



SUMMER/AUTUMN 2023

Keech Matters

“
KEECH
ISN'T JUST
A PLACE
FOR US TO GO,
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family.”

Read Emily's
story on page 13

“
Keech treats
me like me,
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a patient.”

Read David's
story on page 7

Let's hear from Liz



We've had a positive start to the year, and I'm delighted to begin by sharing the news that in June 2023, Keech Hospice Care and Bedford Daycare Hospice officially merged. This is a very significant moment for patients and families. Together, we will be able to grow services, reach more people and deliver more care to more people who need it throughout our local community. Both hospices are already well-known for the quality of care they provide, and both have a rich history that we're proud to bring together. We're building for the future, and it makes sense to come together.

Our volunteers are critical to everything we do, from our shops to our care. We've recently launched a new volunteering campaign, #BeTheReason, to reach out to more people about the benefits of volunteering. Giving something back to your local community while learning new skills and meeting new people. What's not to love? You could be the reason that someone smiles today.

The wellbeing of our staff is paramount, so we've also introduced more measures to look after people and ensure that everyone feels respected and safe. You can read more about this on page 4.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Keech Matters. We hear stories from our dedicated supporters who have raised vital funds, as well as from our patients and their loved ones. Find out how our incredible teams have supported them right from the very start.

We'd love to hear your feedback; scan this QR code to share your thoughts or contact us: letmehelp@keech.org.uk.

Best wishes,

Liz Searle, CEO



In this issue

- 3 Keeping up with Keech.
A round up of our highlights.
- 5 Donate Feel Great
Our retail team are feeling great with some real highs!
- 7 "Keech is a place of joy, care and love."
Read David's story on how we're supporting him and his wife since his diagnosis of MND.
- 9 The difference we make
Our families share their experiences of the care and support from our children's team.
- 11 Could you help us to help more?
Get inspired to raise vital funds for Keech Hospice Care.
- 13 "I don't know what we'd do without Keech"
Emily tells us how we are making a difference to her daughter Amelia.
- 15 Have you written your Will?
The power to shape the future is in your hands today.



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www.keech.org.uk



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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



An important day for Keech

In June, we announced that Keech Hospice Care and Bedford Daycare Hospice officially merged. The merger means we can expand our services in Bedford, enhance our current range of services and allow more people to access our care and support.

We're extremely excited to bring two well-known hospices with long histories together to serve our wider community and raise awareness. We're proud to have the opportunity to come together and combine our efforts to benefit the local community. **It's an exciting time for everyone involved.**

The Short Tail Trail incoming in 2024

In May, we announced that we're bringing a bigger and brighter art trail back to Luton in 2024. Who can forget the fabulous painted elephants of Luton's Big Trunk Trail in 2021 when we raised a whopping **£231,500** for Keech?

2024 will see 90 beautifully designed large and baby hare and tortoise sculptures form the biggest and most unique outdoor public art event Luton has ever seen. The sculptures will shine bright along the free, fun and family-friendly art trail, bringing together the community for one unforgettable event. We hope to not only give our local community some unforgettable and free summer fun, but also raise vital funds for Keech Hospice Care.

Hop on board and follow the trail on social media for our latest updates @shorttailtrail



Catch us on the big screen!

This spring, six of our families were invited to join Bowled Over Media and The Pirate Castle in Camden for a boat trip along the canal for the filming of a **brand-new Channel 4 series, Narrow Escapes.**

The families enjoyed a two-hour boat trip from the Pirate Castle to Little Venice, passing the lemurs at London Zoo, all while being filmed and talking about their experiences. The boat was wheelchair accessible with a hydraulic lift, which made the trip enjoyable for all. Everyone had a great day and didn't even notice the cameras most of the time. **The 20-part series is a snapshot of life on the waterways and will air this winter.**



Supporting our staff

To support staff wellbeing, we recently introduced **Mental Health First Aid Champions across the organisation.** The champions are a point of contact for those in emotional distress or experiencing a mental health issue. They offer a safe space for staff and volunteers. **We've also created an EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) group to raise issues and champion EDI across the organisation.** So far, the group has advocated Ramadan and Pride to raise awareness, educate and encourage people to get involved. We've had a great response already and we're excited for the future.

