

WINTER/SPRING 2019

Keech Matters

The magazine of Keech Hospice Care



A home from home at the hospice

Although seriously ill, Stacey wanted her dream wedding. Keech made her wish come true.

BAKE OFF'S NADIYA VISITS KEECH!

The inspirational TV chef cooks with the children at the hospice.



LET THE MUSIC PLAY

How our music therapist helped Zac, 6, deal with the 'chaos monster' in his life.



"We were at breaking point. Then Keech was there."

Skylar's mum and dad had to live with seeing their baby in pain until Keech Hospice Care stepped in.

Letter from Liz

Welcome to the Winter/Spring 2019 edition of *Keech Matters*.



At this point in the calendar, many of us are still wondering what the year ahead holds. At Keech Hospice Care, we're certainly looking forward to seeing more patients and making sure everyone who needs us knows how we can help them. Increasingly, this means providing support in the places our patients and families prefer - be that in people's own homes, in our communities or at the hospice.

In this edition of *Keech Matters*, our patients' stories show how our services are geared up to offer support where it's needed. On page 5, Stacey came in for a stay at our adult in-patient unit so we could give her the 24-hour support she needed. For baby Skylar (page 9), her family needed our support at home so our award-winning children's community team went out to them. Then, there's Zac (page 13), a young patient who visited the hospice for a few hours a week for music therapy to help him deal with what he calls the 'monster' in his life.

Of course, we can only continue with our vision of 'making the difference when it matters the most' because our community continues to give their time, donations and energy, and we're so grateful for all you do. To give you an insight into what being part of the Keech Hospice Care community is like - whether you work for us, volunteer with us or support us - we've spoken to a committed trainee in our adult in-patient unit (page 11), an extraordinary, award-winning fundraiser (page 8), and two dedicated volunteers (page 12). I know you'll find their stories inspiring!

Thank you again for supporting us.
Best wishes,

Liz Searle, CEO

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If you have any questions or would like to find out more about getting involved, email us at:
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What's been happening at Keech Hospice Care.

Bake Off winner visits us

When *Great British Bake Off* winner and TV personality **Nadiya Hussain** visited the children at the hospice, she stole their hearts and ours, too! She made Rocky Road cakes with them, put together bracelets and even managed to find time to look around the hospice. On social media later, Nadiya talked on film about why she loved Keech (her local hospice) and how she would like to visit us again. We'd love to see you, Nadiya!



Keech's high-tech heroes

Our child patients are in their element playing with some amazing state-of-the-art technology, including touchscreen computers, video-game consoles with adapted controllers and virtual reality technology (pictured left). Most exciting is Eyegaze, a piece of equipment which allows people with limited mobility to control a computer using just their eyes. This specialist equipment, which has been supplied by national technology charity Lifelites, is certainly going to help the children take control of a computer, increase their communication skills and - most importantly - have fun!



Best all round

Congratulations to our wonderful **children's community team** (pictured below), who won **Luton's Best Care in the Community Award 2018**. Keech super-supporter Louise also won Luton's Best Fundraiser - read her story on page 8.

In other 'Best' news, we're thrilled to discover we're on the prestigious *Sunday Times* list of Top 100 Not-For-Profit Organisations for a second time. We last took part in the Top 100 awards (which measure employee satisfaction) in 2017, when we were placed 71st.



Outlet shop opens

We've turned our warehouse shop in Luton into a smart Outlet, stocking furniture and home accessories as well as clothing and shoes, home-entertainment items, books and kitchenware. Since its launch, sales have shot up, with shoppers bagging some great buys! Find out more at www.keech.org.uk/our-shops.





Hamza's dream comes true

One of our young patients, Hamza, 12, had a dream: to have his robot drawings published. With help from some very special friends, including our Play Specialist Jennie, we were able to make it happen.

In October 2018, Hamza saw his sketches come to life at the printer's before moving on to a launch party at a local bookshop. There was even a celebrity appearance by a Very Important Robot - a Dalek from *Doctor Who*. "Hamza had a brilliant time seeing his drawings come to life," said Jennie, "and his family were very touched by all the surprises and gifts he received."

