Our impact

The difference we made together in 2025

Candlelighters

Supporting the families of children with cancer

Welcome

to the Candlelighters 2025 Impact Report

2025 at a glance

We supported over **476** patients and over **949** family members

470 financial grants were given to families

We provided **536** wellbeing sessions of massage and reflexology

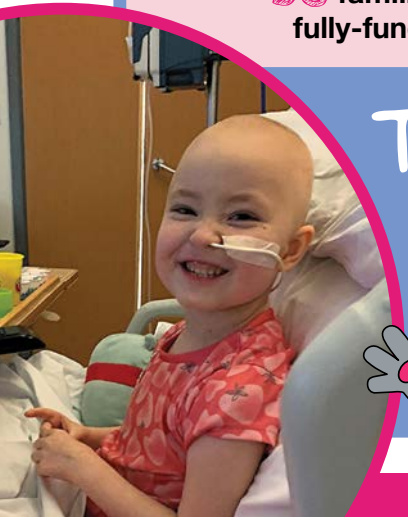
We delivered **438** talking therapy appointments

Our team hosted **70** events to bring fun to patients in hospital

22 family members attended events to help develop our childhood cancer research

We facilitated **41** memory-making activities for families

58 families went on a fully-funded holiday



Thank you!

When a child is diagnosed with cancer, life changes in an instant for the whole family. It's overwhelming, frightening, and uncertain. But because of you, families don't have to face it alone.

50 years ago now, a group of parents and medical staff at Seacroft Hospital in Leeds recognised the need for dedicated support for families facing childhood cancer, and Candlelighters was born. Thanks to the support of so many over the years, the services and support provided by Candlelighters have transformed childhood cancer care in Yorkshire.

Every person who has fundraised, donated, or volunteered from then until right now has helped to bring comfort in times of need and light in the darkest of times. This is your impact. I hope you are filled with immense pride as you read about the difference we made together in 2025. These are not just numbers on a page; they represent real lives, changed and improved thanks to the support you've given.

E. J. Wragg

Emily Wragg,
CEO

The Candlelighters Supportive Care Research Centre

The 2023 launch of the Candlelighters Supportive Care Research Centre (CSCRC) was a milestone in childhood cancer research – the first dedicated centre of its kind, looking at how to improve the brutal side effects young people face throughout treatment. Not only is the centre helping to improve quality of life for children around the world, it's helping to save lives lost due to complications from treatment.

As of 2025, the centre had produced original research, shaped international guidelines, funded new researchers and changed clinical practice.

How the centre is leading the way

Reducing suffering:

Chemotherapy can cause painful ulcers from the mouth to the bowel that leave children unable to eat, drink, or speak. Many families cite this as one of the hardest parts of treatment, with huge detriment to wellbeing and nutrition. The centre has been progressing a light therapy treatment called **photobiomodulation**, which can reduce the frequency and severity of these ulcers, and is looking at how this can be rolled out across the country.

Accessing treatment:

Around **70%** of children experience severe nausea and vomiting from chemotherapy, which can delay vital treatment. As most research focuses on adults, the centre analysed **19 trials** involving **3,523 children** to better understand how to manage sickness in young patients.

Fewer hospital stays:

Cancer treatment weakens the immune system, putting children at risk of serious infections. Children with a temperature were often kept in hospital on IV antibiotics, even without other signs of infection - disrupting families and contributing to antibiotic resistance. The centre has developed a model to **identify lower-risk patients** who can safely be treated differently and is exploring ways to further improve treatment and prevent infections through blood tests and varying antibiotic use.

Treatment at home:

While adults can increasingly receive chemotherapy at home, most children still spend much of their treatment in hospital. Centre funding has helped Dr Jess Morgan, CSCRC Deputy Director, secure an additional **£700,000** to develop a programme in Leeds using portable infusion pumps, allowing children to receive chemotherapy at home.

Family involvement:

From the start, we wanted families to shape our research. Our Patient and Parent group meets every three months to set priorities, guide studies, and make findings easy to understand. Their input ensures research funding is used well and has already helped to develop **two new funded projects** in Newcastle and Liverpool.

Support in hospital

For many families, lengthy hospital stays go hand in hand with their child's diagnosis. From the moment they receive that devastating news, they are thrust into a daunting and unfamiliar world. Many have not spent a significant amount of time in a hospital. But we have. From those very first days, we're there to help families navigate a new life no one is prepared to face.

People-centred support

Our team based in the hospital are a cornerstone of our support. Separated from the people they love at the most difficult of times, families can feel isolated. But our team is there to help. To provide a listening ear, a comforting presence, and practical assistance. We fund the roles of:

- **Family Support Workers:** Visiting families each day, entertaining children, comforting parents, and giving tailored practical support.
- **Dinner Supervisor:** Delivering meals and snacks to children, encouraging them to eat to support their wellbeing.
- **Youth Support Worker:** Providing activities and support specifically for teenagers.
- **Family Wellbeing Practitioner:** Delivering psychological support, individual counselling, support groups, and music therapy.

