



AUTUMN 2025 NEWSLETTER

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- Tee Up Hope



WELCOME TO OUR FAMILY



Dear Friends

It is an honour to write to you today as the new Chief Executive of Francis House Children's Hospice.

I have had the privilege of being part of this community for over 23 years - first as a Trustee and then as the Deputy Chief Executive. The shoes of Revd David Ireland and Sister Aloysius, our two previous CEO's, will be difficult to fill, but I intend to do my very best!

My time as a Trustee gave me an insight into the values, challenges, and incredible impact that Francis House has. But it was only when I joined the team full-time that I truly began to understand the day-to-day dedication, heart, and resilience that goes into supporting every child and family who turn to us during their darkest days.

Among the many vital roles within our hospice, Play Specialists hold a particularly special place. We have

featured the vital work our Play Specialists do within this issue. They create safe, joyful, and meaningful experiences for children of all ages and abilities - often helping to express emotions that words cannot. Through creative play, sensory activities, and therapeutic interaction, our Play Specialists offer children moments of normality, laughter, and self-expression in the midst of difficult circumstances. Their work not only enhances the emotional well-being of the children but also provides comfort and connection for siblings and families, making an immeasurable difference each day.

As I take on this new role, my heart remains exactly where it's always been: with our children, their families, and the dedicated

How to
contact us

Francis House
Children's Hospice,
390 Parrswood Road,
Didsbury, Manchester,
M20 5NA

Hospice tel:
0161 434 4118
Fundraising tel:
0161 443 2200

team that surrounds them. I am committed to ensuring we continue to provide not only the highest quality of care but also the warmth, dignity, and personal connection that makes Francis House a home-from-home.

Looking ahead, there is much to be excited about. With your continued support, we will keep evolving - finding new ways to reach more families, enhance our bereavement and sibling support, and expand our services beyond the walls of the hospice into our local communities. We know how important it is to meet families wherever they are - physically and emotionally - and that will remain at the heart of our work.

Of course, none of this is possible without you - our incredible community.

Whether you're a volunteer, a fundraiser, a long-time supporter, or a new friend, you play a vital role in everything we do.

I step into this role knowing I have big shoes to fill, but also with a heart full of hope and determination. I look forward to listening, learning, and leading with kindness. And most of all, I look forward to continuing to work alongside each of you, building a future where every child and family who needs us feels seen, supported, and cherished.

Rachael Taylor

Chief Executive Officer
Francis House Family Trust



Photo: Cheshire Life

FINDING JOY IN PLAY



Billie Harris

The Play Specialist Team ensures that every child or young person experiences moments of joy, creativity and comfort in an enriched hospice environment.

It's early morning and Billie Harris, one of a small team of play specialists at Francis House, is starting her shift. It's a very different environment to the busy children's hospital ward filled with 30 to 40 patients where Billie started her career as a qualified healthcare play specialist.

Her work then included preparing the children for a medical procedure or helping them overcome their fear of hospitals through play. Today it's about finding that 'little bit of joy'. That one thing that will make them smile.

"Every person has their own little thing," says Billie. "For one child it's Formula 1 racing. He comes to Francis House for day care and has always wanted to go and watch a race. I'm going to get F1 on the big screen in our cinema pod and try to build a makeshift car for him to go around his wheelchair.

"His parents often talk about his love of Formula 1. He's non-verbal, but he's always responding in a way and that's one thing that brings him joy."

Shared play experiences can help families create lasting memories and reinforce bonds, crucial in a hospice setting where time may be limited.

Billie explains: "I try and facilitate therapeutic recreational and generalised play sessions. I also do a lot of memory making – hand prints and foot prints at end of life and also general memory making."

There are three members of the Play Specialist Team: Billie, Emily Hemsley, and Oliver First.

Activities are tailored to each individual, from babies to young adults, and the hospice environment gives staff time to get to know the families, building up a rapport and finding out what interests them.

Thabani is a happy and sociable boy. He has a tracheostomy - a tube in his windpipe which helps him to breathe - and he cannot eat food. He enjoys respite stays with his mum, Busi.