Farewell to a Friend

A founding member of Friends of Keech Bedford, David Whitehead, sadly died in September 2018. Over the years, David supported us at many Bedfordshire events and played a leading role in helping the Friends group raise over £56,000 for Keech Hospice Care. David and his wife Mary were also the driving force behind the Christmas Sleigh, organising volunteers, Santas and drivers as it completed its traditional Christmas rounds.



Smiley's right on track

It isn't Christmas until Santa has done his rounds with Keech's little train engine, Smiley Sam, and the Bedford Sleigh. This year, we added an online tracker to Smiley, which was an immediate hit - supporters loved being able to watch Santa getting closer to their chimney and, as always, donated generously, raising an incredible £45,000.



Herts supports Keech!

So many Hertfordshire community faith groups, local businesses, schools and individuals raised funds for Keech Hospice Care and got involved last Christmas. Below, you'll find just a handful of festive events from our amazing supporters.



New supporter, Wish Upon A Star Entertainment, Stevenage, hosted a Christmas Prince and Princess Ball at Timebridge Community Centre. We were given 30 complimentary tickets so Keech child patients and their families enjoyed some royal fun. The evening also raised £150 for our charity.



The Phoenix Concert Band, Radlett, held their annual Christmas Concert at Christ Church and raised £604. Their ongoing support for us since 2014 has seen them raise an inspiring £4,188.

Also new to Keech, Lucina Troy and the Voices Choir, Harpenden, sung their hearts out at St Pancras International Station and raised over £187 in just two hours.

To everyone who supported us in 2018 across Herts, Beds and Milton Keynes - and continues to support us every year - we cannot thank you enough for your time and effort.

KEECH TREKS TRANSYLVANIA

In October 2018, an intrepid group of amazing supporters and staff trekked the rugged mountains of Romania to raise money for Keech Hospice Care. Lynn, one of the trek team, describes what was a life-changing week for everyone involved.



We'd been told our first day trekking would break us in gently but it wasn't long before we were heading up the steepest of hills. This set the pattern for all our trek days, with our longest walk - 10 hours! - on the second day.

Ants in a giant's world

The scenery was breath-taking: rolling meadows, quiet woods, Christmassy pine forests, rugged mountains, cold streams, steep rocky pathways with long drops, and a gorge that made us feel like ants in a giant's world.

The walks were exhilarating but there was so much more. Eating lunch at 2,200 metres above sea level, surrounded by mountains. Dracula's imposing and romantic castle. The lovely, welcoming guesthouse with its homecooked food. The dogs who walked with us and helped guide us on our first and last days.

Swept off our feet

The final trekking day was the hardest: a four-hour uphill climb. The weather was cooler and in places the wind almost swept us off our feet, taking our breath away. But, when we finally reached the summit, I honestly don't

think I've ever seen or experienced such raw, immediate emotions - a mixture of achievement, pride and reflection that we all shared.

End of the trek

When the time came to leave Romania, there were tears, cheers, hugs and laughter about the week, the new friendships we'd made and what we'd achieved together. The trek was a life-changing experience. Our group were from different walks of life, with different abilities and strengths, but all of us had Keech in our hearts.

The Trek raised an incredible £52,000, funding that will help our charity continue supporting patients with a life-limiting or terminal illness, and their families.

Thank you so much to the Trek Transylvania team - and thank you, too, to everyone who supported them. We couldn't have done it without you!

To find out how you, or someone you know, can take part in our next amazing trekking challenge - Trek China 2020 - turn to page 7.

"We were from different walks of life, with different abilities and strengths, but all of us had Keech in our hearts."



A home from home at the hospice

Five years ago, Stacey, now 27, was told she had an incurable illness that would gradually and devastatingly affect all her organs and muscles. Keech Hospice Care has made her feel like a normal 20-something, even organising her wedding day.



“I was 17 when we first noticed something was wrong, but the terrifying moment that changed everything came when I was 19 – overnight, I lost the full use of my legs. You can’t imagine it: all in a heartbeat, not being able to walk normally anymore.

Five years ago, when I was told the diagnosis was mitochondrial disease and what it would mean, I couldn’t take it all in. I just wanted to know when I would get better. But the doctor said, “I’m sorry but you’re not going to get better from this.”

Anger, sadness and fear

On the journey home, I was just shouting in the car while my mum and dad were crying because they realised before me what would happen. It was only later that night that it sunk in and I cried, letting the anger, sadness and fear wash over me.