"Spending time in hospital is difficult for a lot of families. It's exhausting, repetitive and sometimes upsetting. Both parents and children lose their independence. Our job is to help with the practical side of living in hospital and give emotional support to stop things from becoming too much. We take the time to get to know patients and parents and how we can best support them, and through building these relationships, we can turn a scary environment into a fun and positive one."

Family Support Worker, Amy

- Last year, we delivered over **8,424 hours** of support in hospital.
- Over **735 family members** were supported, including parents, patients, and siblings.
- **750 play sessions** were delivered to children.
- **6,158 comforting conversations** were had.
- **1,782 refreshments** were given.
- Our team gave enhanced emotional support in **168** situations.
- **158 one-to-one** sessions and **28 group activities** were delivered to teenagers.

... and **countless smiles** were brought to families because you helped us to be there when they needed it.

Rohan's story
Told by mum, Penny

Our son, Rohan, was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in June 2023, aged 5 months.

He didn't have any symptoms other than these little lumps, like insect bites, that had appeared on his head. We struggled to get a GP appointment, so I took him to Pinderfields A&E where they did a blood test and sent us home to wait for the results. At around 2am, we got a call from a doctor to say we needed to get to Leeds General Infirmary right away. He couldn't give any more information over the phone, but they didn't want us to wait until the morning. My stomach fell through the ground. I had no idea what it might be, but I knew it couldn't be good.

That drive was the worst 35 minutes of my life, just in sheer panic. After about 20 minutes, they came in and sat us down and told us that he has leukaemia. It was like a bad dream. I've had family members that have had cancer, but they've all been older people. You never think it's going to be your child.

> "Candlelighters get it because they're on that ward every day."

I didn't leave hospital for the best part of 6 and a half months after that night. Everything changed straight away. I was on maternity leave from work, due to go back in a few months, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. I had my other son, Elliott, to think about too. Your mind is racing with a million questions about how you're going to make this work practically, all while thinking, 'Is my child going to die?'.

From not being poorly at all, Rohan got very ill, very quickly. They started his chemo four days after we first went in. Elliott went to live with my parents, and Rohan's dad, Warren, had to keep working to make sure that if and when we came back from this nightmare, we had a house and a life to come back to.

Having the Candlelighters staff on the ward was a huge help. My parents visited every day but sometimes they could be in the car park for two hours trying to get a space. The Candlelighters staff could step in and stay with Rohan to give me half an hour to wake up and have a slice of toast and a cup of tea. They helped to give me a moment to breathe when I needed it, and I really appreciated that. It's a funny thing because it sounds so small to watch someone's child for half an hour, but when you're living in hospital, it's huge.

As scary as it is to end up there, that ward is probably about as brilliant as it gets for hospital living, thanks to the support Candlelighters provides. Things like the pavilion and stocking the parents' kitchen help to make this bizarre, chaotic environment more comfortable. Some charities are removed from the people they support, but Candlelighters is right there with families. You can't know what that environment is like and what help is needed until you walk through those doors. Candlelighters get it because they're on that ward every day.

Financial support

The emotional impact of a childhood cancer diagnosis is not the only way families are affected. Caring for a poorly child brings a whole host of challenges, including a strain on finances. Our financial support helps to lift some of the weight from parents' shoulders, allowing them to focus on what really matters – their children.

The bigger picture

Across the UK, many families are already financially vulnerable due to the increased cost of living. The addition of a childhood cancer diagnosis brings unavoidable costs, often aggravated by a loss of income.

On average, families face an extra

£700 per month

in costs, while simultaneously losing over

£6,000 per year

in income.

Reference: Cancer Costs Report, Young Lives vs Cancer

Typical costs include:

Travel

Leeds Children's Hospital is the biggest specialist centre for children's cancer treatment in the North East of England, serving a huge catchment area. Families from across the region face unexpected travel costs, including fuel and parking.

Food

A complete change in routine and environment means families have reduced access to prepare meals, often relying on expensive convenience food. Treatment can change appetites for patients too, and doing whatever it takes to encourage them to eat takes priority.

Energy

Even back at home, families are not safe from increased expenses. Keeping patients warm is vital, as they may have lost weight and have weakened immune systems. The need to keep environments clean and infection-free also means that more energy is used for washing and cleaning.