"It was pancake day and my plan was to make pancakes and do a tasting session. When I discovered that Thabani was in, as he doesn't particularly like a messy play activity, we did a sensory activity instead using imitation pancakes and he had great fun watching," says Billie.

Research has shown the importance of play in reducing stress and promoting resilience among children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions.

Billie's hospital training helps colleagues by using play distraction techniques if a child is having a tracheostomy changed or the occasional blood test.

She also advises other staff members about moving to a different area in the hospice, like the conservatory, for any medical procedure, so as not to associate the child's safe space like the sensory room or their bedroom with anything other than having fun.

In addition to one-to-one play sessions, a common group activity includes sensory bags with sensory stories. The Gruffalo is a popular choice, with pine cones for the woods, squeaky material for a mouse or a feather for the owl that can be brushed across cheeks or rubbed against hands.



Pancake day Francis House style.




The Play Specialist Team recognise the unique emotional needs of siblings who are often deeply affected by their brother's or sister's illness. Some siblings may never have experienced playing with a brother or sister who cannot talk or lift their arms up in the same way that they can. The team can help them to form a bond with their sibling by doing simple play activities.

With a background in social work and counselling, and as a part-time specialist mentor for university students, Oli First finds the work at Francis House incredibly rewarding.

"My job is play," says Oli with a smile. "It's kind of a nice thing to do, trying to figure out ways to make people happy and enjoy the time they have. It's an unusual environment, people working with children with a short life expectancy; it can be quite intense. For the most part I set that aside and try to be present for somebody without thinking about their illness.

"If I'm working with people who are able to communicate their wishes to me, I'll ask them what they might fancy doing. For example, some of the lads who come here like to do a blindfold tasting session and I'll ask them what food they want to try.



Play specialist Oli First makes mealtimes more fun with quizzes and games.

"Or I might do a treasure hunt through the hospice where one clue leads to the next.

"I really try to listen and take seriously what somebody says to me, even if it's not verbally. They might be able to communicate to some degree with the cues that they give. Giving them my full attention - that has an impact. That they are being listened to and not just having an agenda pushed on them.

"Being respectful is a big part of it; building up a relationship with somebody so that they can trust you. They're more likely to have fun.

"In the sensory room, I quite often get the guitar out and play some songs for them, even though I've got a

terrible voice! I'll sing and make up silly songs and get the young person to strum the guitar themselves or put their hand on my hand so they can feel the rhythm."

The play specialists work closely with other teams in the hospice including homecare, sibling support, and when a child is at the end of their life.

"Finding ways of making the impossible possible is our job," says Billie. "One little boy was at the end of his life and wanted to go to the beach. That wasn't possible, so we brought the beach to him by bringing a load of sand into his bedroom. Another child liked music and dancing and we managed to get hold of a Mexican dance group who did a big performance."

"When people ask me what I do for work, I say I don't work: I play."



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Taylor
Wimpey
Manchester



Cardinal
Partnership

CORPORATE CHAMPIONS



HMG
Paints



Corporate support for charities comes in many forms and is all about building positive partnerships between businesses and non-profit organisations.

CHEP



It's not just about financial donations - companies also get involved through employee volunteering, sponsorships and gifts in kind.

These collaborations are a great way for businesses to give back, boost employee morale, and show their commitment to social responsibility.



JP
Goldman

Let's give a **shout out** to some of our corporate partners who sponsored events, held golf days, took part in payroll giving, endured challenges and volunteered at open days.



DLA
Piper

Could your workplace become
our next Corporate Champion?

Contact Julie Williams
on **0161 443 2200** or email
julie.williams@francishouse.org.uk

Zeus
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TEE UP HOPE

Could you tee up hope and swing fore our children?

Bramhall Golf Club's past lady captain, Jo Lingwood, was so inspired by the extraordinary support Francis House provided to her friend's young family she chose to fundraise for the hospice in her capacity as lady captain.

Jo set about raising money through a host of fundraising events which included guest speakers, an afternoon tea party, raffle, golf day and fashion show. With the support of the ladies' section and generosity of club members, friends and local Bramhall businesses an impressive £9,000 was raised.

Jo said: "Most of us will not need the support of Francis House but may know someone who has been immensely grateful for its support."



