ANNUAL REVIEW 2021/22

Creating memories when time is precious

Supporting seriously ill 16 to 40 year olds

willow
special days for seriously ill young adults
Willow is the only UK charity that supports seriously ill young 16 to 40 year olds by creating uplifting and magic moments that become precious memories.

From fun and activity-packed Special Days Out to inventive Special Days at Home for all the family. From Special Treats, bespoke care packages that bring joy and lift spirits to relaxing Special Breaks away from it all.

Willow’s range of Special Day services offer the chance to meet a hero or fulfil a long-held dream that creates treasured memories for seriously ill young adults and their loves ones.

Against a backdrop of much uncertainty, anxiety and sadness Willow creates life-affirming experiences that boost morale and leave lasting memories for families.
Brooke from Stirlingshire was diagnosed with an ovarian germ cell tumour when she was just 16. She chose a Special Day at Home in a hot tub.

“My life changed when I was diagnosed with a rare kind of ovarian cancer at the age of 16. I had to take time off school whilst I recovered from major surgery. Then two years later I needed chemotherapy as the cancer had started spreading to my lymph nodes. I spent ten weeks in hospital and had to stop working as I was so fatigued and unwell all the time. My family also took long periods off work to look after me.

Covid meant that I had to shield due to my immune system being so weak. Since then, I have just been avoiding busy places and staying at home as much as possible. That’s why I chose a Special Day at Home, it gave us such a boost, we relaxed and enjoyed spending time together. I absolutely loved the hot tub and the balloons as purple is my favourite colour.”

Following one of the most challenging years in Willow’s history, at the start of 2021 we were looking forward to returning to some semblance of normality.

However, when new lockdown restrictions were introduced in the first weeks of January 2021, it was clear that we would have to continue to adapt to new challenges.

In February 2021 we launched our new and improved Willow service, comprising four options – including two Covid-safe options:

- **Special Treats**: luxury gift boxes sent directly to the beneficiary.
- **Special Days at Home**: experiences within the beneficiary’s own home/garden or treatment centre (such as hospice or hospital)
- **Special Days Out**: day trips across the UK including travel, subsistence and overnight stays when required, examples include theme parks, theatre trips and spa days.
- **Special Breaks**: overnight stays and longer breaks (typically 3-4 nights and usually self-catering)

Sadly, we know that many of the young adults who really need our support are often too unwell to participate in a Special Day Out or a Special Break and this is where Special Days at Home and Special Treats can make a real, positive difference.

Along with refreshing our service offering, in 2021 Willow also reviewed its priority in beneficiary reach and we asked medical referrers to help with this difficult task.

In line with their advice we took the decision to give priority to seriously ill young adults living with an incurable diagnosis where making memories for families is key. We concentrated on those young adults who had only weeks or months left to live.

In addition we were determined to help more young adults living with degenerative and genetic conditions. For them especially, there is little other support that simply focuses on their quality of life.

And into 2022 we added a further group to this service focus, namely young adults living with rare diseases for whom the journey is particularly lonely and isolating.

Earlier this year, The Alexion Charitable Foundation committed to support Special Day services for 150 young adults living with rare diseases through their Rare Belonging grant programme.

We will also make every effort to reach young cancer patients on low incomes. People living with cancer already face significant extra costs when they are diagnosed and the recent rise in the cost of living will have made their situations even more difficult.

Throughout 2021 we were able to help all beneficiaries whose application had been approved.
Every week, 300 young adults aged 16 to 40 are diagnosed with cancer. That is nearly 16,000 young people each year whose lives are cruelly interrupted, they face a lot of uncertainty and lost opportunities in the prime of their lives.

A cancer diagnosis in the age range 16 to 40 is relatively rare, accounting for just 4.3% of all cancers diagnosed in the UK annually. This makes the cancer journey very lonely and isolating.

In addition we have estimated that up to 5,000 young adults living with degenerative, genetic and metabolic illnesses become eligible for a Special Day every year. For these young adults there is little support available that focuses on quality of life.

*Cancer Research UK and Willow

**SERIOUSLY ILL YOUNG ADULTS**

**THE NEED**

- Every week, 300 young adults aged 16 to 40 are diagnosed with cancer. That is nearly 16,000 young people each year whose lives are cruelly interrupted, they face a lot of uncertainty and lost opportunities in the prime of their lives.
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**WORKING WITH HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

Everyone aged 16 to 40 and diagnosed with a serious illness deserves access to our Special Day services. However, we know that the need for our service far outweighs the number of young people we can help.

That is why we are constantly striving to reach patients with the greatest medical need. This includes young adults with advanced cancer or degenerative conditions; diseases without a cure.

