

Pilgrims matters

News for Pilgrims Hospices supporters

Autumn 2025



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Pilgrims Hospice's

Eco-Friendly Tree Recycling

Each January, many Christmas trees head to landfills once the festive season comes to an end. But thanks to our annual Tree Recycling campaign, this doesn't have to be the case.



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Pilgrims Hospices

Christmas Cards



Look inside for fundraising dates

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Trees of Love

Who will you dedicate a dove to?

Join us for Trees of Love

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Chair's comment

Welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of Pilgrims Matters

It's always such a pleasure to share this magazine with you. As Chair of the Trustees, I feel so proud and privileged to be part of Pilgrims Hospices, and even more so to be part of a community of people who give so generously of their time, energy, and kindness to help us care for those who need us.

In this issue, you'll find an update on our Canterbury hospice build – a project that will help us create the very best possible spaces for patients and families. On page 8 there is an interesting article about how data is guiding our work, shaping better care for the future. In this article our Medical Director, Pia Amsler, speaks about person-centred care – a reminder that at Pilgrims, every decision we make begins with the individual we care for.

Autumn is always a busy time in our fundraising calendar, and this year is no exception. Trees of Love will bring people together to reflect, remember, and celebrate the lives of loved ones, while the Thanet 10K Colour Run and Herne Bay Santas on the Run, promises fun, laughter, and a splash of joy for all involved. These events show the very best of our communities spirit – people coming together to support others.

Your support makes all of this possible. At a time when rising costs and inflation are challenging us all, your generosity helps us to manage our resources wisely while ensuring our patients and families continue to receive the very highest standard of care. For that, we are deeply grateful.

Together, we really are making a difference. With heartfelt thanks,

Karen Warden

Karen Warden
Chair of Trustees, Pilgrims Hospices

Are you coping with an life-limiting condition illness? Find out more about Pilgrims' support by calling our Advice Line on **01233 504 133**.

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Talk to our team

To contact our Chief Executive or one of our trustees please email eastkent@pilgrimshospices.org or write to our Canterbury address below.

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Canterbury
Kent CT2 8JA
t 01227 459 700/
812612

Hythe Road,
Willesborough
Ashford
Kent TN24 0NE
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Ramsgate Road,
Margate
Kent CT9 4AD
t 01843 233 920

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A message from our CEO

Welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of Pilgrims Matters

Dear Supporters,

As we share this latest edition of *Pilgrims Matters*, I have been reflecting on a significant moment for hospice care – not just here in east Kent, but across the country. Earlier this year Pilgrims Hospices joined 142 other hospices in a national initiative: *This is Hospice Care*, led by Hospice UK. Collectively, we are shining a light on the essential role hospice care plays in our communities, and we're calling on the public to help secure our future. This was the first time that hospices had come together, speaking with one voice, sharing the same message at a local, regional and national level.

Strategically, this campaign marks a shift in how we

communicate the value of hospice care. It's about reframing perceptions, building awareness of the importance of gifts in Wills and the significance of the strong relationship we have with our local communities; it's about ensuring financial resilience in a changing landscape. With demand for end-of-life care rising and funding pressures mounting, we must act now to safeguard our services for the future.

Recently you may have seen the *This is Hospice Care* television advert, read local or national press articles about the campaign, or seen some highlights on our social media platforms. This renewed focus on public engagement is important, as it underpins the continued support that

enables Pilgrims Hospices to deliver compassionate care in our local community. Each year, Pilgrims supports thousands of individuals and families across Canterbury, Thanet and Ashford. It costs over £17.2 million annually to run our three hospices and community services – most of which comes from the generosity of people like you. Your continued support, through donations, volunteering, or a gift in your Will, is what keeps our doors open and our mission alive.

Thank you for being part of our story. Together, we can ensure that hospice care lives on – for all, for now, forever.

With warmest wishes,

Helen Bennett

Helen Bennett, FCIPD
Chief Executive Officer

We care about your care

From 1st January to 30th June 2025 we received 338 reviews through I want Great Care, this is what **YOU** told us about **YOUR** experience with Pilgrims.

✓ **98.8%**
had a positive
experience with us.

On average we scored
4.92 out of five stars.
★★★★★



Canterbury hospice modernisation

In the previous edition of Pilgrims Matters, we announced an important development for Pilgrims Hospices: our plans to modernise the Canterbury site at London Road.

