025 – Our year in numbers



Sent **709** treat boxes filled with meaningful gifts to brighten someone's day

Launched ambitious plans to double the number of people we support over **five** years



Provided **804** days out or relaxing breaks away to young adults living with life-threatening conditions across the UK

Saw **13%** growth in support for young men facing cancer



Created **1,513** experiences for people who really needed them

Increased our volunteer hours by **24%**



Supported **692** young adults living with a rare condition

Launched our Amazon Wishlist, helping supporters to give gifts directly to our beneficiaries

Helped **642** children make precious memories with their seriously ill parent



Our plans for 2026

This year, we are aiming to do even more. In 2026, our goal is to create 1,550 magical experiences for seriously ill 16 to 40-year-olds who need a moment to escape the harsh realities that come with a life-threatening or life-limiting diagnosis.

After a successful first year of the project, we will continue to reach out to more young men with cancer, redressing the balance in applications for our services. We will also be launching our new project focusing on supporting people who are facing financial hardship, something which hits even harder when living with a serious illness.

Unforgettable Memories!

Natasha

Twenty-two-year-old Natasha is living with Juvenile Parkinson's Disease. She is mobile for short distances, but is increasingly using a wheelchair. Due to deteriorating health, Natasha is supported by the local hospice and has several carers visit each day. She had dreamed of a visit to West Midlands Safari Park, which our Special Day Coordinator, Mary, made happen for her. Her mum, Tracey, accompanied her on the day:

"Natasha's West Midlands Safari Lodge experience was wonderful. We have very special memories. Natasha, myself, and her carers had a lovely, special time. Without Willow we wouldn't have had this lovely experience that catered for Natasha's needs. Thank you very much"



Courtney

Courtney from Leicester is 29 and has received treatment for acute myeloid leukaemia. He organised a break at Buxton Crescent & Spa for him and his partner, Lauren.

"I felt relaxed, excited, happy and very grateful. I was able to spend amazing one-to-one time with my partner over the weekend. It came at a perfect time for us as it's been non-stop with hospital appointments, treatments and side effects.

"It was possibly one of the nicest weekends we've had together. The hotel, the food, the spa, the town... all of it was amazing. The quality time it gave us was something that we really needed."



Helping those that need us most

Over the next five years, we want to reach even more people who are most in need of our services. We have identified some key themes that will help us to maintain our focus on this.

Giving hope to those who often struggle to find support

Under our **least supported** theme, we are reaching more beneficiaries with rare conditions (as listed on the Global Genes Database). These people 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. This is the highest number of beneficiaries with rare diseases to whom we have provided special experiences. Our outreach work meant 177 new medical professionals working in the rare disease community introduced patients to Willow.

Support at the end of life

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.

Recognising the financial impact of serious illness

This year, we will introduce our financial hardship project. Focusing on young adults who are out of work because of their illness, on low or reduced income, or live in some of the most deprived areas of the UK.



Reaching out to young men with cancer

As part of our focus on inclusion, we are working to increase the number of young men with cancer we support. Due to a reluctance among men to seek medical advice and support, application numbers from this group have historically been low. Since starting this project in April 2025, we have seen an increase in the number of applications from young men living with cancer, which has resulted in 13% more Special Days being delivered for this group.

Phil

Phil lives in Devon and has been receiving treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, a rare type of cancer that is only diagnosed in around 300 adults in the UK each year. He was referred by his transplant specialist nurse, Juan, and requested a break with his wife Claire, as they hadn't been able to have a honeymoon due to Phil's treatment starting the day after their wedding. The wonderful team at Nymetwood Treehouses kindly gift a stay each year for one of our beneficiaries, and this felt like the perfect place for Phil and Claire to relax in a beautiful natural environment and enjoy being together.



Willow
Special Day
Stories

"I have been dealing with acute leukaemia for the past two years. I was very unwell before diagnosis however the treatment was even worse. Things have also been difficult financially. We sold our house and moved in with my parents so we weren't trying to keep the mortgage paid on a single part-time salary.