Immediate intervention

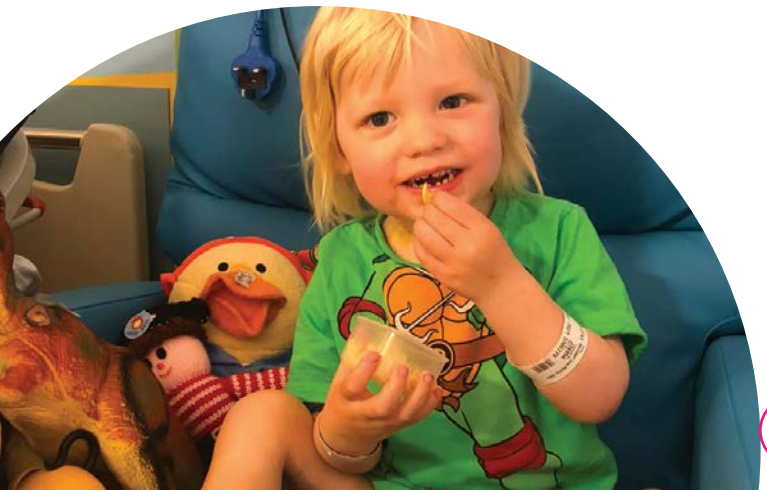
At diagnosis or relapse, Candlelighters provides families with a New Patient Grant, helping to offset initial costs and waiting times for government support.

In 2025, 142 New Patient Grants were given, totalling £83,400.

Bridging the gap

All families face unexpected costs at one time or another. We help to reduce financial hardship from unexpected, one-off costs, as a result of a childhood cancer diagnosis.

In 2025, £2,500 of Family Assistance Grants were given to families.



Funding fun

When finances are tight, spending on fun can be less of a priority. But through challenging times, moments of joy and positivity make the biggest difference to morale and wellbeing. Our holiday grants ensure families can enjoy their Candlelighters-funded holiday as much as possible, covering additional costs for activities, travel, or food. And our Christmas grants help to fund special gifts to make Christmas fun and exciting for patients and siblings.

In 2025, £8,550 of Holiday Grants and £22,900 of Christmas Grants were given to families.

Support through bereavement

For families that are very sadly bereaved, grants are given to help with things like funeral costs, giving them more options to honour and remember their child in a way that feels meaningful and personal.

In 2025, £4,200 of Compassionate Grants were given to families.

Champ's Pantry

Working so closely with children and families allows us to see the day-to-day challenges they face throughout their journey. One big challenge for parents is feeding themselves while staying in hospital with their child. While meals for patients are provided as standard by the NHS, meals for parents are not.

In 2024, we introduced Champ's Pantry, our meal service for parents in hospital. After a successful pilot, we made Champ's Pantry a permanent service, expanded the meals available, and switched from collection to delivery to reduce barriers to use. Each day, our team delivers healthy ready meals, dried goods, fresh fruit and snacks to parents, removing one practical challenge for them.

"It's hard for parents to live healthily in hospital, especially when you're focused on your child. It would be £4.95 a day for a microwave meal - nearly £35 per week, on one substandard meal. That's with no snacks, no breakfast, nothing else. When you break it down financially, it's brutal. You're hungry because your meal is three times smaller than it would have been at home, and it costs twice as much."

Parent

How Champ's Pantry helps

Costs – Convenience food, particularly from shops close to the hospital, is expensive and even small daily costs can add up to big sums during lengthy stays.

Accessibility – Delivering food directly to them means parents don't have to choose between eating and staying by their child's bedside.

Wellbeing – Through Champ's Pantry, we're able to provide healthy, nutritious food, rather than simply the closest food available to the hospital, supporting overall wellbeing.

From 9th September 2025 to 31st December 2025:

Champ's Pantry supported at least 105 family members and 638 meals were delivered

With kind thanks to The Albie Sugden Foundation for their funding.

"My son has so many needs, and I completely forget to make sure I am cared for and eating... Champ's Pantry means I don't have to worry about sourcing food, paying more, and going out of my way."

Parent

Noah's story
Told by mum, Amy

My name is Amy, my partner is James, and we have the most amazing little boy called Noah. Noah became ill in early December 2024. After scans and biopsies, he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma in January 2025.

Due to the positioning of Noah's tumour, he sadly lost his vision and has been registered as severely vision impaired. Noah was treated with a 6-month intensive treatment plan of chemotherapy, lumbar punctures, and scans. Noah spent 181 days in Leeds General Infirmary with just one home visit. Eventually, he rang the end of treatment bell on the 30th August 2025; he was clear of cancer but never cancer-free.

When we found out that our 3-year-old had cancer, our lives were turned completely upside down. Emotionally, we were devastated and overwhelmed, trying to process the diagnosis while staying strong for Noah. The evenings were spent crying and worrying about what the next day would bring - the unknown. Financially, it became incredibly difficult. We both had to stop working and spend long periods in hospital, which meant losing our main sources of income. Practically, we had to rethink everything: managing bills, everyday living expenses.