This initiative marks a significant milestone in our journey to secure the future of hospice care in east Kent. As our Chief Executive, Helen Bennett, shared:

“Whilst the care provided is second to none, we want and need to provide more modern facilities for all our patients and their loved ones. Our current Canterbury site buildings are ageing and disconnected, making day-to-day work more difficult and limiting the spaces where teams can collaborate and support one another.

Modernising London Road will not only transform our current facilities, it will also ensure that Pilgrims Hospices’ extraordinary legacy continues to thrive on the very site where our founder, Ann Robertson, began her vision over 40 years ago.”

Since our announcement, in March, we’ve already made encouraging progress. We’ve appointed a talented team of architects and construction professionals, who

have experience of designing and building hospices; we’ve engaged our dedicated staff in a series of workshops to help shape the vision for the future. These sessions have been invaluable in ensuring that the voices of those who deliver care every day are central to the development of our plans.

We’ve also taken the first formal steps by submitting initial ideas to Canterbury City Council. These early proposals reflect our commitment to creating a space that is welcoming, sustainable, and fit for the future needs of our community.

A Lasting Impact for Our Community

The modernisation of our Canterbury site is not just about bricks and mortar—it’s about people, in particular about ensuring that our patients and their families continue to receive compassionate, expert care in surroundings that are comfortable and feel like home.

By creating a more accessible and inclusive environment, our aim is to strengthen our connections with our local community, volunteers, healthcare professionals, and supporters.

Our mission is to make a difference to the lives of individuals in east Kent who are approaching the end of their life. We believe that modernising our Canterbury hospice will do just that, ensuring that everyone who needs us has access to specialist end-of-life care. The modernisation of our Canterbury site is a vital step toward making that vision a reality.

As our plans continue to evolve, we will share them with you. We are incredibly grateful for the ongoing support of everyone in our local community, and we look forward to working together to ensure that Pilgrims Hospices is here for every patient, every family, every time they need us.

[Read full article online](#)

Making a difference to the lives of our Lottery members and those who need us

We have had a busy few months here at Pilgrims Hospices Lottery, making a difference to the lives of our Lottery members and those who need us.

We have welcomed a new volunteer to our team: – Teresa is on board and helping us out with our mail drop, raising awareness and funds for Pilgrims Hospices. Teresa has had a fantastic start in the Deal area having popped thousands of leaflets through doors already! Thank you Teresa and thank you to all of our wonderful Volunteers for all you do, in the words of our Chief Executive Helen Bennet “Their compassion, time, and unwavering commitment are deeply appreciated. Their dedication plays a central role in making Pilgrims Hospices the warm, caring, and supportive environment it is. We simply couldn’t deliver the high quality and compassionate care we’re known for without our volunteers”.

A winning combination

Our £20,000 rollover winner Mary won our jackpot on her birthday!

Mary who was sadly diagnosed with a rare form cancer “Invasive Lobular breast cancer” earlier in the year and has recently undergone surgery said “I was bowled over by the news of my £20K win – on my birthday! It took me a few days for it to even sink in but it has come at a really helpful time. I so appreciate having won....wow!”

A long association with Pilgrims Hospices Mary’s late Mother Pamela volunteered for Pilgrims Hospices at both our Canterbury and Ashford Hospices for many years and we are extremely grateful to both ladies for all of their kind and generous support. I am pleased to say that at the time of writing this Mary had just been given the good news that her cancer hadn’t spread.

In the last year with our wide reach, broad appeal and with the help from our dedicated team and super supporters; we have gained 4096 new entries to our weekly draw, raised more than £1.2 million and sent out over 5,500 winners cheques. Of course, we are all winners when you play our Lottery. A local charity touching lives across the country. Our winners map tells its own story.

Don’t miss your chance to win and make a difference. Join today, win big, change lives.



It’s easy,

call us **01227 379741**, go on line www.pilgrimshospices.org/lottery, complete the form and send back to us in the pre-paid envelope provided or simply scan the QR code



SCAN HERE

Don’t forget

“Make Christmas Special”

this year, send in your Superdraw 2025 entries today, make a difference and beat last years incredible **£75k raised** from our Superdraw 2024.