"I had forgotten how regenerative these experiences could be. We're both nature lovers, so hearing all the birds and being up in the trees was extremely cool. We had some fancy meals, played board games, went for some short wanders through the grounds and enjoyed toasted marshmallows at the fire pit. It was very serene - it felt a million miles away from the hospital. It was our first holiday since 2019, and it was wonderful. A literal and proverbial breath of fresh air."

Sharing our work with new audiences

Fundraising isn't just about running a marathon or throwing yourself out of a plane. You can support Willow wherever you are, and we have all kinds of ways that people can raise money doing something they are passionate about.

JAN'S WILLOW MOMENTS AND MEMORIES GARDEN

We were thrilled when Willow beneficiary and supporter, Jan, designed a beautiful Willow-themed garden, which was showcased at Gardeners' World Live at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. The garden not only celebrated Willow but introduced thousands of visitors to the difference our work makes.

Jan said, "I'm so pleased to have had the opportunity to share the work of Willow through this very special garden. As a Willow beneficiary, I know only too well the profound and lasting impact of a Special Day and the precious memories that come with it."



CELEBRITIES COME TOGETHER TO GAME FOR GOOD

Influencer, Angry Ginge, joined Premier League goalkeeper and Willow Ambassador, Aaron Ramsdale, to launch Streaming for Willow, our virtual gaming fundraiser. Whether you're a casual PC gamer, Switch addict, board game player or anything in between, you can play games for good!



Willow on the big screen

PICCADILLY LIGHTS

In November, we had the exciting opportunity of a 10-minute prime time slot on Piccadilly Lights in Piccadilly Circus, London. We used the opportunity to spotlight some of the incredible stories of individuals who have benefited from a Willow experience and raise awareness of the charity.



Eyes were drawn up to the charity's recognisable purple on the 780 sq m curved screen as our feature video began playing at the peak commuter time of 5:30pm.

A crowd gathered at the Eros statue to watch our video go live, including some of the beneficiaries featured and their loved ones.

Joe, 24, from Peterborough, is living with Ewing sarcoma. He enjoyed a Special Break in Cornwall with his wife, Charlotte, last year. Seeing himself on the screen was something Joe will never forget. "It's kind of mind-blowing seeing the photos of me up there on this big wall, but hopefully it spreads awareness about this amazing charity."



JC DECAUX BILLBOARDS

In February 2026, we were lucky enough to be offered space on JC Decaux billboards on roadsides and in city centres across the UK through their Community Channel. The month-long campaign gave us an amazing opportunity to get in front of more than four million new people in communities where Willow is less well known.

It's been rather moving seeing our beneficiaries' stories lighting up some of the biggest screens in the UK. These adverts would normally be well out of our reach due to the cost, so we appreciate how lucky we are to have been gifted these opportunities. We're very grateful to Landsec and JC Decaux for allowing us to talk about our work in such a visible way, and to the beneficiaries who agreed to share their words and photos to make the campaigns a success.

Unforgettable Memories!

Rich



Rich has always been an adventurer. He spent his earlier years as an armourer, a footballer, a golfer, a glider pilot and a lover of the ocean. But life changed dramatically when he was diagnosed with a brain tumour.



Twelve years ago, Rich, from Ashford in Kent, was given a prognosis of just 10 years.

He had to surrender his driving licence, was medically retired from the RAF and had to relearn how to speak following brain surgery. He has also felt the physical effects, and is unable to do many of the things he has always loved, including his ultimate passion - surfing.

Rich's diagnosis and ongoing care have highlighted the fragility of life, motivating him to grab every opportunity to live to the full.

Our Special Day Coordinator, Claire, worked with Rich to plan a very special break that truly reflected who he is and took him back to his favourite place, Cornwall.

Having crafted his own wooden surfboard with Otter Surfboards a few years ago, Rich wanted to attend their Annual Gathering of Makers, but was worried about the cost due to being unable to work as a result of his diagnosis.

