

For Any Child



Acorns Strategy

2022 - 2025

acorns

Your local children's hospice

Isla-Rae enjoying the garden at Acorns in the Black Country



Contents

Introduction 4

 A word from the Chief Executive 5

 Thank you..... 6

About Acorns Children’s Hospice 8

 Our history 8

 Our Vision 10

 Our Mission 10

 Our Values 11

 Our promises at Acorns..... 12

A charity to depend upon in an uncertain world 15

PESTLE analysis..... 16

Implementing the recommendations of our Care Review 18

The goals of this Strategy 19

 Goal 1: A responsive, inclusive and quality care service 20

 Goal 2: More care partnerships reaching more families 24

 Goal 3: Acorns recognised as a great place to work and volunteer 26

 Goal 4: Engaging our diverse audiences..... 28

 Goal 5: Investing sustainably in care..... 30

 Goal 6: Excellence as a charity 32

Commitment to Equality and Inclusion 35

A word from Dale, Jack’s dad..... 36

Introduction

We are determined to reach as many children and families as we can. Whatever happens in our uncertain world, we will be here for any child and their family who need our children's hospice care.

The families that we are privileged to work with at Acorns face big challenges at any time. The Coronavirus crisis has been incredibly hard on so many of them. Many feel more isolated than before, after two years of varying degrees of disconnection from their support networks. They talk of long-term pressures on their wellbeing, family finances and physical and mental health.

We want Acorns to be a source of certainty in an uncertain world. This is why we are so determined at Acorns to reach as many children who meet our medical criteria and their families as we possibly can over the next three years.

Every new child and family we reach will be one step closer to our Vision at Acorns, that every life limited or life threatened child and their family, should receive the care and support they need.

Our Ambitions

We know that any plans we make will be influenced by the unpredictable external environment. Emerging from the pandemic, there is still much we don't know about the future. However, we know that there will always be a need for Acorns love, care and support. Over the next three years we have set six strategic goals to help us be there for any child and family referred to us:

- 1 A responsive, inclusive and quality care service
- 2 More care partnerships reaching more families
- 3 Acorns recognised as a great place to work and volunteer
- 4 Engaging our diverse audiences
- 5 Investing sustainably in care
- 6 Excellence as a charity

This Strategy lays out how - with the help of our incredible people, the support of our local communities and our brilliant partnerships - we will achieve each of these of these goals over the next three years.

A word from the Chief Executive

After more than 30 years, we know at Acorns what an important difference a high-quality and responsive children's hospice care service can make to a child and a family that come to need our support. A children's hospice service offers so much more than end-of-life care.

This Strategy starts at the worst of the pandemic ends. Very many parents have told us how hard the crisis has been for their children and for themselves. There is so much catching up to do.

Our overarching goal for the period of the Strategy is to increase the reach of our care service, expanding the numbers of eligible children and families who receive children's hospice care in the West Midlands and Gloucestershire.

While it might be assumed that any child with a life limiting condition might use their local children's hospice, this is actually not the case. There are many reasons why a family may be unable or reluctant to use a children's hospice like Acorns. They may simply not be aware of Acorns, or of the full range of different care services we are able to offer them and their child. Or they may have heard of us, but there might be barriers to their using a children's hospice service which are emotional, cultural, or practical in nature.

Over this Strategy period, we will do all we can to overcome these barriers by promoting and delivering a responsive, inclusive and high-quality children's hospice care service. Reaching more families requires us to achieve high standards and performance across the charity. Most importantly, we must continue to attract, retain and develop the very best people at Acorns, whether they are in paid or voluntary employment. We are always so proud of our team, never more so than during the pandemic. We know it is our people who make the Acorns care service and the charity so special.

Secondly, we will need to raise all the funds we need to sustainably resource our care - from our generous and wonderful financial supporters, from the customers and donors in our charity shops, as well as from our partners in the NHS. We must be wise and effective in how we spend what we raise, and demonstrate excellence in the ICT, data and finance services that support our large and complex charity

We talk often about our Acorns family. Whether you work with us, donate to us, or entrust us with the privilege and responsibility of caring for your child and family, I hope you will find something to inspire or to reassure you in this Strategy. I also hope that reading it will give you the clarity and confidence to recognise the importance of your own personal contribution to the care offered by Acorns Children's Hospice.

Toby Porter,
Acorns Chief Executive



Thank you

This plan has emerged in consultation across our Acorns family – the families we support, our people, our partners and supporters. We would like to thank everyone for their valuable input.



Volunteer Mary making sure our hospice gardens look beautiful

About Acorns Children's Hospice

A parent never imagines their child will be diagnosed with a life limiting or life threatening condition. But when the unimaginable happens, Acorns steps in, helping families cope at every stage of their child's life and beyond, wherever and whenever they need it.

Our dedicated teams provide specialist palliative care for babies, children and young people, and support for their families. This support is offered from our three children's hospices, based in Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester, and in the community.