With Warm Wishes and Seasons Greetings

Shiralee

Shiralee and the Pilgrims Lottery Team

[Find out more here](#)



THIS IS HOSPICE CARE



A 1% residuary gift to
Pilgrims Hospices of

£3,345.70

£87.50

provided complimentary teas and coffees to visitors at all three hospices for a month

£694

helped a Palliative Specialist Community Nurse make all her home visits throughout the year

£744

kept our three hospice buildings warm and lit for 24 hours

£1,006

gave one patient a restful night's stay at the hospice

£60

provided nutritious, tasty meals to a patient during their stay with us

£229.20

helped one person make the most of their time left at 12 Living Well sessions in the Therapy Centre

£525

helped our on-site laundries wash and dry bedding, towels and uniforms for a week

It's everything you'd expect,
and everything you wouldn't



Our head chef preparing that one dish you've always wanted to try



A favourite evening tipple from the drinks trolley



A bedside visit from your furry friends



Handmade knitted quilts providing a bit of home comfort



Festive decorations bringing joy & sparkle

Help it live on with a gift in your Will

Gifts in
Wills

To find out more about leaving a gift in your Will, visit pilgrimshospices.org/will, or speak to our Gifts in Wills Team on 01227 782060 or via giftsinwills@pilgrimshospices.org



"I always imagined hospices were marvellous places but until I experienced it myself, I didn't know just how exceptional everything and everyone would be."

My Dad was a true Londoner. His voice could fill a room, and so could his warmth. He proudly inherited the family picture-frame making business 'Mann & Sons' and in his later years, he moved to Kent finding comfort in the slower pace and sea air.

After Dad had his stroke, it was heart-breaking to see someone who had always been so strong become so vulnerable. As his final days approached, he told me that he wanted to die at home, but he needed too much attention. In the end, I feel very grateful that he ended up in the care of the Thanet Hospice. From the moment we came through the door, I knew we were in fantastic hands.

"The small things will always stay with me: the hand-knitted quilts, the radio that appeared in his room after I mentioned his love of listening to it, and his nurses taking the time to attach rollers to Dad's bed so we could share his final sunset, holding hands as the sky turned red."

These thoughtful touches, to me, show the true meaning of care – acts of decency, kindness and generosity given for nothing in return.

Twelve hours later, he lapsed into unconsciousness and I slept in a chair beside his bed until he passed and afterwards helped the nurses bathe and dress him. Their compassion and respect was astonishing. After they'd taken him away, they handed me an envelope containing a hand-knitted heart and a poem. I still have them both.

"Leaving a gift to them in my Will is my way of saying one final thank you, in memory of my Dad and with deep gratitude for all they did for us both."



My Dad has been gone close to 3 years now, passing away at 80. When people say he had a good life – and he really did – it doesn't lessen the loss. Keeping his memory alive is so important to me, and seeing his name on the Memory Tree touches me. I wanted to support Pilgrims yearly, and it's such a wonderful way to do so, on a beautiful installation where his memory is kept alive.

I will never be able to repay Pilgrims Hospices for everything they did – they care for the people sitting around the bed as much as the person lying in it.

For more information

For more information about the Memory Trees, and to dedicate a leaf or dove to your loved one, visit pilgrimshospices.org/memorytree, or call Ellie Plews on 01227 782066.

Read full article online



Putting patients first: how data is shaping better care at Pilgrims

At Pilgrims Hospices, every patient matters. But how do we make sure that care is always tailored to the individual? The answer might surprise you – it starts with listening, and it's powered by data.

We spoke to Dr Pia Amsler, Pilgrims' Medical Director, and Aaron Salter, our Business Intelligence Lead, to find out how their partnership is helping us understand and improve the experience of people in our care.

What matters most to our patients and their families?

That's one of the first questions we now ask patients – and it's at the heart of an innovative approach that's helping Pilgrims ensure that the patient at the centre of everything we do.

"This isn't just about symptoms or checklists," Pia explains. "It's about understanding what is most important to each individual person at that moment in their life. That's what helps us create meaningful care plans and support people in the ways that matter most."

With Pia's clinical leadership and Aaron's technical expertise, Pilgrims has introduced and further developed a series of outcomes measurement tools that gather insights from patients and also their families or care givers throughout their time with us – whether they're staying in one of our hospice wards or receiving support at home.