Now I’m trying to live the normal life of a 27-year-old as much as I can, but it’s hard. I had to give up my job as a hairdresser. I also used to be a dancer - I did shows and competitions, took exams and even taught a dancing class. But now I’ve lost the ability to bend my legs and I’m bent over when I walk. I use a wheelchair most of the time as I get tired and breathless easily.

I first went to **Keech Hospice Care** as an out-patient in summer 2017, mainly for help in controlling the pain. Since then, I’ve stayed at the adult unit for around two or three months while they brought my symptoms under control. They were able to fit a tube into my stomach so I could eat as well as get rid of a lot of my pain and stop me from constantly being sick. The changes to my medication made a big difference.

Before I arrived, I remember thinking the hospice would be a morbid place, but my opinion changed the moment I got through the doors. It was nothing like being in hospital. My room at the hospice was just like being at home with a recliner chair I could sit in rather than always being in my wheelchair or bed.

Nothing is ever too much

The staff made me feel relaxed and I knew what they were doing was best for me to make me more comfortable. Nothing is ever too much for them. I had a bath every day, which wasn’t easy because it took three of the team to move me into it. I was also able to continue the complementary

“Keech showed me I can have a good quality of life, experiencing so much.”

therapies I’d been having as an out-patient. But on days when I didn’t feel like going to the therapy rooms, the therapist would come to my room instead to give me reiki or massage.

It was great that my family and friends could stay with me at the in-patient unit and I was also able to have my dog, Ella, visit, which meant everything to me. I missed her so much while I was in hospital. At Keech, she could stay on the bed with me. I don’t think I ever looked so well as I did on the days Ella came to visit.

A very special day

In March 2018, Keech made the most brilliant day possible: my partner Mumin and I got married at the hospice. The nurses helped us prepare everything including a pizza hen party! They organised for a bridal shop to bring wedding dresses to the hospice so I could try them on in my room, then helped with arrangements for the dress fittings. On the day, they helped me get ready and made



Stacey with Ella

“Keech made the most brilliant day possible: I got married at the hospice.”

sure that any medical equipment on me was placed so you couldn’t see it in the photos. On that one day, I felt so well, and it wouldn’t have been possible without Keech Hospice Care.

I think before I went to the hospice, I was ready to give up. But after staying there, I began to see things in a completely different light. I was so much more positive about my illness. I know I will never get better, that there isn’t a cure, but Keech showed me I can have a good quality of life, experiencing so much, like family birthdays and other occasions.

One of the best things the hospice gives me, though, is the chance to talk to someone about the future. With my family, when I talk about what is going to happen to me, that I am going to die, I know I’m upsetting them. But I need to talk about it - I want someone to know what I want when the time comes. The staff at Keech are caring and compassionate but not in any way patronising, and it’s so good to speak to people who really understand. **Keech is pretty amazing like that.**”

Caring when it matters the most

As Stacey found, a stay at the adult in-patient unit can make a huge difference to how a patient feels, physically and emotionally, helping to control their symptoms and pain.

The adult in-patient unit also provides care at the end of life for those patients who wish to be supported at the hospice.

We are proud to have been awarded ‘Outstanding’ for ‘Caring’ by the Care Quality Commission.

The majority of the funding for our services is provided through generous donations from our community and supporters. Providing specialist support in a private room, for a patient and their family, costs around **£5,000** a week.

To make sure we can continue to offer our patients and their families this outstanding level of care and support, we have launched the **Caring Appeal**, which focuses on raising funds to provide excellent specialist care for those patients staying at our adult in-patient unit and support for their families.

If you would like to fundraise for the **Caring Appeal**, or make a donation to the Appeal, please contact letmehelp@keech.org.uk, call **01582 707940** (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm) or visit our website at www.keech.org.uk to make a donation today.



HAVE FUN, BE INSPIRED!

We've got exciting events for you to get involved in.

TREK CHINA 2020

4-10 October 2020

Keech Hospice Care's bespoke treks create memories to last a lifetime, raising thousands of pounds for the hospice. We're really excited about Trek China 2020, when you'll walk along parts of the Great Wall which are off the tourist trail, climb 'Heaven's Ladder', and have the chance to visit Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. To read a full itinerary and find out more, go to www.keech.org.uk/trekchina.