The babies, children and young people that we care for at Acorns have been diagnosed with a life limiting or life threatening condition and

not yet reached their 18th birthday. We accept referrals from children in one of four medical categories, as set by Together for Short Lives, the national charity for our sector.

Category 1: Life threatening conditions for which curative treatment may be feasible but can fail.

Category 2: Conditions where premature death is inevitable.

Category 3: Progressive conditions without curative treatment options.

Category 4: Irreversible but non-progressive conditions causing severe disability, leading to susceptibility to health complications and likelihood of premature death.

Our history

We opened our first children's hospice in Birmingham in 1988. As the service grew, we added a second hospice in Walsall and a third hospice in Worcester, which opened their doors in 2000 and 2005 respectively. In addition to our hospice-based services, we work with children and families in

the community, alongside our health and social care partners. Operating across the entire West Midlands and Gloucestershire region, we are the largest children's hospice charity in the UK, both in terms of how many children and families we support, and how much we spend on our care.



Our Vision

Every baby, child and young person living in our region who is life limited or life threatened and their families, should receive the specialist care and support they need.

Our Mission

- > To provide essential specialist palliative care services to babies, children, young people and their families across our region
- > To deliver these services in partnership with others
- > To champion the cause of children's palliative care

Our Values

Our six Values underpin everything we do at Acorns. They ensure that the children and families who rely on our lifeline services are placed firmly at the centre of our ethos, supporting our Vision to provide children's hospice care for every child and their family who needs us.



Caring

We are passionate about getting it right, actively responding to individual needs to deliver the highest quality of care and service.



Committed

We are determined to achieve our goals and take accountability for our results.



Trusted

We build effective relationships based upon trust by consistently being open, honest and transparent, delivering what we commit to.



Collaborative

We actively work together with colleagues and build external partnerships that help us deliver our mission.



Courageous

We are brave in challenging the status quo, embracing difference and change.



Curious

We are inquisitive and empathetic, putting ourselves in the position of others. We seek to understand the why, exploring different ways to succeed.

Our promises at Acorns

We know that in order to achieve the goals of this Strategy, we will need to continue to show flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness in all areas of our work. Our fantastic team has demonstrated these qualities throughout the pandemic, and will continue to do so during what we hope will now be three steady years of recovery.

Even if we can't predict exactly how the next three years will play out, we can and do make these promises to families about our children's hospice service:

- > We are proud to be recognised by UNICEF as a Child Rights respecting organisation, and we will always put the child at the centre of everything we do
- > We will provide end-of-life care to any child or young person who needs it, as we have done throughout the pandemic
- > We will again offer the full range of our children's hospice care services from each of our three children's hospices – in Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester
- > We will use our health and social care networks and partnerships to reach as many new families as we can, where a child could be referred to Acorns
- > We will ensure the professionalism of our Care team, and also work with them to develop a workforce for the future
- > We will use what we have learned during this protracted crisis and from our Care Review to try and do things even better in the future
- > We will deliver the most ambitious, impactful and caring children's hospice service we can over the next three years, whatever the future holds

And we make these promises about what our people, our partners, our supporters and the customers in our shops can expect from Acorns, and its leadership team:

- > We will respond quickly and flexibly when called upon to do so
- > We will continue to care and do all we can to keep you safe
- > We will communicate clearly and transparently
- > We will respect everyone's circumstances and value everyone's contribution
- > We will be digitally proficient and technologically capable
- > We will be environmentally responsible and keep our own carbon footprint as a charity and a care provider to a minimum
- > We will ensure careful stewardship of Acorns finances and create a protracted period of financial stability for those who work or volunteer at the charity or use our services



Shop Manager Ali



I locked myself away at home with Haniya. But coming to Acorns pushed me to go out. We started with the Stay and Play groups and I'd put them in my diary as appointments to make myself go. Now it's a second home to me.

Haniya's mum, Shabana

A charity to depend upon in an uncertain world

We have all learned since the start of this pandemic that any three-year plan must be built around allowances for considerable uncertainty to come. Acorns aims to be a source of stability and support for children and families in our uncertain often frightening world. Assuming, as we hope, the pandemic transitions to endemic status in the UK during 2022, we must still try and anticipate how the economic, social, and health legacies of the crisis may play out.

As part of preparing this Strategy, we have identified what we think are likely to be the most significant characteristics of the external environment over these three years, conducting what is called a PESTLE analysis – an analysis of the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental situation around us.



Political

- > Increased political support for hospice care nationally
- > More predictable and sustained funding from the NHS
- > Increased expectations from children's hospices



Economic

- > Increased cost of living
- > Increased need for charities
- > Changing high street
- > National shortage of children's nurses



Social

- > The pandemic's heavy legacy on the most vulnerable
- > Our commitment to reach more children and families
- > High levels of support for trusted local charities like Acorns



Technological

- > Medical advances in treating health conditions
- > Increased need for transition services
- > More demand for virtual care and support
- > Growing importance of digital fundraising



Legal

- > Continuing need to meet our legal obligations
- > Increased importance in demonstrating high standards



Environmental

- > Maximising our environmental performance
- > Reducing our carbon footprint

Politically, we see the pandemic has created a widely-held commitment to reach vulnerable members of local communities with essential services and support.