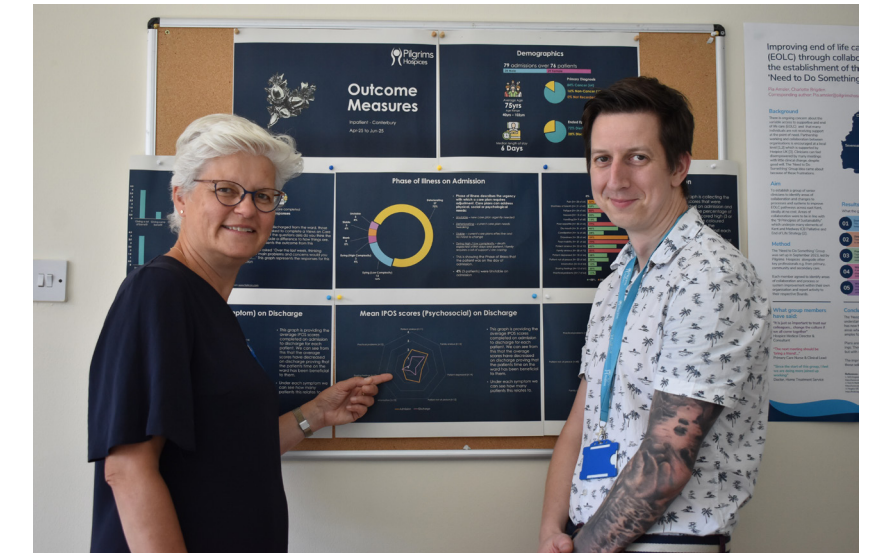
The power of patient voices

"We ask every patient three simple questions," says Pia. "What is important to you? What matters most right now? And what have been your most pressing concerns over the last few days?"

Their answers are recorded and become part of their care plan. Over time, the changes in these responses help us understand the impact of our care – not just physically, but also addressing emotional, social, practical and spiritual domains.

For Aaron, it's about turning those insights into action.

"We collect and analyse all of this information and create easy-to-understand reports," he says. "These help our teams reflect, adapt, and improve. We're now able to track how a patient is feeling when they come to us – and how they feel after receiving our support. It's incredibly rewarding to see those changes and know our care is making a real difference."



One example is the use of "radar charts" – visual charts that map how a patient's concerns are changing across different areas of wellbeing. "We can see real-world improvements," says Aaron. "It's amazing when data drives change."

Wider impact beyond Pilgrims

"We're also now able to share this insight with our sister hospices," adds Aaron. "That means the data we're collecting isn't just improving care here – it's contributing to a much bigger picture, helping shape and enhance services across the whole sector."

Changing culture, shaping services

This new approach has sparked a wider cultural shift across Pilgrims. From nurses and healthcare assistants to social workers, therapists, and spiritual care staff, everyone has a voice.

A group of staff known as the Champion Group, has been instrumental in shaping how outcome data is used and shared. They've helped trial and enhance new tools, voted on how to improve reporting, and made sure every role is represented.

"It's truly democratic," says Pia. "It's not just about the voices of a few – it's about every part of our team working together to improve the journey for every patient."

"In the end," says Pia, "this is about making our strategy a reality – delivering care that's genuinely person-centred. When we understand people's goals, their fears, and their hopes, we can offer care that feels personal, compassionate, and right."

[Read full article online](#)



Pilgrims Hospices' eco-friendly tree recycling campaign

A Tree-mendous Recycling Initiative

Each January, many Christmas trees head to landfills once the festive season comes to an end. But thanks to our annual Tree Recycling campaign, this doesn't have to be the case. Each year thousands of Pilgrims supporters recycle their Christmas trees, helping to reduce their environmental impact and raise vital funds for local hospice care.

The Tree Recycling campaign began over 13 years ago in the Ashford Borough Council area, thanks to a group of dedicated hospice volunteers, who are still pivotal in supporting the Ashford campaign today. Then in 2022, the charity 'branched' out to cover Canterbury City Council and Thanet District Council areas; as well as hosting a drop-off station in Faversham with 'tree-rific' success.

Since its inception, the charity have collected over 20,000 trees, raised more than £368,000, and prevented over 320 tonnes of CO₂e from entering the atmosphere.

