

A photograph of a woman and two children standing in front of a Christmas tree. The woman is in the center, wearing a black winter coat, a beige knit hat with a pink pom-pom, and a brown shoulder bag. She is smiling. To her left is a young boy in a red winter coat with a fur collar. To her right is a young girl in a light green winter coat with a fur collar and white earmuffs. The background is a Christmas tree decorated with white lights and gold ornaments.

WINTER/SPRING 2023

Keech Matters

“ A life-limiting diagnosis doesn't mean you can't live beautifully. ”

Read Pam's story on page 5

“ I know I'll have the strength and support whenever I need it. ”

Read Bianca's story on page 9

Let's hear from Liz



The end of last year finished on a high with so many of our supporters coming out to attend our festive filled schedule of in person events – Santa Run, Christmas Market, Light Up a Life and of course, Smiley Sam raising a startling £24,000 (despite losing seven days due to snow and ice).

Our 33 shops were given a make over reminding our customers to 'Donate and feel great'. We greeted so many excited shoppers and helped them grab a bargain (or two) over the Black Friday weekend too!

As a charity, it takes around £6 million every year, that's over £17,000 every day, to provide our specialist care to everyone living with an incurable illness from day one.

Thank you for continuing to support us. We are so grateful.

In this edition of Keech Matters, we hear from patients and their loved ones – we understand that when people think of the word hospice it conjures up mixed emotions, however, we find quite the opposite when we hear from our families firsthand. Take a look and read their experience of Keech.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Keech Matters. Use the QR codes to see and hear more from your local hospice. We'd love to hear your feedback, share your thoughts with us at: letmehelp@keech.org.uk.

Best wishes,

Liz Searle, CEO

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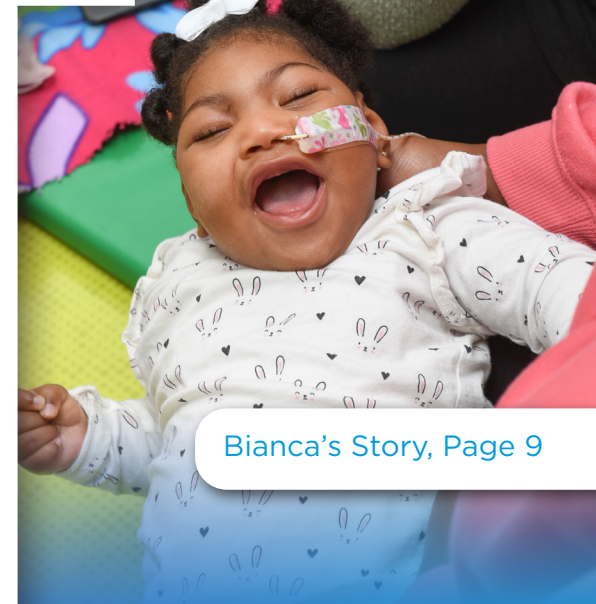
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youtube.com/keechhospicecare



If you have any questions or would like to find out more about getting involved, email us at: letmehelp@keech.org.uk

KEEPING UP WITH KEECH



A memorable day for all

In December, three staff members were given the honour of meeting His Majesty King Charles III, on his visit to Luton. Liz was formally asked to not only greet the King, but introduce him to several local charities, community groups and voluntary organisations.

Liz said "it was such a privilege to meet and welcome His Majesty King Charles III on behalf of Keech Hospice Care and all local charities. He was gracious with his time and humour and his love of charities shone through."

A special day for our local community that will most definitely not be forgotten.

We're a top organisation to work for!

In Autumn, staff took part in the Best Companies survey which resulted in us reaching 2 Star accreditation, meaning we have demonstrated outstanding levels of workplace engagement.

But that's not all. We also made the final 100 Best Large Companies to Work for list for 2022. We came 82nd of all large companies in the UK, 34th of all East of England companies and, drumroll...**11th of all charities in the UK!**

A truly exceptional result, especially as we were up against large businesses such as Wilmot Dixon and Octopus Energy! Some of the team celebrated our success at the live event in London – a great evening was had by all.



One donation, twice the impact

We took part in The Big Give's Christmas Challenge – a match funded week-long campaign where all donations were doubled. We shared the powerful story of 17-year-old Teagan, a patient at Keech which received more than 6,000 views across social media.