The nature of the Covid-19 threat has also led to a welcome increase in appreciation in policy circles of the importance of high-quality end-of-life care, and the critical role played by the country's children and adult hospices in delivering it.

We see political commitment to greater resourcing and better integration of both health and social care services, with new commissioning structures being formed in part to take this forward.

All of these trends should help us at Acorns, as our service is aimed at a very vulnerable group of families, and has both clinical and social characteristics.

With sustained NHS funding will rightly come increased expectations of strong, data-driven reporting and accountability across all our services, as well as the highest standards of safeguarding and clinical safety. We take all such accountabilities incredibly seriously.

Economically, we expect the next few years to be challenging, especially for those living in the most socially deprived households and areas of our region.

The immediate legacy of the Covid crisis is likely to be felt in cost of living increases for households and difficult operating conditions for many businesses.

Any tricky period economically has the potential to simultaneously increase the need for charitable services and at the same time impact negatively upon levels of charitable giving.

The high street is also changing, and charity shops will need to change with it. Inflation over the next few years will bring us particular challenges.

Economic uncertainty will require us to cushion our service against future income fluctuations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine took place just as our strategy was being approved. While we can't anticipate exactly what will happen, it is clear that this may have a major impact on the economy over the next few years

On the people side, and like all other hospices and healthcare providers, Acorns will have to work hard to fully staff our care services, given national shortages in nurses and healthcare assistants, most pronounced in those specialising in working with children.

Socially, there seems no question that the legacy of the pandemic will be felt hardest by the most vulnerable.

This is why we are so determined at Acorns to reach as many children and families as we possibly can over the next few years.

More positively, we are confident that another social legacy of the pandemic will be continued good will and generosity of communities towards their best-loved local charities, particularly those working with children and in health care.

We have benefited hugely at Acorns from the affection and kindness of our local community in recent years. Our fine reputation for the work we do should be a very precious asset for us for many years to come.

Technologically, we expect continuing medical advances in treating health conditions in children and in pregnancy to lead to more babies and children living longer albeit with more complex clinical needs.

We will also hopefully see larger numbers of our young people needing to prepare for transition to adult services.

We expect to see skills and technologies introduced into our care service during the pandemic such as video calling remaining part of our post-pandemic world.

Digital fundraising and communications will only grow in their importance at Acorns, if we are to continue to engage and receive the support of our local community.

Legally, in order to continue to operate safely and effectively, and to retain the trust and confidence of our families, partners and supporters, Acorns will continue to meet all our many and diverse regulatory, reporting and other legal obligations.

These obligations are likely to increase rather than reduce in number, and our ability to meet or exceed all these standards will be more important than ever.

Environmentally, it is anticipated that expectations on Acorns to maximise as well as to report upon our own environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance will increase over the next three years, most notably with regard to the building and maintenance standards of our three hospices and our shops.

We will also be expected to show we are doing all we can to keep our carbon footprint as low as possible in terms of travel, consumption, and other such areas.



Staff Nurse, Jabran

Implementing the recommendations of our Care Review

In-line with our commitment to learning and accountability, Acorns completed an independent review of our Care Service in 2020, referred to in this document as the 'Care Review'. The review was extremely positive and supportive about the care we deliver, but with many of the key findings and recommendations challenging us to increase the numbers of eligible children and families we reach with our service. It is the Care Review that identified the theme and ambition for this Strategy.

Our first step is to begin year one of the Strategy by introducing two new services (symptom management and therapeutic services). We are further starting year one with significant additional investment into our Family Service Team. The strength and quality of our care

partnerships are also expected to accelerate new referrals to Acorns from the start of the Strategy period. We also begin with a new short break policy, to strive for greater equality and opportunity for eligible children.

The next steps include a significant project in year one on clinical workforce planning. This project will help us fully understand the level and mix of resources needed to offer current and increased future levels of residential care and Outreach, combining safety, quality and value-for-money. Once the workforce modelling is complete, along with the sight of precise outcomes from our first year's voluntary fundraising and Retail results, we will recalibrate our precise care delivery targets through our operational plans for years two and three.