> **"Candlelighters gave us a reason to smile, even on the hardest days."**

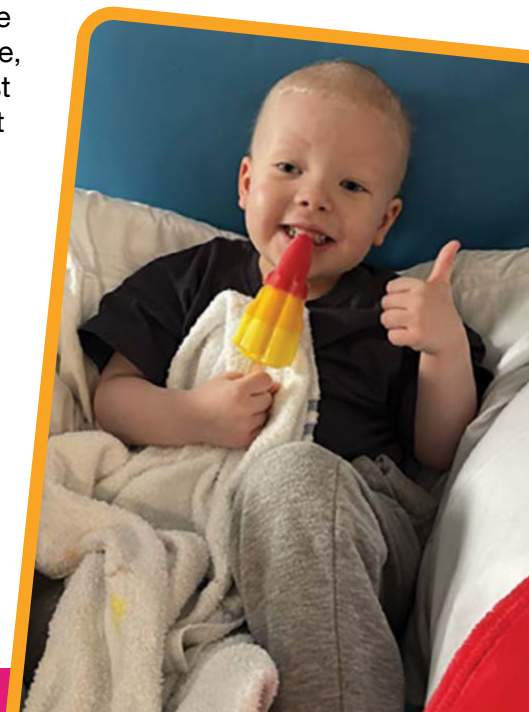
Our journey has been incredibly hard - harder than we could ever have imagined. Watching our child go through so much pain and uncertainty has been heartbreaking, and there are days when the emotional weight feels almost unbearable. Life as we knew it changed overnight; our routines, our priorities, and even our dreams for the future were suddenly different.

As soon as we walked onto Ward 31, Candlelighters became part of our journey. They ensured Noah was happy, learning about his likes and dislikes, but also realising that as parents we need time too, sometimes together, sometimes alone, or just having a normal adult conversation.

Their family support centre, The Square, is such a lovely place to go and take five minutes away from machines, doctors, and nurses. Noah loves visiting The Square when we come for his monthly check-ups to speak to his friends we met on the ward. They remind us that not all is bad, and we always laugh with everyone. They make us feel part of their family.

Candlelighters offer wellbeing services, like massages, as we slept on the camp beds at the hospital. James has gone to two Dads groups since Noah's treatment ended, and he has come away feeling great. We've attended family fun days with Candlelighters both from the hospital and from home, reminiscing with other families we now call friends from the ward, realising it wasn't all bad. Candlelighters also supported us financially by offering us a grant, which lifted a weight from our shoulders.

Candlelighters gave us a reason to smile, even on the hardest days. Their support lifted so much of the weight from our shoulders and reminded us that we weren't alone in this journey.



Accommodation

The distance between the hospital and home can pose another significant challenge for families. Hospital policy means only one parent can stay with their child overnight. Different families face different practicalities, like work and caring for other children, which can influence which parent will stay in hospital. Each scenario poses unique challenges.

It can mean hours of travel to and from Leeds – precious time which should be spent together, all at an increased financial cost. Our accommodation close to the hospital, the Candlelighters Cottage, is a lifeline to these families, lifting the weight of another practical challenge.

In 2025, we provided accommodation to 50 families for a total of 1,072 nights

How the Cottage helps

Stress

Frequent travel to and from hospital can be expensive, time-consuming, and exhausting – especially over long treatment periods. Being able to stay nearby reduces these burdens significantly.

Togetherness

Families can stay together, providing emotional stability, including for any siblings the child may have.

Disruption

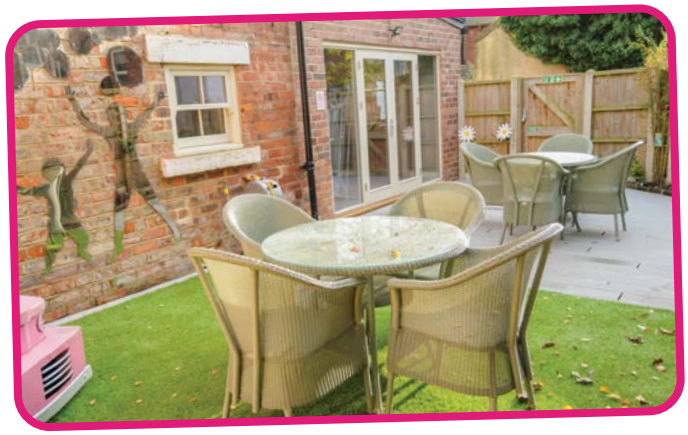
Being close to the hospital can help parents to balance work, childcare for siblings and hospital visits more effectively.

Rest and wellbeing

Hospital environments can be tiring and emotionally intense. The Cottage provides a more homely atmosphere suited for rest and recovery, better sleep, and improved wellbeing.