A Coronation Champion

In honour of Their Majesties' service to the country and to celebrate the Coronation, The Royal Voluntary Service launched the Coronation Champions Awards for volunteers. **We're thrilled that Julien, our housekeeping volunteer was crowned a Coronation Champion.**

Having volunteered for Keech for 12 years, including throughout the pandemic, Julien proved a worthy champion and demonstrates how important and integral our volunteers are to our work at Keech volunteering, *"When I'm at Keech, I don't think of myself as a volunteer, but as a regular member of staff. I attempt to carry out the work with pride and to the best of my ability. I enjoy working closely with the care staff and especially the wonderful housekeeping team that I've been with since day one."* **Well done Julien. We're so proud of you!**



DONATE

Feel Great



Our charity shops receive hundreds of donations every single day. Although all are valued, occasionally a true hidden gem appears. Our Hitchin team recently came across a beautiful vase which they believed to be a Minton design. After being authenticated at a local museum, the vase was taken to Sworders Auction House for appraisal. **The item was listed free of charge for a value between £600 - £800.** Well, the vase was successfully sold and surpassed the valuation by almost double, selling for a whopping **£1,500.** Amazing news and well spotted Hitchin.

Our Harpenden and Welwyn Garden City charity shops have both been busy with exciting refurbishments. Our shops are supported by the local community, so it was fantastic to be able to welcome customers back to refreshed and even more inviting spaces. The response has been great and it's wonderful to see our shops thriving.



Over £1 million of our funding comes directly from the income generated by our 33 charity shops. Whether you're donating or buying goods, your support really does make the difference to the lives of adults and children with life-limiting illnesses and their loved ones.



Scan the QR code to find your local store.



USE YOUR TIME

MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

VOLUNTEER

“

I want to be a doctor, and volunteering at Keech is a good way to gain experience in helping people. It gives me a deeper understanding of the medical profession, especially palliative care. Volunteering is a great way for young people to use their skills while having fun.

”

- Ashton, volunteer lifeguard

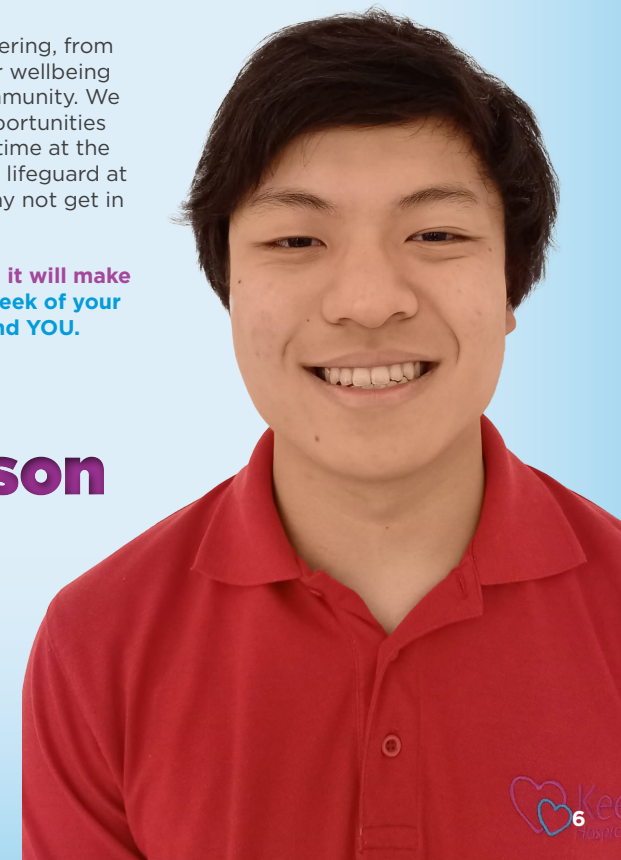
There are so many benefits to volunteering, from learning new skills and improving your wellbeing to giving something back to your community. We have a wide range of volunteering opportunities for everyone. Whether you can spare time at the weekend, help with our events or be a lifeguard at our hydrotherapy pool like Ashton, why not get in touch to find out more.