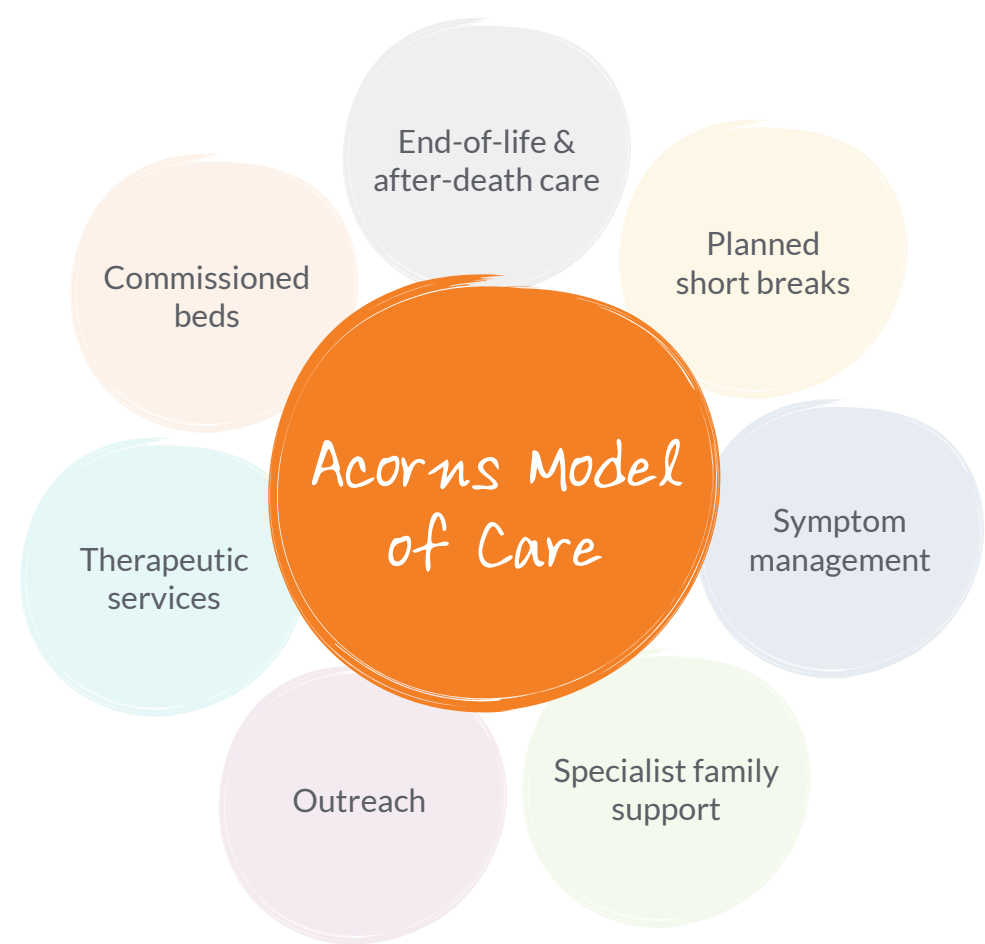


The goals of this Strategy

We have set the following high-level goals for this strategic plan:

- 1 A responsive, inclusive and quality care service
- 2 More care partnerships reaching more families
- 3 Acorns recognised as a great place to work and volunteer
- 4 Engaging our diverse audiences
- 5 Investing sustainably in care
- 6 Excellence as a charity

Goal 1: A responsive, inclusive and quality care service



When a child is referred to Acorns, our teams speak to their parents or carers, other family members, and liaise with the health and social care professionals supporting them. What we call our children’s hospice care service actually comprises of seven different but complementary services, as shown above. The precise package offered to each child will depend both on our team’s assessment, and of course, on the circumstances, preferences and wishes of the child and family.

End-of-life and after-death care

End-of-life care will continue to be our absolute priority service on the sad occasions when circumstances require it. We will always try to provide families with the maximum choices in end-of-life care through a 24/7 responsive and compassionate service. We will build on existing specialist skills with our teams, working flexibly and in collaboration with the District General

Hospitals, Birmingham Women’s and Children’s Hospital, and Community Nursing Teams. An additional and hugely important part of our children’s hospice service at Acorns is to offer families an environment where they have more time and a special, private space to say goodbye to their child after death. All our hospices have temperature-controlled ‘special bedrooms’ designed for this purpose.

Planned short breaks

Palliative care short breaks for children with life limiting and life threatening conditions are an integral part of children’s hospice care in the UK. All children registered with us have a holistic needs assessment. Where families are assessed as requiring short breaks (overnight and/or day care) for their child, they can book and take them at their local Acorns hospice. There is a wide body of research and other evidence about the very significant value of

such short breaks to families caring for a child with a life limiting or life threatening condition. These short breaks are also known as respite stays, supporting parents managing the complex needs of their children. A palliative care short break also provides an opportunity for a child to receive specialist clinical care in a safe, caring and stimulating environment at their local Acorns hospice, where they also access fun and sensory activities based on their individual needs and preferences.

Symptom management and emergency admissions

We will offer responsive symptom management stays and other emergency admissions for those children who require medical and clinical assessment of changes to their symptoms. This will be a new part of our core offer to children and families. Admissions of this type will be over and above a short break stay and will be recorded as a separate activity. Our Paediatric Palliative Care Consultant will provide oversight to our symptom management service, supporting and utilising the specialist nursing skills of Acorns Care teams as well as the GPs we work with across our three hospices.

