

# WHY WE DO IT



Teenage Cancer Trust is the only UK charity providing specialised nursing care and support for young people with cancer. We're here for anyone diagnosed with cancer aged 13-24, and their loved ones too. We fund specialist nurses, expert youth support workers and dedicated hospital units within the NHS, ensuring young people have staff who understand their needs and environments appropriate for their age throughout treatment.

## Olly's Story and his Clinical Nurse Specialist Nikki

I met Nikki a couple of weeks after my diagnosis. She explained what she did and told me that she was linked with the Teenage and Young Adult cancer team at the main hospital in Southampton. There were so many people at the hospital that it was great to have Nikki as a set person who I could reach if I needed anything. She gave me her work mobile number and I was able to contact her with any concerns or problems. She also came to visit me at home to see how I was coping emotionally.



Olly

She introduced me to the IAM portal, which is an online tool where I could say how I was feeling about different situations and then they offer me the support accordingly. The standard of care was so high that I didn't need it much, but it's a great system for people who are nervous to speak out.

Part way through my treatment I needed to move from the Queen Alexandra Hospital to Southampton General Hospital. This is when having Nikki's support was really crucial as she helped co-ordinate all of my care. I'm a 15-minute walk from Queen Alexandra, while it can be a three hour round trip in the car to Southampton in traffic just for a blood test, so Nikki arranged for me to have all of my blood tests at Queen Alexandra. She would help me work out when I needed blood tests and then forward the results to Southampton ahead of my treatment. This saved me having to book everything myself, call Queen Alexandra for the results, then call Southampton. She was also available to do my blood tests at home if I couldn't make it to the hospital.

### Mental Health Support

As well as the physical side, Nikki looked after the emotional side and always asked me how I was getting on. I was stuck at home and spending a lot more time with my family as my mum retired when I was diagnosed, and my dad and sister worked from home while my immune system was low to avoid any illnesses at work. While I appreciated them, I had lost a lot of my independence. Because Nikki has worked with so many other young people who are in a similar situation, she knew what to say to me and understood how I was feeling.



## Young people's cancer stories

Every cancer experience is as unique as the person going through it. Reading young people's cancer stories can be inspiring, moving, and provide support for those facing diagnosis or treatment and spur on those fundraising to keep the support going. Here, young people who have been supported by Teenage Cancer Trust share their truths, in their own words.

### Cancer and Relationships

**Jordan**, who was diagnosed with thyroid cancer aged 21, says:

"It's hard at such a young age when you've just figured out your groups and friends, to then have that dramatically changed. When going through cancer, my outlook on life totally changed and I matured so much. This affected the relationships in my life – I found I could no longer relate to them and didn't feel like I fitted in to some of my friendships and relationships."

### Cancer and Body image

**Perri**, who was diagnosed with a type of cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma in her breast aged 21, says:

"Having a mastectomy at the age of 22 really made me feel self-conscious and isolated. I struggled for a long time with how I looked and how others perceived me. Body image is so important to me as a topic as it affects nearly every young person diagnosed with cancer. We shouldn't need to feel ashamed or worried about our bodies as they have been through so much."

### Cancer and Mental health

**Alex**, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma aged 23, says:

"My mental health was affected massively. Everything was building up and I was initially bottling it all up. I felt so thankful that [my Teenage Cancer Trust Nurse] Amanda took time out of her day to listen to me. She also put me in touch with a psychologist who I could talk to if I needed. It helped massively. I would definitely recommend that people find someone to speak to as bottling things up just makes it worse."

## How music helps young people get through cancer

At Teenage Cancer Trust, music means more than simply our fundraising gigs at the Royal Albert Hall. For young people on our units, it's everything from an easy way to socialise with others in the same situation to a vital tool to help them through their cancer journey.

### 'Music helped me push myself to start chemo'

#### **KELLY PLAYED GUITAR DURING HER HOSPITAL STAY**

Kelly Underwood was 24 when she was diagnosed with Hodgkins lymphoma. She went to the doctors six times before she was diagnosed and says she "wasn't listened to" when she first sought help. She was treated on the Teenage Cancer Trust unit at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham.