Willow’s medical advisors are at the forefront of directing services to these priority groups. In the last two years, we have built targeted relationships with Hospice UK, Together for Short Lives and Children’s Hospices across Scotland.

We have also maintained long-standing relationships with medical professionals who frequently refer their palliative patients to Willow. As a direct result of this approach, Willow has supported an increased number of young adults living with incurable conditions.

Bev Barclay, Medical Advisor said: “For the group of young adults living with life-limiting non-cancer conditions in particular, there is very little support that helps families make memories. We often see that one of the parents has had to become a full time carer, impacting the family’s finances and therefore a Special Day Out for all the family is true respite. It is also not unusual to see more than one child in a family affected by the same condition, making these families very deserving of our support.”

**My Special Day Out**

**Millie** is 17 and she was diagnosed with lissencephaly at birth resulting in profound learning and physical disabilities. She relies on carers 24/7. Our Special Day Coordinator learnt that Millie is mad on Mr Tumble, a CBeebies character. So for Millie and her mum, we organised a Special Day Out at CBeebies Land including an overnight stay in a ‘Something Special’ room. We also booked accommodation for Millie’s carer who supported them during the two days they spent at the park.

“We had a fantastic stay at CBeebies hotel, Millie honestly had the best time and vass in CBeebies heaven, she was so good and we all had an amazing experience. I simply couldn’t afford to take her so for that I am so very grateful.”

**My Special Day Out**

Earlier this year we reached out to the Huntington’s Disease Association who referred Saleish to Willow:

**Saleish** is 33 and lives with Huntington’s disease, his mum explains: “Since Saleish’s diagnosis our lives have changed drastically, there is no cure. Something we are painfully aware of as I have already lost a son aged 35 to the same disease. Our Special Day Out was so important because as a family we want to make memories which I know will help in the long run. My son is a true Dr Dolittle and loves animals so our day at London Zoo was perfect. We enjoyed a full day at the zoo, Saleish got to feed the penguins and it was lovely to share the happiness and smiles for all the family to treasure.”
Natasha’s Special Break

32-year old Natasha wrote to us following her Special Break:

“You will know that I was diagnosed with incurable breast cancer and was due to start radiotherapy when we returned from our family break. However, this has now been cancelled as my cancer has spread aggressively across my other breast, into my lungs and my liver. I am actually feeling very poorly in a short space of time and will be going onto a new trial chemo to try and help.

The reason I mention this, is boy, did this trip away come at a good time. For me family is everything and you will see from the photos just looking at the smiles and joy on my little girl Ruby’s face, it meant everything to me. Creating memories with my husband and her so they have photos to cherish in the future.

I don’t know how long I have left in life and just wanted to share my gratitude of being able to have this week away.”

A couple of months after Natasha’s Special Break, her parents got in touch:

Dear Willow Foundation,

We are the parents of Natasha who you very kindly provided a break for at Center Parcs, Longleat in June.

Thanks to the generosity and kindness of those who support you Natasha was able to enjoy one last holiday before she sadly passed away aged 36, only three weeks later.

The thought that she had the holiday to look forward to kept Natasha going through many painful weeks as cancer inexorably took over her body. It meant that she lived just long enough to see her daughter, Ruby’s third birthday before Natasha was admitted to hospital for the last time.

The family break meant everything, she was able to create lasting memories with her daughter, Ruby and her husband, Marc. Through the pain it brought many smiles to her face as she described to us the happy times she had enjoyed during that weekend.

On Ruby’s grave we will have photos that we can share of her and her mum enjoying life and smiling almost to the very last moment she was on this earth.

For most of us a few days away are just a bonus to look forward to but for those younger people whose life expectancy is short and often brutal, this can sometimes mean everything as it did to our daughter, Natasha.

With best wishes, Ray & Sheila

Natasha’s Special Break

Memories for 1,028 Families

Your generous support made sure Willow was able to support more than 1,000 seriously ill young adults in 2021

By Location

- East 11%
- East Midlands 4%
- London 4%
- North East 4%
- Northern Ireland 7%
- Scotland 9%
- South East 11%
- South West 10%
- Wales 4%
- West Midlands 8%
- Yorks & Humber 11%

By Condition

- Cancer 29%
- Rare diseases 71%
- Muscular Dystrophy 886
- Organ failure 32
- Cystic fibrosis 22
- Other 20
- Neurological degenerative 18
- Blood Disorder 17
- Huntington’s disease 12
- Other 6

Gender Split

- Male 38%
- Female 62%

Age

- 16-20 13%
- 21-30 35%
- 31-40 52%

Special Breaks

- 296

Special Days at Home

- 29

Special Days Out

- 126

Special Treats

- 577

Total

- 1028
40-year-old Jyoti from Coventry was diagnosed with gestational trophoblastic disease, a rare cancer:

“I was a busy, fit and healthy Mum prior to diagnosis. I loved socialising and worked full-time as a physiotherapist. I also trained to be a yoga practitioner and taught anatomy and physiology to yoga students.