Claire set to work arranging a break, which included the event and accommodation by the beach for Rich and his friend Tim. It was a chance to reconnect with friends, breathe in the sea air and spend time out on the waves.

Rich said: "My Special Break was everything - a group of surfers and great people that feel the same as me, wooden surf boards and waves. It is a great environment and it helped me forget bad memories and just smile.

"Thank you for creating something truly magical and helping me make memories with my friends that I will treasure"



Tim

Rich's friend Tim, who he met on a surfing course when they had both been medically retired from the RAF, accompanied him on his break.

"Seeing Rich go through this journey has been a real rollercoaster. How he has just powered through different operations and treatment and refused to let it defeat him, it's inspiring.

"The Willow team have been absolutely fantastic. It was the little touches that made it extra special - they gave us money for petrol to get to Cornwall, to buy food and drink, they even sent Rich an Otter Surfboards T-shirt which put a smile on his face.

"No matter what you are going through with the different stresses of treatment, having something like this to look forward to really gives you something to aim for. It all makes a real difference to your mental health in the rough times."



98%

of the beneficiaries who completed our survey in 2025 said their Special Day had a positive impact on their mental health.

When connection becomes commitment

We are inspired by the incredible people who turn a personal connection into lasting support, paying it forward to help more people make precious memories.

CAINHOE WOOD GOLF CLUB

We're honoured to have been chosen as Charity of the Year by the captains at Cainhoe Wood Golf Club in Bedfordshire.

The club's Men's Captain, Jordan Collison, said: "A big part of our decision to choose Willow as our Captain's charity was the fact that I have personally experienced how wonderful Willow are. I witnessed this a few years back when my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Willow organised the most special day for us to enjoy together and I could see what this meant to my wife, and for me as well, during her treatment and a time of uncertainty."



TERESA

Since 2006, Teresa has channelled her passion and determination into hosting an annual fundraising ball in support of Willow.

"I lost my brother to cancer at just 42. I saw Bob Wilson on TV talking about Willow and it touched my heart. Since then, I have supported the charity for 20 years and raised over £100,000. I find it very rewarding knowing that I have contributed to experiences which are precious for those affected, and have hopefully brought unforgettable memories back into their lives during such a difficult time. That makes it feel special to be part of the Willow team."

BEA

Bea's dad, Luc, sadly passed away in 2024 from adenocarcinoma of the oesophagus. To celebrate what would have been his 40th birthday, Bea took on the challenge of cycling 40 laps of the local velodrome, raising more than £5,000! Bea shared: "I used to go to Herne Hill Velodrome with my dad - he really loved cycling. After he was diagnosed with cancer, Willow gave us a break at Legoland. It was so much fun! I wanted to raise money so other people can enjoy a special treat."



How our Community Fundraising Team can support you

Whether you're organising a bake sale, running a marathon, hosting a gala dinner or creating your own challenge, when you choose to fundraise for Willow you become part of a community making sure no one faces serious illness without moments of joy to look forward to.

Here's how we can help:

Personal support from start to finish

You'll have a dedicated member of our team on hand to offer advice, encouragement and practical guidance, helping turn your ideas into a successful event.

Fundraising ideas and planning advice

Not sure where to start? We can help you shape your plans, set achievable targets and share tried-and-tested ideas to maximise your impact.

Resources to boost your fundraising

We can provide branded materials such as collection tins, posters, balloons and T-shirts, as well as digital resources including sponsorship forms and social media graphics.

A heartfelt thank you

From certificates to shout-outs, we love celebrating our fundraisers and recognising the incredible difference you make to the families we support. Every pound you raise helps us continue providing unforgettable Special Days for seriously ill young adults across the UK. Together, we can create moments that matter.



If you're planning a fundraiser or would like to get involved, Harry, Mark, Megan and Poppy are here to help – please contact the team by emailing fundraising@willowfoundation.org.uk

Making dreams come true in the toughest times

Jodie

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

“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 than 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.”