In 2025, the campaign raised a staggering £78,000, directly supporting patients and their families across east Kent. These funds are raised simply by registering your tree and making a donation online. So, you can 'leaf' the hard work to our wonderful team of Pilgrims elves who collect and recycle your real Christmas trees.

A Greener Way to Give

This incredible impact wouldn't be possible without the continued support of our local communities and volunteers, whose bright idea 'grew' into a campaign that has more than 75 volunteers involved each year, helping to raise vital funds ensuring we can be there for those who need us.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of local businesses and volunteers who donate their time, vehicles and facilities, in 2025 we were able to collect over 4,200 Christmas trees, preventing more than 67 tonnes of CO₂e from entering the atmosphere. Instead of going to a landfill and releasing harmful methane, the trees are chipped and

repurposed into mulch or compost-eco-friendly by-products that break down slowly and sustainably. A 'tree-rific' example of community collaboration for a shared environmental and social goal.

The Second Life of Christmas Trees

Our collections are carefully planned using digital mapping software, allowing us to design the most efficient routes. This reduces travel distances, maximises household collections, and lowers our overall carbon footprint. Once collected, trees are taken to our Canterbury or Thanet hospice sites, where they're chipped and repurposed for environmental landscaping across east Kent. Some of the chippings are even used within our own hospice grounds, while others are donated to local composting projects or animal rescue centres, giving your tree a second life in the most sustainable way. Every tree continues to do good long after the decorations come down. It's a simple act with a powerful impact.

[Read full article online](#)

2026 Tree Recycling Campaign

Mark your calendars! Pilgrims Hospices' much-loved campaign returns in January 2026:

- **Canterbury & Thanet:** Friday 9th – Monday 12th January
- **Ashford:** Saturday 10th – Sunday 11th January

Online bookings will open via the Pilgrims Hospices website from October 2025. All bookings will close on 5th January 2026, the twelfth and final day of

the Christmas season (unless maximum capacity is reached earlier).

Supporters can register their tree for collection in exchange for a donation of their choice. Our dedicated teams of volunteer 'elves', full of festive spirit, will be out in vans collecting trees across all three hospice areas.

By recycling your Christmas tree with Pilgrims, you'll be doing more than just clearing out the old for the New Year.

2025-26 Events

● Special ● Running ● Hiking

Ashford Christmas Fair Saturday 22 November



This festive season there will be stalls brimming with seasonal crafts, gifts, delicious refreshments, entertainment and games for all the family. Whether you're looking for the perfect present or simply want to get in the Christmas spirit by soaking up the festive music, there's something for everyone.

Location:
Grosvenor Hall, Ashford

Entry:
£3

Registration:
Please visit the website for more information.

Contact:
Ashford Fundraising Team

Trees of Love Saturday 6 December

Dedicate a dove to remember someone special this festive season. Then, join us for a remembrance service with carols, mulled wine and mince pies at our hospices and other venues across east Kent.

Location:
Hospice sites

Contact:
Individual Giving

Christmas Tree Recycling 2026 9-12 January 2026

Every tree that is collected in Ashford, Canterbury or Thanet, will help to care for people facing an incurable illness in our community.

Location:
All addresses within the Canterbury City Council, Thanet District Council and Ashford Borough Council areas.

Registration:
Bookings can be made with a chosen donation

Contact:
Events Team

Santas on the Run Sunday 14 December



Celebrate the countdown to Christmas by joining the jolliest jog of the year! Choose from a 3k, 5k or 10k challenge along the scenic Herne Bay seafront. It's the perfect way to step into the ho, ho, holiday spirit and raise money for a good Claus!

Location:
Herne Bay Clocktower, CT6 5JQ

Registration:
Early bird entry (closes 10 Nov)
Adults: £15, Under 18s: £10, Family Ticket: £40

Standard entry (closes 5 Dec)
Adults: £18, Under 18s: £12, Family Ticket: £50

On the day entry
Adults: £25, Under 18s: £15, Family Ticket: £70 Note: Under 3s go free.

Sponsorship:
As much as you can!

Contact:
Canterbury Fundraising Team

Everest Base Camp Challenge Saturday 7 – Sunday 22 March 2026



NEW – A bucket list challenge beyond borders. Pilgrims Hospices will be taking a group of keen adventurers to reach the base camp of the greatest mountain on earth, Mount Everest. Follow the path of many pilgrims before us. This is a pilgrimage to top all others!