Specialist family support

The Care Review highlighted the significant value that families place on the psychosocial and practical support Acorns offers through our specialist Family Service Teams. These highly skilled teams offer practical and emotional advice and support to families, liaise with other agencies such as local authorities, health providers and schools and support to young people and their families transitioning to adult services. The service includes bereavement support as well as specialist therapeutic based support to children, young people and their siblings.

The Care Review concluded that it is our specialist Family Service Team that may very well be the best way to introduce and attract new eligible families to register with Acorns and over the course of this Strategy, one of our priorities will be to expand the Acorns Family Service across our area.

While Acorns is a secular charity, we recognise and respect the significant importance of religious faith to many of the families we



Neil, Neonatal Nurse Lead

support. We will continue to work closely with faith communities and leaders to promote awareness and understanding of our service, and to further improve our own equality, diversity and inclusion policies and practice.

The volunteers who support our care services are highly valued and bring a wide range of life skills and experience into our teams. If we are to expand our reach over the course of this strategic period, we need to ensure we continue to attract volunteers who are not only able to work across all areas of care but also have the specific skills and experience to support us to reach out to more families by working alongside our Family Service Teams, supporting our children, young people and families both in the hospices and community.

We will aim to create a sustainable and enhanced volunteer structure within care that will ensure we are able to recruit, train and retain volunteers who are also considered and increasingly recognised as an integral part of our care delivery.

Outreach

Acorns Clinical Outreach has been a valued service for Acorns families for over seven years. The growing demand for more care being provided to children and support to families in their own homes, as an alternative or a complement to a residential short break, has been clearly visible over many years to us at Acorns and within the children's hospice sector nationally.

At Acorns, we have often been constrained financially to provide this service consistently and have usually had to depend on external funding being available. The Care Review highlighted the Outreach service as potentially critical to the goal of increasing the number of families using the Acorns care service for their children and themselves. Care delivered at home can overcome both practical as well as cultural and emotional barriers, that have traditionally prevented more families from coming to a hospice.

Over the next Strategy, therefore, we are committed to bringing this Outreach service into the Acorns core service offer. We will continue to seek external funding where possible but are now in the position to be able to invest some core charitable funding into this service.

Therapeutic services

What we call therapeutic services at Acorns comprises some of the special services we are able to provide to children and families. These include physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, complementary therapies, music therapy, and specialist play sessions.

A key lesson learned at Acorns during the Covid pandemic was to see the phenomenal value that therapeutic-based services on their own had on children's physical and emotional health, and therefore on that of their families. As a result, over this next Strategy period, Acorns will now offer therapeutic services as a stand-alone, specific service. This will be promoted to families and developed as an additional specialist service providing symptom management, as well as wellbeing benefits to the children and their families. We will provide the additional resources and investment needed to support this development.

Commissioned beds

What we call a commissioned bed at Acorns is when we are asked to provide safe, secure and stimulating stays for children with a life limiting or life threatening illness or condition, who cannot be looked after at home or who local NHS hospitals have asked to transfer to our care.

Acorns has been managing a steady increase in demand for commissioned beds from both local authority and NHS commissioners over recent years, including during the pandemic where a key role for hospices has been to support care capacity at local hospitals and social care. The provision of commissioned beds is therefore now recognised as a core and managed service in our new model of care.



Care Assistant Raine and Head Nurse Carmel providing care at Acorns in the Black Country

Goal 2: More care partnerships reaching more families



Living our collaborative value

Our Vision of every child and family getting the support they need has always been dependent on high levels of partnership and collaboration across the health and social care system and services accessed by families. Collaborative is one of our core Values at Acorns. These care partnerships were strengthened during the pandemic and will be more important than ever to our ability to fully resource and deliver our children’s hospice service over this Strategy period.

Partnerships with the NHS & Local Authorities

We are committed to continue and, where opportunities present, extend our existing partnerships with NHS England, as well as with local hospitals and NHS/Integrated Care System commissioners. We likewise see Care

Quality Commission regulators, community nursing teams and social care providers as important partners of Acorns. We will develop guidance on price tariffs for Acorns services. We will ensure services we provide to local children and families are aligned to NHS England’s service specification for children’s palliative care, as well as with NICE guidance (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) and the NHS Long-Term plan.

We will work actively with our West Midlands Paediatric Palliative Care network. We will work in ever-closer partnership with our local hospitals, especially the team at Birmingham Women’s and Children’s Hospital. Our partnership, which will include several shared posts and services, will be led by our Paediatric Consultant in Palliative Medicine in the region, working across our two organisations for the benefits of all children, families and health workers who need our specialist support.

Our Family Service Teams will always liaise closely with local authorities, schools, and other health and social care providers, in the best interests of the child, and particularly where there may be any safeguarding concerns.