She said: "I used to play the guitar and write songs and there's a guitar in the kitchen at the unit I was on, so I'd sit in the kitchen window seat and play the guitar in the hospital.

"It also helped having that space when people came to visit me as it was more cheerful. The unit is exactly what a young person needs."

When asked why music was important to her during her treatment, Kelly said: "At first it's like I forgot who I was and what music I liked, I couldn't bring myself to listen to anything. Then I discovered a jukebox in the teenagers' kitchen in hospital and found myself listening to things that felt powerful. It helped me push myself to start my chemo listening to powerful music. It was a constant reminder that I could do this."

"Music helped me most on chemo days where I needed a little boost, and when I was alone walking and thinking about my situation. It gave me confidence!"

Since finishing her treatment, Kelly has been writing and releasing her own music.

She said: "I didn't write songs during treatment, but I did find song lyrics really helped me. Some songs made me feel understood even though they were not written about cancer.

### 'Music brought back the real me'

# childline

ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME



## NEGLECT: STEVE'S STORY

Steve's home became unsafe when his mum started dealing drugs and disappearing for days at a time.

### "ALWAYS LOCKED IN OUR BEDROOM"

"My home life got increasingly worse from the age of about 8 years old when mum's drug dealer partner moved in. Drugs took over family life. My brother and I were always locked in our bedroom as soon as we got home from school and then let out to go to school the next morning.

"Sometimes we didn't see mum for days at a time. We made our own breakfast and were given takeaway for dinner all the time, also in our bedrooms. I could hear the drug dealing going on.

"There was a constant stream of people dealing drugs at all hours in the flat and some of them were pretty scary, so mum and her boyfriend just wanted us out of the way. The flat was regularly raided by police, sometimes in the middle of the night. They would bang down the door, yelling and ordering us around. That was really rough.

"Money wasn't a problem: I had new clothes, plenty of toys, computers, but no mum in my life. She only thought about drugs and her boyfriend was very controlling. I didn't really have any parenting.

I think everyone, knew about my family's drug problem and no-one talked about it.

"Once a teacher dropped me home and mum told me not to let anyone come round, or my brother and I would be taken away into care. That was my greatest fear because it seemed really unknown and I didn't know what it really meant.

"I learnt to keep agencies out: they weren't to be trusted. I made sure I went to school and covered up any problems. I tried to be good at school as much as I could. I think everyone, knew about my family's drug problem and no-one talked about it.

"I think it was obvious to teachers that we didn't have the right clothes sometimes, had a lot of cash for children of our age and that no-one was looking out for us. I felt out of place at school.

"My brother and I did our own thing, sometimes staying out really late, whenever we wanted to. I would fall asleep at school sometimes after staying up late. Looking back it was really unsafe - anything could have happened to us.

Sometimes I would find her passed out. When I couldn't wake her up, I thought she was dead and it was really scary. I ran away once. I just didn't know what to do.

"Things reached a real crisis point when I was about 11 years old. Mum was sent to prison and when she came out a couple of years later, I went back to live with her again.

"Things were okay with mum for about six months then it got much worse because mum would smoke heroin in front of me. After doing it in front of me a couple of times, it was like she thought it was OK and normal. That felt really horrible.

"Sometimes I would find her passed out. When I couldn't wake her up, I thought she was dead and it was really scary. I ran away once. I just didn't know what to do.

"By this age, I had started to think what was happening at home really wasn't right and that other children didn't live like this. Luckily for me, I had other family to rely on and I went to live for good with my aunty. She made me healthy meals, made sure I washed and went to bed on time.

"I really liked it there and felt really cared for. Looking back, I think if the school or social services had recognised the situation and our family had got help earlier maybe it might have been better for me.

"I came to the NSPCC (which Childline is part of) when I was 13 years old. I joined a group for children of parents with substance abuse problems and it really changed my life. Most importantly, I met other young people who had been through similar experiences and I wasn't alone.

"It helped me make the most of my life and I stayed at school and did well. As I got older I helped many of the younger children in the group who had similar problems."