Reassurance

Parents can take comfort in being able to get to the hospital at a moment's notice, especially if a child's condition changes.



The Candlelighters Cottage can house up to four families at a time. To keep up with demand, we also coordinate and fund additional accommodation for families, to ensure they still have somewhere to stay if the Cottage is full.

Outreach support

The impact of living with a childhood cancer diagnosis extends far beyond hospital, and we believe support should too.

Outreach Play Specialists

Our Outreach Play Specialist role delivers play support to children and families in their homes. They help to reduce anxiety around visiting hospital and support the wellbeing of patients and siblings. Through therapeutic play, patients and siblings can make more sense of what's happening to them and their family in an age-appropriate way. The Outreach Play Specialists also help to support patients throughout a palliative diagnosis and provide support to siblings post-bereavement.

"I don't think he will ever want to go into hospital, but I am sure that he now remembers it as a positive experience and not as a traumatic one. Thanks to Rachel. She was an absolute hero, and we cannot thank her enough."

Parent

Since launching the service,
174 families
have benefited
– approximately
25% of new patients

1,210 home visits
were made

Outreach chemotherapy

While direct support helps families navigate the challenges of childhood cancer day by day, we also look for opportunities to create change on a wider scale.

In 2023, we funded a pioneering two-year outreach chemotherapy pilot programme, enabling children to receive treatment at home. Initially developed in response to the pandemic, the role could not be sustained beyond then with the existing resource within the NHS. Working in close partnership with the NHS, we funded the role of Chemotherapy Project Nurse Specialist, Neil, the first role of its kind in the UK.

"It makes the whole experience much better, reduces time feeling like a cancer patient and allows you to return to normal life quicker. It also reduces disruption and time spent away from siblings. It's honestly an incredible service."

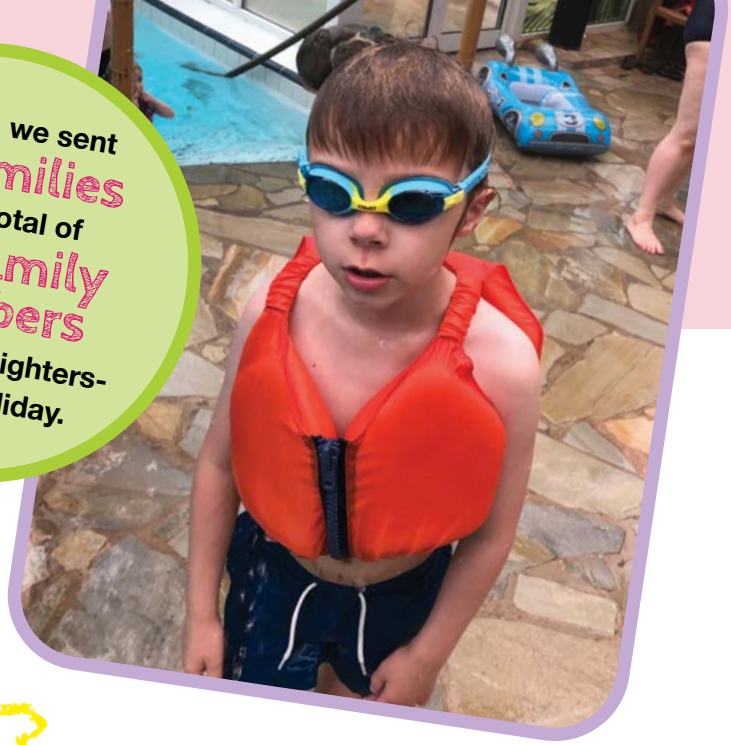
Parent

Around
23,200 miles
of travel were saved,
and around
708 hours
of travel time were saved

In 2025, the two-year outreach chemotherapy trial came to an end, having provided strong evidence of the huge benefits to families. Thanks to this evidence, the NHS has now assumed funding for this role, making it part of their standard provision in Leeds, and the North West Children's Cancer Clinical Network has begun its own pilot trial, highlighting the potential national reach of the service.

Holidays

In 2025, we sent **58 families** and a total of **249 family members** on a Candlelighters-funded holiday.



When living with the day-to-day reality of a childhood cancer diagnosis, a holiday is just one of the many things that can feel too far out of reach for families. But we know just how important it is to have some respite from that day-to-day and time together to have fun and make happy memories.

How holidays help

Making memories

Getting the opportunity to make positive memories, where treatment isn't the focus for a while.

Emotional wellbeing

Improving mood, reducing stress, and having something to look forward to on the other side of treatment.