Be the reason someone smiles today; it will make you smile too. Just a few hours per week of your time can make the difference to us and YOU.

#BeTheReason



Scan the QR code to become a volunteer!



“With Keech by our side we feel supported.”

I'm David and my story starts with the all too familiar tale of Covid taking over the world and changing life as we knew it.

I'd planned to retire in May 2020 so I could travel and spend more time with my family. We were planning to celebrate my retirement and my wife's, Sonia, 60th birthday with a three-week trip to Canada and a few nights in New York. What a way to celebrate. Or so we thought.

My plan for retirement went out the window as the country went into lockdown. I continued to work and postponed my retirement (and our trip). In August 2021, we were on a trip with our grandchildren when I noticed some fluttering in my shoulders, a strange feeling but thought nothing of it. In the December, I noticed I was losing movement in my hands too. I started to research, and my concerns grew. It played on my mind for some time before I did anything. Sonia and I had gone away for the weekend, and I really struggled to lift my beer - now I knew I needed to do something.

By this time, I had announced my retirement. I was working my three-month notice period when I first went to my GP about my growing concerns and symptoms. I was told the wait to

see a consultant would be 10 months, so I made the decision to see a private specialist. During my first meeting, we discussed my symptoms and ran several tests. The results took one week which flew by. By the end of that week, **I'd finally reached my retirement date but by Saturday I had also been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND).**

Five days later, we finally went on our trip to Canada - a hard decision but we'd waited so long for our holiday to celebrate. The first day we arrived, we were both down and upset about what the future held for us. We quickly agreed that we didn't want to spend our break being so sad. Our holiday was amazing. We spent three weeks together making memories that will last us a lifetime. Special moments for the two of us.

Recently, my sister-in-law introduced me to Keech Hospice Care and now I have Donna helping me. Donna, the Occupational Therapist at Keech is supporting me with the changes I'm experiencing. Sonia and I had mentioned that eating was becoming difficult, so Donna did some research and found me an aid called a 'Neater Eater'. This means I can still feed myself. Donna is so valuable to us on this journey. I never realised that hospices offer such a vast range of care services, and **I don't know what I would do without her and the team.**

Keech's hydrotherapy pool continues to be a good way to relax my body. The heat gives me great comfort. Under the supportive care of Charlotte, my Aquatics Therapist, I've been able to perform exercises in the water that have helped improve my strength. Another favourite is the circuits with Nic. She's so much fun and I know I'm in safe hands. She has all of us working hard in the gym and even makes it competitive.

The team really engage, understand and care about me. They're doing the very best they can do for me, for as long as they can. There is so much on offer, and it really has made the difference to my every day.

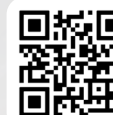
Sonia is seeing me fade away. It's very difficult for her. She is having counselling and complementary therapy. It helps her to relax, share how she is feeling and supports her mental wellbeing. **Keech are engaged with Sonia as much as me and I'm delighted that she is supported.** It takes the burden off me just a little because I know she has people she can talk to.

We're close. We talk about what's happening and how we are feeling and that has helped us so far. With Keech by our side we feel supported and as we plan for what might happen next, we know they will be there with us. Every person and their experience is different and that's why I feel the care



and support I get from Keech is personalised to me. **They treat me like me. I'm not just a patient.**

Keech is a place of joy, care and love. The team have so much to offer. Death is the very final part. Keech is helping me live well for as long as I have left.



Scan the QR code to read David's full story.



Our Children's
community
service cared for
381
children with
2,659
visits.

We cared for **69**
children in our
in-patient unit for
a total of
330
nights.

Our play service
team held
722
activity sessions for
152
children.