Francis House benefits from three corporate charity golf days held each year that combined raise approximately £25,000. Raising funds through a golf day not only provides a vital source of income for the hospice but the most successful events incorporate fundraising activities throughout the day such as a 'Beat the Pro' challenge to further engage participants and boost fundraising.

If your club captain is looking for a charity to support or your company would like to organise a charity golf day we can come to your offices or club and talk about Francis House and support you throughout your year. Contact us via fundraising@francishouse.org.uk or call 0161 443 2200.



STARLIGHT

GALA

Join us for an unforgettable evening at the Starlight Gala, Francis House annual winter Ball taking place at Mottram Hall from 7pm to 1am on 15th November.

The night promises a sparkling drinks reception, a delicious three course meal and live entertainment from The Pedal Tones. The evening will be hosted by the incredible Tom Finkill, with an exciting live auction expertly led by Exceed Giving, offering guests the chance to bid on exclusive prizes.

Last year's event raised £40,000 and sold out quickly, leaving many disappointed! We encourage you to secure your place early. To purchase tickets, please book via the website or contact Zeffi Johnson at zjohnson@franchishouse.org.uk

A CHRISTMAS

STORY

Come and be part of a wonderful evening of festive music and celebration at St Elisabeth's Church, Reddish on December 5th.

Featuring Christmas music, carols and readings, performances from Stuart Beech, the choir and musicians of St Elisabeth's Church, guest soloists, Stockport Schools Brass Band and VIP guests, all coming together to create a fantastic evening of festive celebration.

To reserve your place please contact Susie on susie.poppitt@franchishouse.org.uk call 07931 642409, or book online at www.franchishouse.org.uk/christmas-story-service



UNWAVERING DEVOTION



In the summer we shared the sad news of the death of Sr. Maureen O'Driscoll, FMSJ who died on 11th June aged 72. Sister Maureen dedicated her life to caring for children and young people with life-limiting conditions. She was a beloved member of the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph and the last of the religious sisters to work at Francis House.

As one of the first nurses at Francis House, and later through her work establishing residential care homes, she gave over 35 years to Francis House and brought love, strength, and compassion to every family she met.

We miss her deeply, and we're forever grateful for all she gave.

The Francis House Festival of Trees returns to Quayside Media City UK from 25th October until 14th December offering a stunning display of Christmas trees decorated with unique gifts donated by top brands, organisations and community groups.

Bids are placed on the trees through an online auction and anyone

placing the highest bid gets to take the tree home for Christmas! The event each year raises tens of thousands of pounds. To make it a success we are on the look out for tree new sponsors with a flair for creating saleable, tempting trees. To find out more and get involved please call the fundraising team on 0161 443 2200 or visit www.francishouse.org.uk/festival-of-trees



FESTIVAL OF TREES

MAKE A WILL MONTH

Make a Will Month returns this September and solicitors across the Northwest will once again be partnering with Francis House to offer their Will writing service for free in return for a donation to the charity.

Join our Make a Will Month campaign to safeguard your family's future and support Francis House Children's Hospice.

Leaving a Will not only protects your family's future but gives you peace of mind that your wishes will be carried out.

Throughout the month of September, legal firms across the region are giving their time and expertise free of charge in drawing up new Wills or amending an existing Will in return for a suggested donation to the hospice.

- £100 for a simple individual Will
- £175 for a simple mirror Will for a couple.



Chris Burrows and Glaisyers solicitors are supporting Make a Will Month.

This represents a substantial saving compared to the standard fee for the service.

"I received an excellent and highly professional service when writing my Will under the Francis House 'Make a Will Month' initiative. It gave me peace of mind knowing that I'd put all the necessary measures in place to protect my family and provided me with a great opportunity to support Francis House Children's Hospice at the same time." Mrs Graham

To find out more about Make a Will Month and participating legal firms in your area, contact Susie Poppitt at susie.poppitt@franchishouse.org.uk call Susie on 07931 642409 or visit the website www.franchishouse.org.uk/will-month

Every donation will help the families of Francis House



**SCAN TO
DONATE**

- **Donate at francishouse.org.uk**
- **Donate by phone 0161 443 2200**
- **Donate using the form below**

I would like to give a single donation

☐ £10 ☐ £30 ☐ £50 ☐ other £

I enclose a cheque made payable to **Francis House Family Trust**

Title.....First NameLast Name

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone Number..... Email Address.....