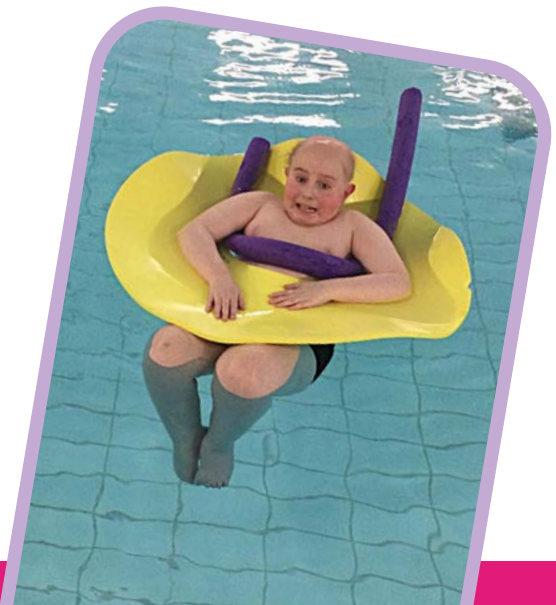
Time together

Spending quality time together after spending time apart through treatment.

Maintaining normality

Getting to do things they would have done before treatment, offering comfort when much of life has changed.

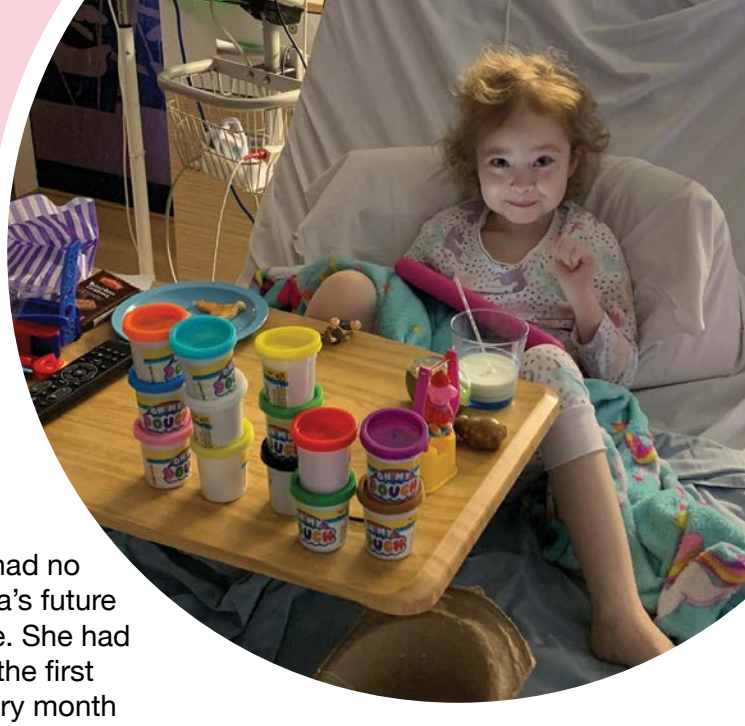
Holidays can also have a huge impact on families who are sadly bereaved. Time away from home can offer temporary relief from the intensity of grief, a break from reminders of loss, and space to support one another. In 2025, **6 families** attended a bereavement holiday.



Candlelighters offered us a holiday which we took after treatment when Caleb had built some strength back up. It was one of the best holidays I've had in my entire life. Given the year we'd just had, to have that time away to have fun really did bring some light back into our lives. Caleb learned to swim there, and to be able to see the joy on your child's face and make those happy memories after everything they've been through is so special."

Dale, mum to Caleb

Olivia's story
Told by mum, Amy



Our family is made up of me (Amy), Jordan (dad), Olivia, and twins Benjamin and Charlotte. Olivia was diagnosed with B-cell lymphoblastic leukaemia on 7th October 2021, aged 5.

It was a complete shock. Olivia had woken up with a nosebleed that lasted two hours. We were advised by her GP to go to A&E, by which point it had stopped. She had had daily fevers for three weeks and was lethargic, but her GP said there were no signs of any illness and to see how she went. The doctor at A&E arranged a blood test after hearing of her leg pains and fevers. Within four hours, she had been diagnosed.

I immediately had to go on long-term leave from work as she was admitted to hospital to begin treatment immediately. All the family had to help care for 1-year-old Benjamin and Charlotte, so Jordan could continue working to support the family. I spent days and weeks away from home with Olivia in hospital while she had treatment.

Her treatment lasted two and a half years, and she spent more time at hospital than at home. Everyone was so scared. We had no certainty about Olivia's future and just had to hope. She had to have steroids for the first five weeks, then every month as part of her treatment. They gave her so many mood swings, which impacted everyone. We had to navigate hospital trips, sometimes daily, for weeks and for hours at a time, sometimes turning into staying in for a few days. Finding childcare for my other children, it was such a juggle.