Championing the cause

We will continue our work as a member of both Hospice UK and Together for Short Lives, championing the cause of children’s palliative care at a national level. Acorns will always look to share our best practice, learning and

expertise with other children’s hospices, looking to have a positive impact on families across the UK.

UNICEF Rights Respecting Award

Over the past two years, Acorns has become the UK’s first children’s hospice to receive accreditation from UNICEF UK as a Rights Respecting organisation, winning first a Bronze and then a Silver UNICEF Rights Respecting Award. Over this Strategy, we will aim to obtain our Gold Award.



For me, coming to Acorns gives me time with Yusuf and that’s what’s important.

Yusuf’s mum, Iram

Goal 3: Acorns recognised as a great place to work and volunteer



Our amazing people

We have never been prouder of our team at Acorns than during the pandemic. Our people, both in paid or voluntary employment have demonstrated our Values so powerfully through such a challenging period, and are the reason that our care service and charity enjoy the reputation that they do.

Acorns is a complex organisation, with hundreds of people working across three hospices, in the community, in 45 shops, and in our central support teams. We value and celebrate the diversity in our organisation, our roles and in the people that perform them. The pandemic led us to learn new ways of working and has shown us that we can still deliver excellent results and nurture a positive organisational culture, whatever challenges we face.

Acorns recognised as a great place to work

As we emerge from the pandemic, we have never been clearer of our reliance on our people at Acorns, and of our ability to continue to attract, develop and retain the talent we need. In the children’s health and social care sector nationally, there is a critical shortage of suitably qualified professional resource. There is also great competition for the top local fundraising, retail and support service talent.

Therefore, for Acorns to meet our goals, we must genuinely be recognised as a great place to work, and we must also have well-structured and resourced pathways to grow and develop our own talent. Our people must feel valued, whatever their background and experience, and wherever they work. They must equally be clear and proud about the contribution they

make to the care we provide, and to the charity. Every person at Acorns, whether they are in paid or voluntary employment, should be clear about exactly what they are expected to do, and properly acknowledged and rewarded for what they do.

Developing our talent acquisition

We will develop our talent acquisition Strategy to ensure we attract the very best talent from a range of sources and actively promote Acorns to achieve the same diversity in our people and high-profile supporters that we see in the diversity of children and families accessing our services.

Investing in our people

We will continue to invest in supporting our people to be successful in their roles, in their professional and career development and also by focusing on their wellbeing. Acorns is committed to ensuring a climate is created where wellbeing is continually considered. We aim to achieve the Thrive at Work Silver level accreditation within the Strategy period.

We will do all we can to provide a safe and rewarding environment for our people at Acorns. We will be expecting people at all levels in our organisation to be actively building a culture we can all thrive in, and to be showcasing our Values. We will encourage flexible and agile working practices. We expect and receive the most from those of our people in positions of responsibility at Acorns, and we will continue to develop and enhance our exciting leadership development programmes to support them in their roles and develop leaders for the future.

Our People and Culture Strategy will focus on these seven areas, seen as key to Acorns being recognised as a great place to work.

Diane, Family Team Worker



Goal 4: Engaging our diverse audiences



Our diverse audiences

Over this Strategy period, so much of what we want to achieve will depend on how well we engage our diverse audiences, both internally and externally. Firstly, and most importantly, our Care teams will always strive to communicate sensitively and compassionately with children and families using our hospices or community services. Keeping families informed, engaged and able to hold those important conversations with us is one of the most important parts of a quality palliative care service.

Effective internal communications

High-quality internal communication will also be integral to everything we are trying to achieve. Meaningful communications will make our culture stronger. We will use the channels that resonate most with our people to create greater engagement and collaboration between different teams, as well as help Acorns deliver the key projects and initiatives underpinning this Strategy. The impact of our strong internal communication will also be reflected in future employee engagement and retention.

Raising awareness, changing attitudes and inspiring action

Externally, Acorns has a wide and diverse audience across the West Midlands and Gloucestershire. We will use strategic communication to engage with multiple audiences, with the goal of achieving three main outcomes – raising awareness, changing attitudes and motivating others to take an action that would be beneficial for children and families we support, including donating to Acorns. Understanding and communicating effectively with our diverse audiences will be a key focus in order to achieve this effective engagement.

Talking to professionals

Over this Strategy period, we will deliver targeted marketing campaigns to health and social care professionals and faith networks in the West Midlands, to build awareness about our care services and their benefits for children and families and our eligibility criteria, and to facilitate new referrals.

Jack and his family enjoying a splash in the hydrotherapy pool



Amplifying the voices of children and families

In our public communications, wherever possible, we will ask parents or young people who have experienced Acorns care first-hand to tell their own stories and to describe the care and support they have received at our hospices. As befits our status as an UNICEF Silver Award winning organisation, the UN Rights of the Child will be reflected in both our internal and external communications, and we will ensure that key concepts such as Rights Holders and Duty Bearers are understood and acted upon.