We had seven days to reach our **£30,000** target but thanks to our incredible supporters, we smashed it in less than four days!

It was an honour to share Teagan's story and highlight the benefits of the work we do out in the community. You can read more of Teagan's story on page 13.



Could you handle the heat?

In September, a team of 20 trekkers headed out to Jordan to complete the challenging Trek Petra. It was not for the faint hearted! The team faced six to eight hours of trekking each day in 33 degrees across ever-changing terrain, whilst camping overnight in the desert.

The team raised over **£150,000** – isn't that just phenomenal?! A huge amount of money that will allow us to continue making the difference when it matters the most.



A glorious scent-sation!

As part of their 30th birthday celebrations and Feel Good When You Smell Good initiative last year, The Perfume Shop decided to create a 'Scentsory' garden for our patients, staff and visitors. **60 incredible volunteers donating over 310 hours of their time transformed an area of the garden into a beautiful place of peace and reflection.**

We hope it provides a sense of comfort to those who may need it. **Thank you to The Perfume Shop** for their sheer passion and determination to create such a wonderful space for all to enjoy.



“Your diagnosis doesn’t mean you can’t live beautifully”

I’m 46 years old, married with two children. My children keep me busy, but they also ground me. They don’t let me wallow in self-pity.

I have a rare form of cancer which also affects my nerves and blood. I was diagnosed in August 2020 and the cancer is all over my body, my heart being significantly affected.

In March 2020 during lockdown, my job was altered in response to the pandemic. It was a busy time: I was working long hours, skipping lunch and I was losing weight. I put it down to being so busy. I’d lost a stone in a month and half.

I had a horrendous pain in my shoulder which was worsening. I started to feel tired in the day, it was a hot summer and I started napping at lunchtime which wasn’t like me – I rang my boss to tell her. She immediately said I should call my doctor which I did. They did some tests which came back as ‘worrying’. **I then realised something was wrong.** My Mum died from bowel cancer.

The surgeon wasn’t worried I may have bowel cancer as I’d been having regular

checks because of my mum, but he wanted to do further tests. We were going on holiday the following week so I had my examination on the Thursday and we went on holiday on the Monday. By the following Thursday I’d not heard anything, so I convinced myself nothing was wrong. The surgeon had my results and when he called me, he said he wanted to let me enjoy my holiday with my children. He told me **I had cancer and it was incurable.**

I worry most about the kids. I struggle to say this without crying but, as a parent, you want to be there to protect your kids and console them. I know what crippling grief feels like. I know my kids will feel this when I’ve gone and it’s me that’s caused that grief.

When I was diagnosed, I struggled to get the support I needed. I felt like I was drifting. I rang a friend in healthcare and she suggested I contact Keech. The website showed how much support was on offer. From counselling to emotional and practical support. It was all there under one roof, and it was free. I filled in the form online with a few details, it was so easy, and I referred myself to Keech.

The moment I pressed send, I felt relief. The next day, Kim, a nurse at Keech called me. It was that simple.

Kim had so much time for me. We spoke about how I was feeling, my worries and linked me up to a Keech stretch and balance class. My legs were itching so Kim prescribed some cream and sent it to my local pharmacy for collection. **I had no idea my local hospice could do all of this.**

If you’re diagnosed with a life-limiting condition, make sure you call your local hospice. They have so much support and a tremendous range of services on offer. They’ll help you live well for as long as possible. It’s that physical and emotional wellbeing that Keech gives me and my family. I know Keech is there for me, and **I’ve stopped feeling like I’m drifting.**

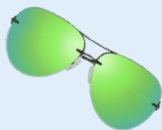
Getting the diagnosis is bleak. But your diagnosis does not mean you cannot live beautifully. Change what you think about hospices. They have such expert knowledge; the time and they genuinely care.

Pam, who uses our Wellbeing Centre service



To read Pam’s full story scan the QR code.





**DONATE
Feel Great**

Join in the era of pre-loved!

You'll save money, you're more likely to find some one-off pieces and you can make the difference to your local hospice. What's not to love?

By donating your pre-loved items, not only will it help to declutter your home (just in time for spring) but it feels good too! To know you are giving to charity can give you all 'the feels'. The same can be said for finding the perfect trifle bowl or faux fur jacket you didn't know you needed but now, won't be without.