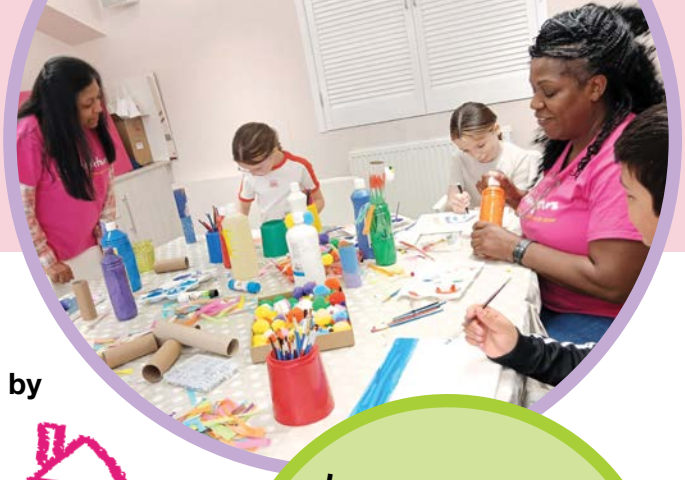
> "Candlelighters staff always remembered Olivia and what she liked."

After Olivia's diagnosis, we were admitted to the children's oncology ward L31, and the next morning, someone from Candlelighters came to introduce themselves to us. I was given an information pack and a bag with some essentials, and they offered for a Family Support Worker to come play with Olivia so I could leave the ward and contact family, which was so helpful.

Olivia was only five and I didn't want to leave her alone, so the offer of someone from Candlelighters to come stay with her and play with her to distract her was so useful. Not once did Olivia say she didn't want to go to hospital because she loved the staff and the entertainment they offered. She actually looked forward to her hospital stays because she said the staff treated her like a princess. Candlelighters staff always remembered Olivia and what she liked. They went out of their way to support her with anything they thought would work. Elaine (the Candlelighters Dinner Supervisor) always made Olivia her special-shaped toast, which encouraged her to eat when she really didn't want to.

They also sent us on a break to Center Parcs, which everyone really enjoyed and was such a nice break away for us all. The support of even just stocking the parents' kitchen so I didn't have to leave the ward to get hot drinks was a godsend. We've attended the Candlelighters Christmas party twice now and it's great, as well as going over to The Square to have a break after her appointments.

Ongoing support



We know that after treatment or a bereavement, the challenges faced by families may be different, but they do not go away. Families can continue to be supported by Candlelighters in a number of ways, reducing isolation and helping them to adjust to a "new normal".

The Square

The Square is our family support centre, solely dedicated to supporting families through childhood cancer. When families walk through the door, they can shed the mask they might use in the outside world and be with people who understand what they're going through or have been through.

Last year, there were **2,364 drop-in visits** to The Square made by **425 family members**

How families use The Square

Emotional support – **A place where families can find reassurance and understanding.**

Refreshments – **Giving a moment to pause and recharge, in a homely environment.**

Fun – **Packed with toys and activities, children can play and enjoy themselves.**

Information – **Accessing information about further support services from our team.**

Support groups

We run a variety of support groups throughout the year for families affected by childhood cancer, including Mums, Dads, Patients, Siblings, and Grandparents. These safe spaces provide emotional support, practical advice, and a vital sense of community that reduces isolation.

In 2025, we hosted 23 groups for 160 family members, including 38 new attendees.

Talking therapy

Talking therapy can be hugely beneficial for family members, giving time to process emotions like fear, anger, sadness, guilt, grief or anxiety in a confidential place. These sessions help to develop coping strategies during and after a difficult experience.

In 2025, we delivered 438 talking therapy sessions to family members.

Family events

Events are another way we bring families together, ranging from bell-ringing ceremonies and parties to trips out and memory-making activities. These events allow families to spend time together, recognising what they've been through, fostering a sense of community, and having fun.

In 2025, we held 52 family events, attended by 661 family members, including 251 new attendees.

How you made it happen

None of this incredible support would be possible without our amazing fundraisers and volunteers – people like you, who show up time and time again for families.

In 2025...

5,502 people fundraised for or donated to Candlelighters.

427 businesses fundraised for or donated to Candlelighters.

249 people took part in a challenge event.