To find out what it's like to go on one of our life-changing treks, read *Keech Treks Transylvania* on page 4.



Sunday 16 June
at Cranfield University,
near Bedford and Milton Keynes

Bubble Rush returns for a second year - so more bubbly fun on the run. Last year, around **1,500** supporters took part - just read some of the glowing reviews below. To find out more, go to www.keech.org.uk/bubblerrush.

"What a fantastic day - so much fun. The weather was beautiful and everyone was happy and friendly."

"It was our first time taking part in an event as a family and we loved it! Great atmosphere, great people, great weather, lots of fun and, more importantly, it was for charity."

"It was fun for everyone involved, from my eight-year-old son to my 78-year-old Nan! We all had a blast!"



Do your own thing!

Remember you can always organise your own fundraising event!

New for 2019, we're asking supporters to **Have a Cuppa for Keech** by organising an afternoon tea party in aid of Keech Hospice Care. We'll be launching this fundraiser at **Bedfordshire's Biggest Afternoon Tea** (see right). Why not come along, have fun and find out how you can organise your own elegant afternoon?

Whatever event or activity you decide to organise, we have a team of fundraising experts to support you. Call them on **01582 707940** (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm) or email letmehelp@keech.org.uk.



For a full 2019 calendar of our fundraising events, as well as detailed information on each event, visit www.keech.org.uk/whats-on.

Simply *the* BEST

Louise has been raising money for Keech Hospice Care for around 20 years. Last year, her amazing achievements were publicly recognised when she won Luton's Best Fundraiser award. We found out what Louise loves about fundraising for us.

What made you start fundraising for Keech Hospice Care?

As a family, we were involved with Keech's children's unit right from the start, when adding a children's service to the hospice was in the planning stage. Our eldest son, Samuel, suffered from Duchenne muscular dystrophy and we were asked for our input and advice on what would be needed. Once the unit opened, and we saw the amazing work being done for seriously ill children and their families, we decided we would dedicate our fundraising activity to such a wonderful cause.

What events have you organised for Keech?

Over the years, my husband and I have organised charity events ranging from quiz nights and

Christmas discos to major black-tie balls. I work in a school and have even encouraged the students to get involved - this year they raised almost £5,000 from a sponsored cross-country event.

Do you get involved in other ways?

I've helped at various Keech-organised events and now volunteer as a speaker at local community organisations and groups, raising awareness of the wonderful work Keech does at the hospice and in the community.

What has been your most memorable fundraiser?

That has to be the May Ball we organised, raising nearly £9,000 from one fabulous evening and giving us the chance to thank all the family and friends who have helped us over the years. It was so successful, we went on to do it again 18 months later, at Christmas - we just love it!



Do you have any fundraising events planned for 2019?

In honour and remembrance of what would have been Sam's 30th birthday, we plan to organise a one-day music festival in aid of Keech Hospice Care, which we've named 'Samfest'. We're supported by Tip Top Venues and the event is due to take place on Sunday 26 May near Milton Keynes. We're expecting nearly 300 people to attend what should be a great day showcasing local musicians while raising more much-needed funds for Keech.

Time flies at Bedfordshire events!

There's lots to watch out for this year - here's some highlights.

There's tea time...

Keech Hospice Care is hosting **Bedfordshire's Biggest Afternoon Tea** on **Sunday 24 March** from 2pm in a garden marquee at The Cross Keys in Pulloxhill (MK45 5HB). Enjoy an elegant, traditional afternoon tea with a glass of prosecco to start. Live music from Gary Wood and his jazz band, and singer May Blossom. Buy your tickets (**£25 per person**) at www.keech.org.uk/afternoontea or call **01582 707940** (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm).



....and tee time!

Watch out for charity golf days and other events organised by local golf clubs themselves. We're lucky enough to have **Chalgrave, Stockwood Park, Tilsforth and South Beds** clubs supporting Keech Hospice Care this year.

We're also holding our first-ever corporate **golf and footgolf (golf with a football!) event** on Wednesday **27 March** at Stockwood Park Golf Centre in Luton. So if you're looking for a fun and competitive day out with work colleagues, why not put a team together? To find out more, call **01582 707940** or email letmehelp@keech.org.uk.

"We were at breaking point. Then Keech was there."