Childline is a free, private, and confidential service available 24/7 for anyone under 19 in the UK. It allows young people to talk about anything, whether it's a big problem like abuse or mental health concerns, or smaller issues such as school stress or friendship troubles. The service is run by trained counsellors who listen without judgment and provide guidance, support, and practical advice.

The funds that Heavy Metal Truants raise means that children needing support can rely on ChildLine to be there for them when they have no one else to turn to.

## ENSURING NO CHILD IS LEFT BEHIND

Helping children when they need it most, in times of crisis, and in the world's toughest places, we stand side by side with children.

Entering 2026, around the world, children continue to face extraordinary and growing challenges. **More than 200 million children will need humanitarian assistance across 133 countries and territories this year alone.**

Today, **more than 520 million children are living in conflict. A further 251 million are out of school, and 4.9 million children under five die each year from preventable causes.** Humanitarian need is rising.

Behind these numbers are children in places like Afghanistan, Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine whose lives are being shaped by conflict, hunger, displacement and climate shocks every day, and often all at once.

Behind these numbers are the stories of individual children. A little girl in Somalia crying from hunger pains in the night. A toddler in Afghanistan too weak to stand. A mother in Sudan cradling her newborn baby, desperate to breastfeed but unable to find the support she needs.

**For £50, you could supply a hungry child with a 6-week course of lifesaving peanut paste treatment.**

Six weeks of treatment brings a child back from critical danger, giving them the strength to take in diverse, nutritious, locally available foods. It gives a child the chance to regain their health and restart their childhood.

**For £230, provides a child with 6 weeks of nutrition supplies and the services to support that child to fully recover – including immunisations, water and hygiene, and support to their parent or carer.**



*Samah, 14, in her classroom. Samah from Taiz, Yemen, has grown up amid years of conflict that disrupted her education and endangered her safety. Her school was repeatedly damaged by shelling, forcing classes to move to temporary buildings. Despite these challenges, she remains determined to continue her studies and advocates for safe schools and children's right to education. AHMED ALBASHA/ Save the Children*

**“I want to defend [Children’s] rights and demand their right to a dignified life, full of learning and joy, far from sadness, death, and destruction.” Samah, 14, from Taiz, Yemen.**

## **WAR IN UKRAINE**

- Four years since the full-scale war began, children in Ukraine are facing a deepening humanitarian crisis following years of conflict and disruption.
- Their childhoods have been ripped away as they’ve been forced from their homes and schools, lost loved ones and friends and lived in fear as air raid alerts, drones and explosions consume the world around them.

## **WAR IN GAZA AND ESCALATIONS IN THE WEST BANK**

- Children in Gaza have experienced unimaginable hardship over 2 years of relentless violence.
- In 2025, Save the Children provided lifesaving support to over 1.8 million people across Gaza, including over 950,000 children. This includes providing support to nearly 800,000 people, including over 380,000 children who have received a wide range of services.
- In 2026 we will continue to be there for children and their families across Gaza when they need us most. We will continue operating in Gaza to provide essential health and nutrition, child protection, education and water and hygiene services.
- **Save The Children** provide water trucking services across 91 sites and vital and lifesaving services at our Mother Baby Areas, Temporary Learning Spaces and Child Friendly Spaces, and extending those services to children and families as they move throughout Gaza.



Music therapy has helped Patsy, who is autistic, find new ways to communicate and express herself without words.

Patsy is seven years old and has an autism diagnosis, which affects her communication, social interaction and verbal development.



Due to her very complex needs, she is home schooled and is on a therapy programme. Her care is 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And music therapy has been integral to Patsy's development.

"Patsy didn't need words to have a voice."

Things most children take for granted have been inaccessible to Patsy. She can't join in games or play, which can make her world a very isolated place to be. But by working with one of our music therapists she has been able to find new ways to express herself.

"I felt silence in my house for five and a half years," says Kathy, Patsy's mum. "But through music, Patsy has been able to communicate. Through music therapy, her speech became clearer and she was showing that she wanted to interact."

To this point my little girl had been unable to speak – and here she was communicating through music. At Nordoff and Robbins, Patsy didn't need words to have a voice.

Kathy, Patsy's mum