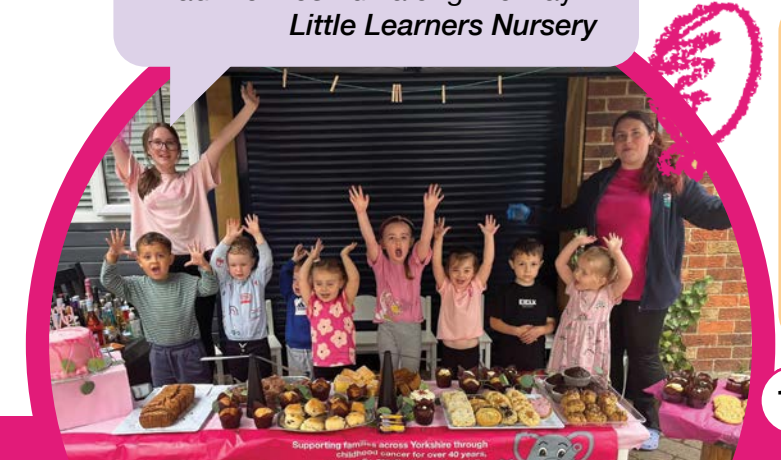
211 registered volunteers gave their time to Candlelighters, in addition to countless people in the wider community giving their time – totalling thousands of hours!

£841,664	Raised through events and challenges by people in the community
£564,552	Raised through partnerships with businesses
£454,594	Left in wills to Candlelighters
£268,189	Donated by Trusts and Foundations
£210,810	Given by philanthropists through high-value gifts
£94,176	Given in donations from individuals
£13,188	Saved in costs by donating items and services we need to operate
£9,199	Raised from sales of merchandise

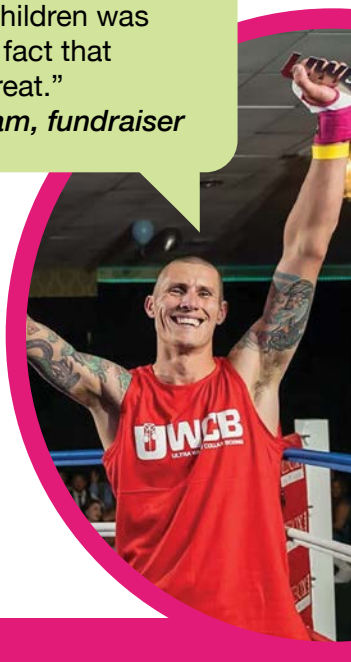
Thank you for everything you do. You are changing lives for the better.

Raising a total of £2.45m and helping to ensure support can continue

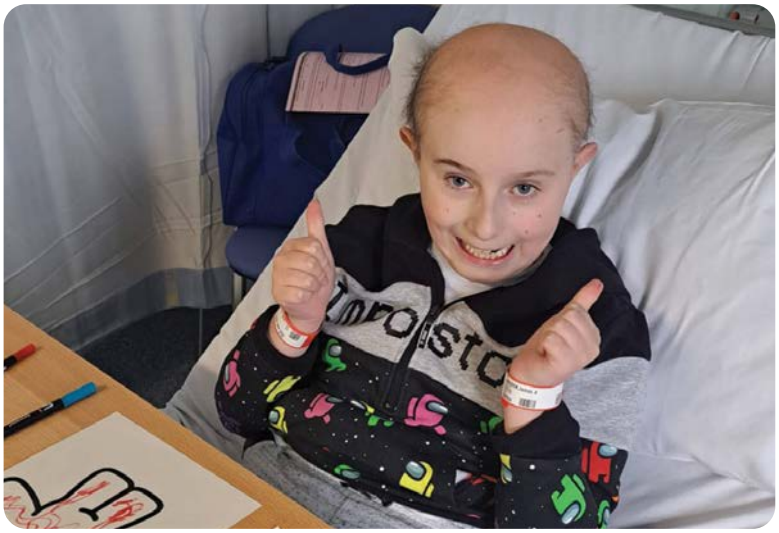
"It was a huge pleasure fundraising for Candlelighters after hearing about all the amazing support they had given a family who is part of our nursery – and we made sure we had the most fun along the way!"
Little Learners Nursery



"I don't like to see kids hurt, in pain, upset or poorly, so the fact that Candlelighters helps ill children was enough. Kids deserve to be kids, so the fact that Candlelighters provide that support is great."
Adam, fundraiser



"Raising so much money was just incredible - and the least I could do for such an amazing charity that helped my brother and our family in our darkest time."
Layla, fundraiser



"Without the help and support of Candlelighters, we wouldn't have been able to cope and manage as well as we did. It was the scariest, darkest time of our lives, and they gave us support when we needed it most. You can't think of anything worse than to be told your child has cancer. Knowing that Candlelighters were there whenever we needed was a real comfort."

Emma, mum to James

Every moment of support we provide is only possible because of people like you.

Together, we can bring more light, hope, and strength to children and families facing childhood cancer.

If you would like to donate, find out more about fundraising, or the support we can offer, please call **0113 887 8333** or visit our website **www.candlelighters.org.uk**

Or click here to donate – every penny makes a difference.

You can also change the future for children and young people with cancer by leaving a gift in your will.
Find out more here.

candlelighters.org.uk

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Candlelighters
Supporting the families of children with cancer

FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

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