Sue, 39, and Duncan, 38, from Stevenage, felt overwhelmed when they were told six-week-old Skylar had a rare condition called dystonia. Keech Hospice Care has made the family feel safe and supported again.



"We were devastated," Duncan remembered, "and had the terrifying thought that she was going to die."

Heart-breaking news

Skylar was diagnosed with dystonia, a rare condition causing uncontrolled muscle cramps and spasms as well as body twisting and tremors. Her sight has also deteriorated over time so she is now blind.

The diagnosis was heart-breaking for the family. "She had such a beaming smile but, since the seizures, Skylar hasn't smiled at all," said Duncan. "She's barely able to sleep. She has been fighting all her life - she can't switch off."

"Skylar was in so much distress, crying and screaming all the time," said mum Sue, "and we knew she was in pain. We kept asking what we could do but were told we'd have to wait to see. We were at breaking point. Then Keech was there."

Keech's community team calls

"We were introduced to **Keech Hospice Care** in April 2018," Sue continued. "Melissa and Faye from Keech's **community team** came out to see us at home. The idea of going to a hospice would have terrified us but they explained that Keech does so much more than care for people at the end of their lives."

"When they discovered that a warm bath is the only thing that relaxes Skylar, they thought the hydrotherapy pool at the hospice would be great for her. They also thought being around other parents in a similar situation would help us, too, and mentioned there is support at Keech for our other children, if they needed it. Within half an hour, we were totally at ease."

An amazing transformation

"A week later, we went to the hospice for the first time and were just blown away. The doctors and nurses were brilliant. Skylar had been in pain for months. Very quickly, the team changed her medication and, within a few hours, the transformation in Skylar was amazing."

"The medication changes also helped relax her hands. When we first came, she was gripping them so hard her little nails were digging into her palms."

"We were offered a stay at the children's unit so the team could manage Skylar's pain. We didn't feel we could leave our baby completely so we stayed in the family accommodation. We were so tired, it was fantastic - we had 100% trust in

"She had such a beaming smile but, since the seizures, Skylar hasn't smiled at all."



"Skylar's medication stopped working as well as it had been. One call to Keech and a community nurse came out."

those looking after Skylar while we could be close by."

"I feel safe going to Keech," Sue said. "Before, I was scared to go out on my own with Skylar in case something happened. Now, day trips with Keech get us out of the house, the hospice staff are there if Skylar is poorly and all the parents support each other. Just the fact you can call Keech day or night means so much."

One call to Keech

"A couple of weeks ago, Skylar's medication stopped working as well as it had been," Duncan added. "One call to Keech and a community nurse came out and tweaked the medication for her."

Sue and Duncan both recognise they don't know what the future holds but they are glad Keech Hospice Care will continue to be there for the family. "If we hadn't gone to Keech," Duncan finished, "Skylar would still be in pain now and that thought is unbearable."

Sue and Duncan told their story as part of our Christmas Appeal 2018, helping us to raise over £16,000.

You can help us help more families like Skylar's by donating today at www.keech.org.uk/donate or calling **01582 707940** (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm). Thank you!

Keech's award-winning children's community team

Sue, Duncan and Skylar are one of the Hertfordshire families our wonderful children's community team support at home.

The team looks after children with life-limiting conditions, and their families, across Herts, Beds and Milton Keynes, in their own homes or in hospital. They even go into schools to support our child patients, their friends and teachers.

The team:

- works to ease symptoms and pain
- provides practical advice and emotional support for the whole family
- liaises with other services involved in a child's care, taking the burden off parents and carers
- offers care and support at the end of life, if a family wishes for their child to die at home.

Last year, our children's community team supported **326** families though **1,681** visits and **1,134** phone calls.





A job like no other

On page 5, Stacey described being a patient at Keech Hospice Care's adult in-patient unit. But what's it like to care for someone at the unit?

Nursing student **Hollie**, 20, has been working in Keech's adult in-patient unit for four months as a health care assistant.

"I didn't know what to expect, having never worked at a hospice before," said Hollie. "I was nervous but it has been the best experience. I've learnt lots from the nurses, who are highly skilled and very

experienced at this kind of care, and I've met some amazing people."

As a leading hospice, Keech Hospice Care staff are highly trained in palliative care. Hollie benefitted from training in "medicine management, care reporting and infection control. I learnt new skills, too, like using 'syringe drivers', something I'd never heard of before working at the hospice."