Our new campaign Donate Feel Great brings to life the emotional benefit of supporting your local hospice. We couldn't provide support and care to patients and their loved ones without your kind donations. Why not pop into one of our 33 local shops and see what treasure you can find?



**To find your
local store scan
the QR code.**



Get more out of volunteering!

“

I've been volunteering for some time now and I still look forward to my volunteering shifts. Volunteers are treated as part of the Keech family and I am sure my contribution is valued. I like to know giving my time makes a difference.

”

Sheila – Training admin support



Make the difference while improving your skills (and feeling good too.)

Volunteering is rewarding for so many reasons. You can have a great impact on your community, enact positive change and work with people from all walks of life. We have a wide range of volunteering opportunities so whether you want to share your time in one of our 33 retail shops, support our fundraising team to generate vital funds or even help our families in the hydrotherapy pool, we have a role just for you.

Get in touch and find out more. We can't wait to hear from you.

Email: Volunteering@keech.org.uk
Visit our website: www.keech.org.uk/volunteer



**To see our
volunteering
opportunities
scan the
QR code.**





If you, a child or adult you know has been diagnosed with a life-limiting illness, we can help today. Please find out more at:

keech.org.uk/refer

In my third trimester we were told our daughter wasn't measuring as expected – she had looked fine in previous scans but this one was different. That's when everything changed.

I want to share my story with you in the hope that should you need help, you know where to turn. When Breanna was born she was perfect, perfect to me. What followed was many uncertain weeks, but worst of all was the looks, comments and lack of understanding.

My pregnancy was classed as high-risk, so we were offered additional scans. During our 28 week check-in, the sonographer re-measured Breanna and noticed her head was smaller than it should be. On the same day, we were referred to a specialist for more detailed checks – they found that Breanna had Microcephaly. Microcephaly is where a baby's head is smaller than expected; this can occur because a baby's brain has not developed properly during pregnancy.

At 37 weeks, Breanna was born, and she was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen.

“**KEECH IS THERE FOR ME**”

I KNOW I'LL HAVE THE STRENGTH AND SUPPORT WHENEVER I NEED IT. ”

I kissed her before she went to NICU where she stayed for 45 days. During the very early days I noticed she was having seizures. She also had very low blood sugar which needed to be monitored and she was tube fed. I knew we were staying for a while, but it felt like a lifetime. **I knew Breanna was going to be a little different but that makes her even more special.**

Since having Breanna, the hardest bit is not feeling like a 'normal' mum. Breanna has changed me as a person, my confidence has grown because I must be strong but it's hard when people stare. My experience of mum and baby groups was not great. **I felt isolated, frustrated and alone.**

I referred myself to Keech by completing the online self-refer form, it was easy. I hoped they could help me feel less isolated. Within 24 hours, someone contacted me and arranged a home visit. That's when everything changed. Two nurses came to my house to meet Breanna and I. **They took time to listen and really understand what we both needed.**

During our first play session, I noticed all the children had different needs. The common theme were the mums, we're the same. We

all have children with additional needs and for the first time I felt understood. It's a space for me to enjoy time with my daughter. We've created a strong network. Something I needed, and I know I'm a better mum because I have support from people who really understand.

Keech has opened up the world for us, giving us experiences to make the most of our time together. We've enjoyed the zoo, farm, family photoshoot days and a race day. Our favourite activity is a family swim in their hydrotherapy pool. It's amazing for Breanna, it relaxes her muscles meaning she can be pain free floating in the water. She even started lifting her head as her muscles strengthen. For Kevaughn and I, it's quality time together in a space where people know, care and understand us. **That's priceless.**

Keech is there for me – I know I'll have the strength and support whenever I need it. I'm grateful to Keech and the network they've helped me create. It's so much more than exceptional medical care, it's the time they take to create moments for me and my family.

Bianca, Breanna's mum



To read Breanna's full story scan the QR code.

TREK HADRIAN'S WALL

Fancy taking on this epic challenge in September?

You will trek in the footsteps once walked by the Romans, east to west, starting in Bowness On Solway and ending at Wallsend, Newcastle. The wall, 84 miles long, once stretched from the east to the west coasts of Britain. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

What's Included:

- Return transport from Keech Hospice Care
- All accommodation on a bed and breakfast basis
- Packed lunches and snacks on all trekking days, some evening meals are included
- Qualified trekking lead
- Transportation of baggage between accommodation
- Fundraising support and advice

Registration fee* £150 Minimum sponsorship £1500



To find out more, please get in touch by emailing lyrussell@keech.org.uk or visit www.keech.org.uk/trek



FUNDRAISING FIT FOR A KING

Celebrate the coronation of our new King this spring and donate the proceeds to Keech Hospice Care.