Gift Aid

Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 donated

giftaid it

☐ I wish Gift Aid to apply to this donation and all donations I make in the future or have made in the last 4 years. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in that year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signature..... Date.....

Keep in Touch

Your support is vital and we look forward to keeping in touch with you by post, sharing our news, activities and appeals.

Would you like to receive our supporter emails too?

☐ Yes, I am happy to hear from you by email. Email Address.....

If you do not wish to receive information by post, or wish to change how we get in touch, please contact rachael.taylor@francishouse.org.uk or call 0161 443 2200.

THANK YOU

Please return this form with your donation to:

Francis House Family Trust, Francis House Children's Hospice,
390 Parrswood Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 5NA

MAKE A REGULAR DONATION

To continue to expand and develop our services we need to raise £5 million each year. Become a regular giver and make an ongoing difference to the lives of the children and families that we support. To make a regular monthly donation by Standing Order fill in this form or set it up via your own online banking using the information below. Once set up please confirm your details, monthly amount and date chosen by email to carole.dickinson@francishouse.org.uk If you prefer to set up a Direct Debit you can do so via our website francishouse.org.uk

STANDING ORDER

Name of Bank/Building Society

Branch Address

..... Postcode

Account Name

Account Number Sort Code

Please pay:

Francis House Family Trust
Virgin Money
48-50 Market Street
Manchester
M1 1PW

Account Number **68170373**
Sort Code **05-05-73**

The sum of £..... each month

Commencing on until further notice

Name

Address

..... Postcode.....

Signature Date.....

If you are a UK taxpayer, please also sign the Gift Aid Declaration to increase the value of your donation by 25% at no extra cost to you.

GIFT AID DECLARATION I wish Gift Aid to apply to this donation and all donations I make in the future or have made in the last 4 years. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in that year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signature Date

Please return this form to Carole Dickinson,
Accounts Office, Francis House Children's Hospice,
390 Parrswood Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 5NA

Registered Charity No. 328659

**Thank you for
your donation**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Francis House is a lifeline to more than 600 families from across the North West. When life is short it needs to be of the highest quality and that's what Francis House does best.



Bramhall & Woodford
Rotary Club
Duck Race &
Family Fun Day

£10,000



Samatha Slack & Family
Yorkshire Three
Peaks Challenge

£1,352



Jessica's
Bake Sale

£200



Irish Association
Golfers Charity Day

£6,000



Oppio Lounge
Climbing Challenge

£1,000



The Stephanie
Glynn Foundation
Therapy Room donation

£2,000

EVENTS 2025



2025	
STEPtember Walking Challenge	1st - 30th September
Charity Golf Week in Almerimar	23rd - 30th September
Run Heaton Park 5k, 10k & Half Marathon	5th October
Festival of Christmas Trees, Quayside Media City	25th October - 14th December
Jimmy Cricket's Big Birthday Gala Show, Lowry Theatre	1st November
Francis House Starlight Gala Ball	15th November
A Christmas Story	5th December
Run Heaton Park 5k, 10k and Half Marathon	7th December
2026	
Winter Wander	1st - 31st January
Christmas Tree recycling with Just Helping	January
TCS London Marathon	26th April
Great Manchester Run	31st May

To find out the latest information or to take part in any of these events contact the fundraising team on **0161 443 2200** or email fundraising@francishouse.org.uk or visit www.francishouse.org.uk/get-involved/events

STOP PRESS!

Provisional dates for the return of the Charity Christmas Card shops to libraries across Cheshire have been published. Francis House cards will be available to buy throughout November and early December at Wilmslow, Knutsford and Sale libraries. For more information visit www.christmas-cards.org.uk

Newsletter Mailing List

If you no longer wish to receive a copy of the newsletter through the post, please call the fundraising office on 0161 443 2200 or email fundraising@francishouse.org.uk and ask to be removed. Visit our website to subscribe to our monthly supporter newsletter via email and view our newsletters online www.francishouse.org.uk/news/newsletters/

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 www.francishouse.org.uk

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