I started getting back pain which was not shifting with exercise and then had it checked. A scan revealed a large mass on my right ovary and I was told this could be cancer, it was a complete shock. Soon enough the diagnosis was confirmed and my husband and I were crushed. We were in denial for some time, and not knowing the prognosis, thoughts turned negative. To focus on treatment I have had to take time off work, stop my yoga course and teaching. We had to ask family from India to come and help out.

I have always wanted to spend a night in London to take in the night view of the London Eye and Big Ben. That was my wish. So for my Special Day Out we had an overnight stay and our hotel room faced Big Ben. I felt so special with my family around me. My Special Day Out achieved everything I had expected.”
Willow receives no government funding and we rely wholly on fundraising and voluntary donations. As the world continued to navigate the global pandemic, our fundraising team was determined and focussed and our supporters were committed and creative with their fundraising ideas. We applaud each and every one of our supporters for their incredible commitment and passion.

Willow operates five charity retail shops in Hertfordshire which offer a sustainable and reliable source of income. Alongside selling pre-loved items, our shops raise awareness of our work in the Hertfordshire communities they serve. Lockdown meant that the shops had to close for the first three months of the year. A very determined retail team finally opened our shop doors on 12 April 2021.

We were overjoyed to be one of the chosen charities for the 29th ICAP Charity Day in December 2021. Our Ambassadors Leah Williamson and Pat Jennings together with Life Presidents Bob and Megs Wilson attended this fun day in the office!

During much of 2021 we had to resort to adapting our fundraising events to work in a virtual setting. It felt bittersweet when in September 2021 we returned to our first physical event in more than 18 months, the Willow Golf Classic at Brocket Hall, the location where Bob and Megs Wilson founded our charity in 1999. Many of our most loyal supporters came out onto a gloriously sunny course and they were the driving force behind an electric auction that resulted in a grand total net income of £46,000.

Our friends at Folk by the Oak have supported Willow since their first festival in 2008. A wonderful 14 years later team ‘Folk’ have raised more than £100,000 for Willow through ticket contributions and the generosity of the crowds on the day. We are in awe of Folk by the Oak’s loyal support.

FOLK BY THE OAK

Our Ambassadors Leah Williamson and Pat Jennings together with Life Presidents Bob and Megs Wilson attended this fun day in the office! Thank you to all ambassadors - Charity Day Stars - who joined in on the fun.

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Following her brother Rob’s diagnosis with stage 4 bowel cancer, Carrie swam in the sea every day. It was her coping mechanism to stay focused and to support her brother and his family. She kept up her daily swimming when Rob sadly passed away in August 2021 aged 40. To mark her two years of swimming, Carrie asked friends and family for donations. Carrie said: “Willow gave my brother and his family a Special Day to Everton to watch the match and meet the players. I don’t think I have ever seen my brother Rob so happy.” Carrie raised £1,065!
FUNDRAISING EVENTS

A highlight in November was the Willow Christmas Ball, held in the iconic Savoy Ballroom. Hosted by the wonderful Mary Nightingale, she helped to give our supporters an incredible night to remember. For so many guests it was the first time since the start of the pandemic they shared a room with another 250 people.

On the night, special tribute was paid to the NHS professionals who were honoured with the Willow at Heart Award. This award is given to an individual, group of individuals or company that has significantly contributed over a sustained period to the growth of Willow.

NHS doctors and nurses are the people who first introduce patients to our service and they are our biggest champions in the young adult serious illness networks. Of course, during the pandemic, their role becomes even more vital. When many charities’ services ceased to operate, Willow remained open and many NHS health professionals were able to refer their patients.

The Willow Carol Concert signifies the start of the festive period and in December 2021 we were back at St Albans Cathedral after hosting a virtual concert in 2020. Although Covid-restrictions meant introducing a few changes to the programme, the concert was a chance for our community to come together, sing festive songs whilst enjoying the performances from local singers and choirs. We also placed baubles of remembrance on the Willow Christmas tree.

All enjoyed the post-concert mince pies kindly donated by Simmons Bakeries, offered as a take away treat to enjoy at home. Special thanks go to our partners, St Albans Cathedral, The Galleria, H&G Recruitment, Simmons Bakeries, our incredible choirs, performers and volunteers who helped create a truly memorable evening.