“

Robin and I have immersed ourselves in Keech. The care, the advice and support we get when we need it is so important to both of us. **We have access to doctors and nurses who really understand us, who know Robin and are ready to answer our questions or concerns.** That's so valuable. We join the weekly play sessions where Robin is often front and centre with his friends. We've enjoyed the safety (and warmth) of the hydrotherapy pool too.

”

- Emma, mum to Robin

“

For us, Keech acts like an anchor. We feel stable knowing we have the vital support for our son. As well as nurse and hospice visits for Yousuf, we have support for our eldest daughter, who attends Sparklers, the bereavement group for siblings. Being able to take part in activities with other children takes the pressure off having a sibling with a life-limiting illness. **Keech is for all of us - not only Yousuf.** Mentally, we feel so much better when we visit, even by talking to someone over the phone. They always listen very carefully, offer good advice and cater to Yousuf's needs. **As his family, we need that advice and they're always there to support us. It doesn't matter whether it's midnight, weekdays or the weekend.** The nurses, doctors and play team come into our home to help us make memories that we wouldn't be able to do. For us, Keech is like a family - a family who is there for you when you need them during hard times. Keech is Yousuf's first family.

”

- Tahir, dad to Yousuf



“

We attend Keech once a week - Hamza absolutely loves it there. He wakes up and asks me if it's a Keech day. While we are there, the team care for Hamza and I can sit down and relax for a short while. **I can enjoy a cup of tea and talk to other parents.** He takes part in fun activities, it's a good day for Hamza when we are at Keech. Because of his weak immune system, Hamza only travels between home and Keech, and nowhere else. **Keech has been supporting us since Hamza was very, very young.**

”

- Ginger, mum to Hamza



Scan to
donate
here



A donation of **£11** could help a family meet and talk with other families who also have a relative with a life-limiting condition.

THANK YOU FOR MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

Did you know we rely on our local community for 60% of our funding? Thanks to the dedication and commitment of people like you, we're able to continue making the difference when it matters the most for our patients and their loved ones.



Avid runner (and Lecturer Practitioner at Keech Hospice Care.) Mark, took on the epic challenge of running three marathons in three months – including the renowned London Marathon – in aid of Keech

and in memory of a dear friend whom Keech supported. Mark travelled

across the UK to complete his challenge and raised an amazing **£3,500**.

Here's what Mark had to say. "Keech Hospice Care has always been a very special place for me due to my roles as a lecturer and working as a nurse over many years. During this time, all the patients and relatives have meant so much to me and it's been a privilege to offer support at times of need. Being able to raise vital funds for Keech Hospice Care means we can continue to provide care and support to patients and families – that's priceless."

If you're feeling inspired to take on a challenge in aid of Keech Hospice Care, take a look at our activities and events to get involved. Whatever you decide to do or give, will make a huge difference and we're extremely grateful.

UPCOMING EVENTS

CHRISTMAS MARKET

25 - 26 November 2023

keech.org.uk/christmasmarket

★ Light up a life

Sunday 3 December 2023

keech.org.uk/lual



We're fortunate to have the support of businesses too, both local and national.

One company that's supported us recently is The Perfume Shop. As part of their 30th birthday celebrations, the shop created a 'Scentsory' garden at the hospice for patients, families and staff to enjoy.

Hundreds of staff from The Perfume Shop have been involved in creating this special outdoor space. In July, we were pleased to welcome their senior management team, who donned their gardening gloves, picked up their secateurs and gave this much-loved part of the garden a tidy up.

Speaking about the garden, Liz Searle, CEO said, "The beautiful 'Scentsory' garden has been greatly received. It's a perfect place to relax and reflect. We're proud to offer our garden to our patients as a safe space for them to take time - whether that's coming to terms with a diagnosis or making memories with their loved ones.

If you're part of a business that would like to support Keech, we have lots of ways you can get involved and help make the difference when it matters the most. From joining our Business Club, selecting us as your Charity of Choice and everything in between, call Kate, our Corporate Fundraiser on **01582 707940** or email kate.gooden@keech.org.uk to find out more.