Every story shared in this newsletter was only made possible through your support

Finn

Arsenal fan Finn, is 20 and lives in East Sussex. Our Special Day Coordinator, Claire, arranged for him to watch Arsenal v Manchester United with his dad, Patrick, and two friends.

*Willow
Special Day
Stories*



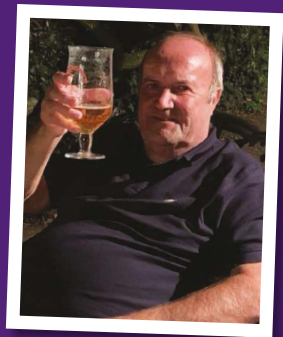
“My osteosarcoma diagnosis is the most awful thing that has ever happened to me and the list of how it has negatively impacted my life is too long to go into. I mostly do event work and carpentry, which are quite physical, so I’m still slowly integrating back into that kind of work after my surgery and chemo.

“It was such an amazing experience on my Special Day; seeing all the players walk in and then being so close to it all was incredible. Even though we lost it was such a great day. I was absolutely awestruck when I received the signed letter and photo from Arsenal, and the video from David Seaman was amazing too. I have memories of having a laugh with my loved ones who came with me on my Special Day.”

Giving in memory of a loved one

Lester recently chose to raise money for Willow in remembrance of his dad, Martin. He said: “When dad passed away, we chose to support Willow in his memory. A massive Arsenal fan, he would have loved that the charity was founded by Gunners legend, Bob Wilson.

“Willow’s mission deeply resonated with us. With our help, dad nursed our late sister through her illness, so we know first-hand how vital ‘Special Days’ are during life’s toughest challenges. We are so proud that the donations raised at his service will help other families find joy, continuing our father’s legacy through both the club he loved and a cause so close to our hearts.”



Celebrate the life of your loved one in a meaningful way. Honour their life and legacy through charitable donations, funeral collections in lieu of flowers or by setting up dedicated tribute funds on our Much Loved page.



Group days increase connection and reduce isolation

Following on from the success of our first group day initiative in 2024, we delivered three more in 2025 for young people living with rare diseases that often result in complex needs. By bringing together beneficiaries who are experiencing similar challenges, we encourage friendship and connection and reduce feelings of isolation.

A BREAK IN MANCHESTER WITH THE MPS SOCIETY

In November, 17 people living with mucopolysaccharide diseases, along with four carers, met up for dinner and drinks at Manchester's Hilton Hotel, then stayed the night at the nearby Holiday Inn. The event, which was funded by Willow, was the biggest group get together they have had.

Each person, including the carers, received a Christmas themed gift box which contained a Santa mug, hot chocolate spoon, fleecy blanket, postcard colouring set and colouring pencils and a festive candle.



VIRTUAL PANTOMIME WITH THE HUNTINGTON'S DISEASE ASSOCIATION

In December, we worked with the Huntington's Disease Association to bring together seven families affected by the condition. As they are based all over the UK, it is often difficult for the families to travel and meet up in person, so we created a virtual Mother Goose pantomime that they could enjoy in the comfort of their own homes.

Custom treat boxes with a pantomime theme, which included a stuffed goose toy, were sent to make the experience even more special.

Group days are a great way to bring people together who often struggle to find support elsewhere. We are planning several more this year, working with medical professionals, support groups and other charities to identify people who need our support and helping them to feel less alone.

Lace up your trainers and make more wishes come true

Willow ambassador and Lioness legend, Leah Williamson, is calling on you to join her for this year's Williamson's Walk.

So, grab your friends, family, clubs, teams, school friends or colleagues and join people all across the UK walking for Willow.

We are hoping this year's walk will be even bigger and better than last year. Sign up to walk 100K your way during July and raise money to help more people make precious memories during tough times.



Willow 10K

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 1.8K Family Fun Run and bring your friends and family - there's something for everyone at this fun-packed event!