Harnessing technology and innovation

We will increasingly use digital channels to tell our stories, host special events, and to inspire, engage and steward those supporting or looking to support our children's hospice care.

We will underpin our supporter engagement and fundraising activities by seeking out new and innovative ways to promote our care. We will communicate our Vision through media and social media channels, inspiring a wide audience across the West Midlands to donate or volunteer with us. Our communications will be built around the stories of the children, young people and families we support, and assisted by those who have kindly agreed to act as Patrons and Ambassadors for Acorns.

Goal 5: Investing sustainably in care



The financial picture

Whilst we look back with pride at the difference our care has made to children and families over the past few years, the previous Acorns three-year Strategy saw long periods of financial uncertainty for Acorns, most acutely in 2019 and then again at the start of the pandemic a year later. This was incredibly tough for everyone associated with the charity. But Acorns has emerged strongly and successfully from these toughest of times, and we are now fully confident in our ability to fully resource the care service that we will offer from our three children’s hospices.

Investing sustainably in care

Our goal for the next period is for everyone associated with the charity and its care to benefit from a protracted period of financial

stability. This will allow us to invest sustainably in extending our services. To do this, we will need our income and expenditure levels to remain well balanced. With costs of care expected to continue rising, this will require us to continue to steadily increase our overall income at Acorns, which comes from three main sources.

Engage, attract and retain

Firstly, and most importantly, as a children’s hospice charity, we will need to continue to engage, attract and retain supporters from across the West Midlands to donate to us at Acorns. Charitable bequests and gifts, along with events and activities to raise funds and awareness about the work done by Acorns will always be the most important source of funding for our children’s hospice care. We will emphasise in all our communications the

difference that this support has made and will continue to make.

We will look to take our supporters on a journey, where we show our gratitude to them with professional stewardship, engagement opportunities and communication. We will look to strengthen our relationship with existing supporters, while continuing to look for ways to attract many more new supporters to Acorns.

Raising funds and awareness in our charity shops

Secondly, Acorns has a large network of charity shops across the West Midlands region. Thanks to our customers, the local community who so generously donate second-hand clothes and other goods to us, and to the very many people who volunteer with Acorns, we have established a highly profitable retail operation, which makes a significant contribution to the care at our hospices. Our shops are also vital for promoting awareness about Acorns and the work we do across our local community.

We will continue to provide safe and welcoming environments for customers to shop, and for our supporters to donate the goods on which we depend. We will continue to develop our ‘empowerment model’, supporting our Shop Managers to make the choices and take the decisions they need to in order to create the best possible customer and volunteering experience. We know this is the right way to maximise the financial contribution from our shops to our care.

NHS partnerships

Thirdly, we expect to maintain our important partnership with the NHS nationally and locally, reflecting their understanding of the importance of their contribution to the cost of providing a hospice care service to children and families in our area. We will continue to maintain and develop the relationships to sustain this level of empathy, understanding and contribution.



Careful stewardship of our finances

Over this Strategy, we expect to be able to increase what we spend on our care, but need to remain cautious of the speed and rate at which we do so. Charity shop income has quickly recovered to pre-pandemic levels, but while we are encouraged and grateful for the high levels of support for Acorns in the local community, we will still start the Strategy period not yet able to resume our full range of fundraising activities and events. The next three years will require continued careful stewardship of our finances by our leadership team and our Trustees. We will ensure that Acorns maintains charitable reserves at levels appropriate for a charity of our size and complexity, and to protect our care service from any short-term falls in our income, and invest them appropriately.

We will always aim to spend the funds we raise transparently and effectively, for the maximum impact for those using our service. Over the next Strategy period, we will introduce new ways of planning and reporting on our care expenditure to our supporters and NHS partners, in-line with changing requirements from our statutory funding partners. This will be modelled using similar costing methodologies to those used in the NHS to give greater visibility to the cost of our care services, and to help us understand how we can invest in care most effectively in the future.

Goal 6: Excellence as a charity



A complex organisation

With three children’s hospices, 45 charity shops, and a lean and focused fundraising and support team working mainly remotely, Acorns is a complex and geographically dispersed charity made up of both paid employees and volunteers.

Our obligations

Acorns also operates in highly regulated fields. We are regulated separately as a health and social care provider, an organisation working with children, an employer with important obligations to our people, and a registered charity. We have a website designed to offer information to parents and carers of children eligible for our services, as well as to engage and process donations from the general public. We have a digital care management system in operation at our hospices and used by our community teams. For their part, our fundraising and retail operations require us to securely hold and store data about our supporters and donors. We have important

multiple reporting requirements, both statutory and as part of obvious obligations to our generous supporters.

In order to satisfy all our regulatory obligations and meet our ambitious objectives for our care programme, as well as to maintain our very high percentage of charitable expenditure, we need support services and teams of the first order. We will be adding expertise to delivering complex internal projects involving multiple teams and looking to further develop a positive culture of business partnering and internal customer service.