When Hollie started her nursing training, she wanted to be a midwife. After working with the adult in-patient care team at Keech Hospice Care, she's changed her mind.

"I found working with patients at the end of life so rewarding," she said, "and spending time with families meant so much, I'd now like to specialise in palliative care."

Become a Keech volunteer

We couldn't continue making the difference to our patients without our volunteers! Here two remarkable supporters tell us why they enjoy it so much.



Angela worked with children for around 35 years before she retired. Volunteering in children's day support at Keech Hospice Care was 'the perfect fit'.



When Keech's fashion shop opened in Harpenden, Hertfordshire, nine years ago, Beverley joined as a retail volunteer. She's never stopped enjoying it!

An event to remember

1 in 7 of our patients are cared for thanks to thoughtful people who remember us in their Will. Last September, we held a special event to show supporters how these wonderful gifts help secure our future.



The event was hosted by **Adam Frost** (pictured right), the award-winning garden designer and BBC *Gardeners' World* presenter, who shared stories from his gardening career with us and fielded a 'gardening question time' with the audience.

He also talked about being motivated by his belief that creating a garden is a lasting gift, something beautiful that will live on after him. Adam's legacy to Keech Hospice Care is the Courtyard Garden he designed for us, which will be enjoyed by patients, families and staff for many years to come.

Will you remember us?

By leaving a gift in your Will to Keech Hospice Care, you will be ensuring we can continue to provide free specialist care and support to seriously ill adults and children, and their families, long into the future.

You don't have to be rich to leave a gift in your Will: a cash gift can be as small or as large as you like. You could also consider leaving a percentage share of your estate - just a 1% or 2% share can have a huge impact.

We are enormously grateful for whatever support you can give.

If you would like to attend a gifts in Wills event in the future or wish to know more about leaving a gift in your Will to Keech Hospice Care, please call us on **01582 707940** (9am-5pm, Mon-Fri) and ask to speak to the gifts in Wills team. You can also email letmehelp@keech.org.uk or go to www.keech.org.uk/wills.

"I've been a volunteer here for nearly four years, for two days a week, and I find it so rewarding," Angela said. "Over time you really see the difference the care makes to the children."

A personal experience prompted Angela to volunteer. "My husband was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when he was 35 and he died when he was 57. Seeing how good care helped him drove me to try and make a difference myself."

Since joining Keech, Angela has taken part in events and helped at the Tots 'n' Toys group. "When *Bake Off* winner Nadiya visited the hospice last year, I was lucky enough to talk to her about what we do. It was a special moment.

"I've also made new friends through the hospice, both staff and other volunteers. It's nice because I now meet up with some of them outside of Keech.

"If you're thinking about volunteering at Keech, I would say come with an open mind. You might expect it to be sad, but it isn't - it's full of enjoyment and laughter."

"I'm in every Wednesday morning, for four hours," Beverley said. "It's a great opportunity to be involved with the tremendous work Keech does."

When Beverley started, she was completely new to retail. "But I needn't have worried - the customers are really nice, and staff and volunteers make a good team. I enjoy serving customers, helping with window displays, and the camaraderie of being with the same people every week."

Another benefit of volunteering at the shop are the wonderful buys Beverley finds on the rails. "The shop stocks really good-quality items. I'm usually dressed in Keech clothes and people often comment on how much they like my outfits.

"I get involved in Keech activities like the annual volunteers' thank you evening - four years ago, I got my five-year service certificate and badge! We've also got a team together for the quiz nights at the hospice.

"One of my best memories is when TRHs The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited the hospice in 2016 and I was lucky enough to shake hands with William as they were leaving!

"By volunteering for Keech and helping to bring in funds, I love the thought that I'm making a difference. It feels so worthwhile."

We rely on the support of our dedicated volunteers - and there are so many ways you can get involved. To find out more, go to www.keech.org.uk/volunteer, email volunteering@keech.org.uk or phone **01582 497829** (9am-5pm, Mon-Fri).

LET THE MUSIC PLAY

When he was three years old, Zac, now 6, had a tumour removed from his brain which left him with very limited vision. Keech Hospice Care's Music Therapist, Nathan, has helped him deal with what Zac called the 'monster' in his life.

Zac was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2013, when he was just a year old.