“

FOR THE FIRST TIME I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE THE ODD ONE OUT

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My daughter Amelia was diagnosed with a rare genetic muscular disorder called Nemaline Myopathy Type 2 when she was just two weeks old. My husband Paul and I have a particular recessive gene and when both parents have that gene it causes Nemaline Myopathy. It is so rare, **it only affects around 1 in 50,000 people.**

When I was pregnant, we had no idea Amelia had this disorder. At the 20 weeks scan we were told she had clubfoot, where the feet grow inwards, but all other scans and tests showed that everything else was normal.

When Amelia was born, we discovered she also had a cleft palate which hadn't been detected during the pregnancy and she needed to be on oxygen as she was struggling to breathe on her own. It's so hard to watch your baby go through all of this. Nothing can prepare you for it. I remember when Amelia had an MRI when she was just a week old and was put in this giant incubator. **She looked so small and innocent, I just wanted to rescue her, but I couldn't.**

Amelia had to stay in hospital for seven weeks after she was born while they carried out tests and because she was struggling to keep her feeds down and kept vomiting.

Before she was born, we thought Christmas would be fine, we'd get her feet sorted and be home for her first Christmas. In reality it was nothing like that. It was hard because Amelia couldn't even come home. She spent her first Christmas in hospital.

When we were first referred to Keech, we didn't know what it was, so we thought it meant they were telling us our baby girl was about to die. It wasn't until one of the nurses at Lister Hospital explained it better that we understood. One of Keech's amazing nurses came round and we just talked about everything. It was scary at first because when you think of a hospice you do think end of life but that's completely wrong. They're there to give us help because we need it.

We first visited the hospice when Amelia was around two months old, and our eyes were opened. We spent a wonderful day meeting other families like ours with children who also had feeding tubes, were in wheelchairs or on oxygen, children who couldn't sit up but were still playing. **For the first time I didn't feel like the odd one out.** It is the one place we can go where we aren't watched, and I don't have people thinking 'oh that poor woman'. At Keech, there are people who understand where I am coming from and who aren't fazed by the meds or the beeping machines. It's all normal.



When we come to Keech, Amelia knows exactly where she is. She gets looked after and Penelope, Amelia's sister, gets lots of attention too. Keech is great with supporting siblings as well.

Keech isn't just a place for us to go. The people there are our friends, a part of our family.

Keech has organised everything for us and has helped us put together a care plan for when the time does come that Amelia is no longer with us. I don't know what we'd do without the team at Keech. Knowing you have that support and that everything is in place for whenever that day will be is so important. We know they will be there for Penelope too.

Emily, Amelia's mum



To read Amelia's full story visit our website or scan the QR code.

The power to shape the future in your hands today

A survey* reported two-thirds of people were unaware they can leave a gift to charity in their Will.

It was a gift in a Will that provided some of the first funding to build Keech Hospice Care. 32 years on the power of a gift in Will continues to be felt today, with such gifts helping patients to feel safe and cared for, and loved ones reassured and supported. They truly are invaluable.

I've had the privilege of speaking to people who have chosen to support Keech with a gift in their Will. Whether it's in memory of a loved one or in appreciation of the care we've provided - it's their way to ensure a cause close to them will continue to provide much needed care after they've gone.

Of course, gifts in Wills are a personal matter. Any gift, a cash sum or a share of your estate (from 1 to 100% or anything in-between), WILL make a difference for the lives of our patients and their loved ones.

If you don't have a Will, or haven't reviewed it recently (and it's suggested you do every three years), we can help you write or update your Will for free, thanks to our partnership with Guardian Angel. Simply scan the QR code and then be guided through the process from the comfort of your home.

Making or updating your Will isn't difficult and I'm here to help.

If you have any queries, you can phone me on **01582 707940** or email **Stefanie.Cuff@keech.org.uk**



Scan the QR code
to find out more



*Remember A Charity, 2019; Smee & Ford, 2022