Safeguarding

Every person working for Acorns has a responsibility to safeguard. Key members of our people and our Trustee Board have lead roles in this area. We will always act on our duty to report any concerns we may have, whether they arise through our work in support of families, or with regard to the behaviour or practice of our people, other organisations or individuals. Acorns is committed to safeguarding all

vulnerable people we engage with through our work, and has a rolling programme of mandatory background checks for people joining our team, along with a programme of regular safeguarding training through the period of an individual’s paid or voluntary employment with us.

Working flexibly

Over the pandemic, our Acorns Central team who support our hospices and shops have proved they can work without a building. Our Care team have shown they can provide support and advice to families where face-to-face contact has not been possible. But we have all learned that we cannot operate effectively without a high functioning ICT infrastructure and system, and data services.

Building for the future

On the facilities side, we will continue to do everything we can to make our three Acorns children’s hospices in Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester welcoming, safe and appropriate environments for children, young people, and their families, as well as for our own people working in them.

In the first year of our Strategy, we will look to carry out a major refurbishment of Acorns in the Black Country, the first in its 22 years of operation. The plans we have made are all designed to significantly enhance the experience of children and families staying with us at Acorns. We also plan in the first year of our Strategy to add a new pair of family suites on the ground floor of Acorns in Birmingham.



Kasim and Nurse Suhaila playing



Esme laughing with Head Nurse Lindsey

Commitment to Equality and Inclusion

At Acorns, we are proud to serve any child or family that needs our support across the West Midlands and Gloucestershire, one of the most diverse communities in the UK. We are deeply committed to engage the views, perspectives, and ideas of everyone in the community and of those individuals using our services, or working and

volunteering in our charity. We are proud of our achievements over many years to ensure our care service is designed and delivered in an inclusive and appropriate way, but we recognise there is always more we can do.

We have a detailed Equality and Inclusion Action Plan, which we will be taking forward over this Strategy period.

It's such a wonderful place to go, seeing all the children's faces happy and smiling. When you hear the word hospice it's a scary word and you imagine the worst. But it's nothing like that at all. It's a beautiful place and anyone who goes there will say the same.

Jenna, Esme's mum

A word from Dale, Jack's dad

“ I want to tell you about our son Jack and why Acorns is a charity so close to our hearts.

Jack had an infectious laugh and a heart-melting smile and he was well-known and loved by everyone who met him. When he smiled, it wasn't just his mouth - it was his whole face. His eyes just sparkled. And when he laughed - well that was just to die for - because it came from right down below.

Due to complications at birth Jack was brain damaged and had cerebral palsy. We began using Acorns for the Three Counties in Worcester when he was just 9 months old. The hospice had just recently opened, and we were one of the first families to use it. Jack visited for short breaks and to our family - me, my wife Sharon and Jack's brothers Harry and Charlie - it became like a second home.

At the beginning we were very, very drained and not sleeping. It was hard work because being first-time parents, we didn't understand what the problems and issues were. It was all completely new to us.

The stays that Jack had made a huge difference. It was somewhere we could get a bit of respite and recharge our batteries. The support of our Family Team Worker at Acorns over the years was a real help. An extra person we could talk to who understood, who knew what we needed, even before we did ourselves.

In September 2020, Jack's health deteriorated and one morning he was

taken to A&E at Royal Worcester Hospital. He was transferred to the Paediatric Intensive Care in Stoke on Trent where he stayed for nearly seven weeks.

Although Jack had been in hospital before, it was clear that this time the situation was different and specialists advised us there was little more that could be done.

We decided to transfer Jack to Acorns, a place where we could spend time with him in a familiar setting, closer to home. Jack was at Acorns for two and half weeks.

Acorns looked after all of us whilst we stayed at the hospice. Staff were there to meet all our emotional, physical and practical needs. Meals were taken care of and Acorns nurses made sure Jack was comfortable and had the right medication.

The hospice allowed us to have the boys there as a family of five, so we could say our goodbyes. One Saturday morning Jack woke up at six o'clock, looked at me, gasped twice, three times and was gone.

Acorns is an amazing charity and we cannot imagine life without them. I wouldn't even want to think about it. What Acorns offers is physical respite but also mental respite - not having to think about things or worry - so you can actually go to sleep. In 16 years, I don't think I ever had an unbroken night's sleep. If we hadn't had the respite I don't even want to think about where we would have ended up.

”

Dale, Jack, Harry and Charlie enjoy a swim at Acorns



For Dale and his family, with Acorns they found a sanctuary. A place with the professionals who understood what they were going through and the skills and experience to help.

Their story is just one of the countless examples of how Acorns touches the lives of children and families across our region, every year.

This Strategy outlines how we will do everything we can to ensure that wherever they are and whatever their circumstances, we will be here for any child and their family who needs us.

A parent never imagines their child will be diagnosed with a life limiting or life threatening condition. But when the unimaginable happens, Acorns steps in, helping families cope at every stage of their child's life and beyond, wherever and whenever they need it.

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