Sign up for Williamson's Walk, Stream with Willow, the Willow 10K, or one of our other events across the UK here



Your story matters. Your legacy does too.

Have you considered leaving a gift to Willow in your will?

We have partnered with Octopus Legacy to offer our supporters the chance to write or update your will for free. Willow will cover the cost of a simple will, or contribute £150 if your will is more complex.

You are under no obligation to leave a gift to Willow, but if you consider pledging once your loved ones are looked after, you will be supporting a future where more special moments and memories can be made every day.

octopuslegacy

To write your will for free
online, or to arrange a call or

home visit, scan the QR code or call 020 4525 3605
quoting **WILLOWFREE**



If you would like more about leaving a gift in your will, please
contact sarah.butlin@willowfoundation.org.uk

One of our beneficiaries used the service and shared how easy the process was:

“When I saw the free will offer, it felt like the perfect solution. I could get my affairs in order and give back to Willow for the support they provided while I was going through treatment for bowel cancer.

“I made sure my family would be looked after if anything was to happen to me, and left a gift to Willow to help them to continue their great work in the future. It hasn't cost me anything and was really easy to do. Thanks again Willow!”



Could you become a Community Ambassador for Willow?

Volunteers play a vital role at Willow, right the across the organisation. We simply couldn't do what we do without them!

We're looking to recruit volunteers all over the UK to help us deliver our ambitious growth plans. Can you help? Whether you could attend talks in your local area or gather clothes donations for our charity shops, you could play an important role in helping us to raise additional funds and awareness.

Nick

"I started volunteering for Willow three years ago, alongside my wife, Debbie, after a friend asked if we'd like to help out at the Folk by the Oak festival at Hatfield House. As long time music festival fans, it felt like the perfect place to begin.



"After ten years of working from home, suddenly being out in the open, chatting to people and sharing what Willow does was refreshing and energising.

"I recently had the chance to volunteer at the London Football Awards. It was a fantastic experience and a privilege to be part of such an important fundraising event.

"I'd wholeheartedly recommend volunteering to anyone, no matter how little time you have to spare. Every bit of help makes a difference, and the experience is genuinely rewarding."

We'd love to chat with you about how you can help. Please get in touch with our HR & Volunteer manager, Jo, on jo.tredgett@willowfoundation.org.uk to discuss how your skills and experience could support our work.

Willow Raffle

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



The Willow Raffle is back. Enter today for your chance to win a relaxing break at Center Parcs for up to four people.

Jayne was last year's winner. We caught up with her following her break with her partner Andy (pictured with Billy the dog), daughter, Mel, and her partner, Charlotte: "When I was contacted by Willow to say I had won first prize in the raffle, I couldn't believe it. I have never won anything before! I was told it was a holiday at Center Parcs, and for four people, I just couldn't believe it. It took a while to sink in that I had really won.

"The holiday was fabulous! It's somewhere I had never been before, and to share with my family made it even more special.

"I would like to thank Willow for putting up such a fabulous prize. Everything was perfect!"

Play today to turn each £1 ticket into something truly meaningful.
www.willowfoundation.org.uk/raffle



Scan the QR Code to purchase tickets or visit the link



Keep in touch

Postal address: Willow, Gate House, Fretherne Road, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6NS

Phone us: 01707 259777 **Email us:** info@willowfoundation.org.uk

Willow Foundation is a registered charity in England and Wales No. 1106746 and in Scotland No. SCO45811. It is also a company limited by guarantee no. 5207070. Registered in England Wales at the above address.



WOULD YOU PREFER TO HEAR FROM US BY EMAIL?

Our email subscribers receive regular emails where we share news, updates, opportunities to get involved and stories of people you are helping. To replace postal updates with regular emails, or to receive both, email us at DPO@willowfoundation.org.uk

FOLLOW US

@willowfoundation

@willowfoundation

@willow_foundation

@willow-foundation