As we went into 2022 the world was still grappling with the pandemic and a lot of uncertainty remained. We were determined to host our flagship sport-based fundraising event, London Football Awards (#LFA22) as an in-person event. We worked with The Premier League and London football clubs to navigate their strict Covid rules. This included reducing the audience capacity and allowing for social distancing. We were also advised to put in place a traffic light system that enabled the award winners to collect their award without coming into contact with any of the guests.

Team Willow triumphed as award winners, including Conor Gallagher, Declan Rice and David Moyes attending to receive their award in person. LFA celebrated the success of women’s football when Emma Hayes OBE was presented with the top award on the night – Outstanding Contribution to London Football. The award was sponsored by the equally outstanding and long-term corporate partner of our charity, Weston Homes. We are hugely grateful to Toscafund Asset Management who are long-term sponsors of the event.
The beginning of 2022 saw Willow return to its strategic plan which rests on the following three pillars:

### Growth

- Our fundraising plan aims to raise £3.0M income in 2023.
- Aim to grow our beneficiary reach by 10%.
- Our retail growth plan post Covid will see the opening of two new retail charity shops by the end of 2023, with a further three shops to follow.
- A drive to return our events fundraising income to pre-pandemic levels.
- Organise a beneficiary event in 2023 that encourages long-term involvement.
- Build strong relationships with service suppliers who support through discounts and gifts in kind.
- Roll out our gifts in wills programme.

### Impact

- We will support at least 1,100 seriously ill young adults in 2023.
- Focus on those beneficiaries most in need – we have identified young adults with living incurable cancer diagnoses, diagnosed with degenerative and genetic conditions, rare diseases as their journey is particularly lonely and isolating, cancer patients on low incomes.
- To measure impact of our services and implement learnings from feedback.
- Raise Willow’s profile to attract beneficiary applications and new supporters.

### Sustainability

- Ensure the charity continues to operate with financial sustainability.
- Continue to shape and develop our income generation area recognising that different types of fundraising spreads risk.
- Recruitment into our trustee board in line with the needs identified in our skills matrix.
- A focus on sustainable income areas such as individual giving, trusts and foundations.

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Investors should remember that the value of investments, and the income from them, can go down as well as up and that past performance is no guarantee of future returns. You may not recover what you invest.

HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE INVESTMENT CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES?

When it comes to investment, we help charities by thinking beyond the obvious.

Find out more about investing with us by contacting Dominic Tayler on +44 (0)20 7150 4610 or visit www.quiltercheviot.com.

INVESTING FOR GENERATIONS

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The unwavering support of our Life Presidents, Ambassadors, Trustees and Development Board has been vital to our charity operation. We thank each of them for giving their time and expertise so generously, especially during the past two Covid-years.

THANK YOU
We are incredibly grateful to all our supporters – Willow benefactors, companies, challenge fundraisers, community groups, volunteers, trustees and foundations as well as our regular givers. Your donations and acts of support have a huge impact across all aspects of our work. We extend our warm and sincere thanks to the following supporters, including those who have chosen to remain anonymous.

Life Presidents
Mags Wilson
Bob Wilson OBE

Trustees
Richard King (Chair)
Nicholas Aldridge
Stevie Bennett
Elena Cialle
Rachel Jones
Martin Ryan
Vanessa Steel – appointed
24 September 2021
Glyn Taylor
David Waddington CBE

Development Board
Tony Gibson (Chair)
James Ebel
Ashley Muldowney
Christopher Murray
Neil Thompson
Jackie Wilgar
Ian Womack

Ambassadors
Natalie Kaplan as OBE
Pat Jennings OBE
Mary Nightingale
Theo Walcott
Jim Rosensthal
Linda Lusardi
David Seaman MBE
Sam Kane
Lee Dixon
Gary Mabbutt MBE
Simon Mccoy
Ian Poulter
Gary Lewin
Ian Wright MBE
Frankie Seaman
(formerly Poultney)
Martin Chivers
Ossie Ardiles
Katie Swan
Allie Boe OBE
Leah Williamson
Mica Paris MBE

We thank them wholeheartedly for their outstanding contribution.

Bob and Megs Wilson, Willow Life Presidents

23 YEARS OF QUALITY TIME
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. Anna’s determination to live life to the full wherever the cancer would take her, she wanted quality of time, quality of life but most of all she wanted to have fun. With her husband, her family and her friends. A shopping trip in a stretch limo, watching an Arsenal match or a concert in the diary to look forward to. As a family, some 20 years later we still cherish the memories we made with Anna.

Bob and Megs Wilson, Willow Life Presidents

A huge thank you to our Willow Ball Committee for their creative ideas and invaluable input.

Our London Football Awards (LFA) relies on the support of our LFA Judging Panel, LFA Committee and LFA Development Board. We thank them wholeheartedly for their outstanding contribution.