A few jewels to get you started:

- Sing for the King (with the UK also hosting the Eurovision in May, why not put on your own concert or karaoke night)
- Royalty for the day (host a royal themed fancy dress party)
- A Right Royal Knees Up! (host your own garden/tea or street party)
- Coronation Cake Off (organise a bake off or cake sale)
- His Majesty's Treasure (what about a treasure or egg hunt for the kids?)

You may even have your own ideas for this very special occasion, if so, we want to hear from you so that we can register your activity. We're here to support you so if you have any questions, email letmehelp@keech.org.uk and the team will be happy to help.

TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE!

We rely on our local community and supporters for around 70% of our funding and we're enormously grateful for whatever you can do or give.

DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START? Don't worry as we have plenty of ideas and activities. Whether you're an adrenaline junkie looking for a heart-racing event, or an avid baker who would excel at a bake off - there's something for everyone.



To check out our upcoming activities scan the QR code.

CANCER CHOSE ME I CHOSE KEECH

It's important when you hear the news that you have a life-limiting illness that you know who is there to listen, to support you and manage your pain. Keech has been here for me and my family, and that makes all the difference.

It isn't easy at 17 being told you have just four to eight weeks to live. But that's been my journey. Hope given and hope taken away.

I've grown up doing everything sporty! I was always doing something at fast pace. In the school office, I had my own box of plasters for patching me up after running bends at speed and jumps that didn't quite go to plan. I have the war wounds to prove it, and I'm proud of them too!

It was whilst training with Biggleswade Athletic Club that I narrowed my talents down to high and long jump. At 15, I found the triple jump and proudly represented Biggleswade Athletic Club at the Nationals.

Like the rest of the world, in March 2020, schools closed and so did our sports clubs. I was okay with that, as

for the first time in my life I was tired. **In hindsight, this was the first alarm bell.**

After the first lockdown restrictions were eased, I got back to the athletics track and my first triple jumping session was brilliant. All the hard work had paid off and I was jumping further than before and would easily qualify for the nationals again. I was thrilled!

And then in August, my tiredness returned.

I started to feel a weakness in my back, and lumps began to appear in my pelvis. A hospital referral and tests didn't throw up any immediate answers. But I became increasingly tired, and the lumps were doubling in size. After a particularly uncomfortable night, an ultrasound was arranged for me. After seeing the results, I was booked in for an MRI.

Walking back to the car with my Mum, the team called asking me back in for an additional scan. That was when I met my oncologist for the first time.

At 15, I wasn't entirely sure what that was. I was young. I was healthy but

“

Keech have made my home more comfortable. I see the same nurses every time.”

there it was, laid out in front of me – I had cancer.

My type of cancer is called Alveolar Rhabdomyosarcoma. Only 60 or so children are diagnosed each year.

When I was told I had four to eight weeks to live, I did not want to go into hospital. I wanted to be at home. My nurse found Keech online and they came to meet me at home a few days later.

They took time to hear my wishes and have helped me, my mum and my family get organised. **Keech have made my home more comfortable.** I see the same nurses every time and they are on

the other end of the phone if we are worried about anything.

I know they are there for me if I want to talk and I know they are there for my family too. I hope my family take their supportive care once I am gone because I know that will help. I have comfort knowing Keech is there for my family when I am gone.

Teagan, patient of Keech Hospice Care. Died November 2022.



To read Teagan's full story visit our website or **scan the QR code to watch her video.**

Only 4 in 10 people have made their Will. What's stopping you from making yours?



**Make your
Will for
FREE today!**

There's no obligation to leave a gift in your Will to Keech, but after providing for your family and loved ones, please consider supporting us in this way, and helping to make a difference for those we care for.

Make your Will For Good

It's simple, scan the QR code below to register (or visit [keech.org.uk/giftsinwills](https://www.keech.org.uk/giftsinwills)) and then be guided through the process of writing your Will step-by-step to create a legally binding Will (once signed and witnessed). **All from the comfort of your own home and in as little as 15 minutes.**

**Make your
FREE Will here**