"The first time we noticed there was anything wrong with Zac was when my brother noticed his eye wobbled - just a small movement when he was looking at things," said dad Colin. "There were no other signs. But then you can never prepare yourself for a diagnosis that earth-shattering."

Gruelling chemotherapy

Because of where Zac's brain tumour was situated, surgery was dangerous so Zac began gruelling rounds of chemotherapy, which didn't work as, sadly, two years later, the tumour was back and much bigger this time. The family's only choice then was brain surgery and doctors removed as much as they safely could. But, a few weeks later, a build-up of fluid in Zac's brain left his eyesight permanently damaged.

"I can see all at the front of my left eye but not at the side. But on my right eye, I can only see out of the side," Zac explained.

By this time, all the hospital appointments, surgeries and other procedures were pushing Zac towards his lowest point. "He wouldn't go to school - he was just so overwhelmed by everything that had happened to him," said Zac's mum, Miriam. "He was a very sad child. Then, just when we really needed help, **Keech's Music Therapist Nathan was there.**"

Control from 'chaos'

Nathan felt music therapy could help Zac overcome his anxieties.

"I tried to help him find control over his life at a time of chaos," Nathan said. "Many of the songs we created involved the 'monster'."

"When we first played music together, Zac pretended to be a monster who wanted to steal all the musical instruments. As we spent more time together, though, Zac began to talk about how the monster just wanted to be cared for. It felt like Keech was a place of safety which would protect him when he was scared of all the hospital admissions and treatment.

"Later, Zac created a model of the monster which he brought to music therapy sessions," Nathan continued. "He spoke about how people feared the monster because he looked different but that he was actually friendly and nice. This helped Zac deal with his feelings about being different to his school friends."

Leaving worries behind

Nathan feels music therapy can be particularly helpful with children: "They tend not to have the words to describe how they're feeling so it's important to offer them different ways to communicate. Zac benefitted from creatively exploring his worries and was able to leave them behind."

Zac said making music with Nathan has made him feel happier. "When I'm playing a musical instrument, it really takes my mind off all the horrid things," he explained, "and I can think about all the good and relaxing things."

"It makes me feel free."

How music therapy helps

Last year, we provided 198 sessions of music therapy to our child patients and their families.

Music therapy at Keech Hospice Care can offer psychological and emotional support in a safe and secure place: our fully-equipped music room with its guitars, drum kits, keyboards and more.

Music therapy can help children communicate difficult issues, thoughts and feelings, without necessarily the need for words. It can support them emotionally while helping them to make choices or take control.

A child doesn't have to be able to play an instrument - the focus is on improvisation. Sessions can include listening to music, singing, song writing, making CDs and memory making onto CD or DVD.



Zac with Nathan



Harry with Sophie

Keech plays double role in BBC Children in Need 2018

Keech Hospice Care's amazing music-therapy work with children is partially funded by BBC Children in Need, and Zac's story played an important part in the BBC Children in Need Rocks concert in November 2018.

Then, on the big appeal night, the cameras caught up with Harry and his sister Sophie (pictured below, left), who were featured in Children in Need 2016. Harry has had pre-bereavement help from our family support team. The team helped Harry overcome his anxieties about Sophie, who has severe epilepsy, chronic lung disease and is blind. The fantastic news is that, two years on, Sophie is doing much better and Harry is much happier, able to put his worries into perspective.

You can watch Zac's film at www.keech.org.uk/cin2018.

Harry and Sophie's update can be found on BBC Children in Need's YouTube pages - look for the title 'Revisiting the families you've helped'.

We rely on our supporters and local community to help raise the £6 million we need every year to provide all our services.

If you'd like to make a donation, please email letmehelp@keech.org.uk, phone **01582 707940** (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm) or go to www.keech.org.uk/donate.

Keech Hospice Care weekly

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1st prize
£1,000

In our lottery, it costs just **£1** a week to be in with the chance of winning one of our **152 cash prizes every week.**

For as little as 14p a day, you will be helping us continue our care for adults and children with life-limiting and terminal illnesses, and their families.

It couldn't be easier to sign up - just call **01582 707940** (9am-5pm, Mon-Fri) and we will get you started there and then. You can also go to **www.keech.org.uk/lottery**.

2nd prize
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year a top prize of
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