Location:
Nepal

Registration:
£395 registration fee, with a final balance of £3,495 for a twin room adventure package (other limited options available)

Sponsorship:
You must pledge to fundraise a minimum of £750

Contact:
Events Team

Future dates for your diary:

Cycle Challenge 2026

Sunday 3 May 2026 Routes across east Kent

Pilgrims Way Challenge 2026

Saturday 20 June 2026 Routes across east Kent

Want to register?

Need some help? If you would like to register your interest in an event, fundraise or help in another way, visit pilgrimshospices.org or email fundraising@pilgrimshospices.org

Got a question?

Don't hesitate to contact our friendly team! 01227 782062

Please note: all events will launch on the website closer to the time of the event. Please visit: pilgrimshospices.org/events

[Get involved here](#)

Fiona's Kilimanjaro Challenge Raises Thousands for Pilgrims Hospices

Ward Support Volunteer Fiona Dobson takes on the challenge of a lifetime



At 62, Fiona Dobson from Canterbury proved she's no stranger to a challenge when she successfully climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in June 2025, raising an incredible £5,300 for Pilgrims Hospices, where she volunteers as a Ward Support Volunteer.

"I paid for the trip myself because I didn't want any of the fundraising to go towards costs – I wanted every penny raised to support the care Pilgrims offers," Fiona said.

Fiona's connection to Pilgrims spans nearly 40 years. She began her nursing career at the hospice in 1986 and has worked as a district nurse, practice nurse, and still does freelance vaccination work.

"I started my career here, and I'd like to finish it here too. Volunteering on the ward once a week means a lot – it's special. I love it."

Fiona has experienced the value of hospice care personally, having lost her dad at Pilgrims, a close friend, and her husband's brother more recently.

"It's more than the beds – it's the support for families, friends, and the counselling. That makes all the difference."

An experienced hillwalker, Fiona had already tackled the

Yorkshire Three Peaks, parts of the Alps and Pyrenees, and over 50 Scottish "Fionas" – lesser-known peaks once called Grahams – plus several Munros and Corbetts.

"There are often no paths on the Fionas – it's rough terrain, but that's what I love. Kilimanjaro took it to a new level."

She trained hard for the challenge, running the Kent Downs, doing yoga, gym sessions, and cycling events – including Pilgrims' Cycle Challenge.

"I did the 50-mile route a few weeks before the climb. It was windy – one of the toughest yet! I only recently found out a photo of me from the 2017 event is on a Pilgrims van!"

Now retired and with two grown-up children, Fiona enjoys walking her dogs on the White Cliffs and embracing new adventures. She completed the Kilimanjaro trek with a friend, as part of a group of 20, capturing the experience through photos.

"It was life-changing. I made new friends, and most importantly, it was all for Pilgrims. It's a brilliant place and I'm proud to support it however I can."

Feeling inspired?

If Fiona's story has sparked your sense of adventure, why not join our next incredible challenge – the Pilgrims Hospices Everest Base Camp Trek in 2026? You'll follow in the footsteps of great mountaineers on a breathtaking 16-day journey through the Himalayas, including an 11-day trek to the iconic Everest Base Camp. Led by an experienced UK Mountain Leader and supported by local experts, this is a pilgrimage to top all others. From spectacular sunrises over the snow-capped peaks to gazing up at the mighty summit from Kala Patthar, it's the adventure of a lifetime – and you could be part of Team Pilgrims.

Find out more and register your interest at: www.pilgrimshospices.org/events

Find out how you can volunteer for Pilgrims Hospices: pilgrimshospices.org/volunteer

Read full article online



Refurbishment of the Ashford hospice family lounge

The family lounges at the hospice sites provide a space for patients and their friends and family to spend time away from their bedside, in a calm and relaxing environment. With the support of a number of Trusts, businesses and community groups, we were able to completely update this space so it can be enjoyed by patients and their loved ones.

Before the renovation, the room was dark and had little natural light, the furniture was tired and the décor needed a refresh. The lounge is now a comfortable and welcoming space to be enjoyed in a variety of ways.

Thank you for the kind support of:

- B&Q Foundation
- Green Hall Foundation
- The Community of the Presentation Trust
- BOB Connections, Canterbury
- Ashford Invicta Masons

Amazon Wishlist

The Pilgrims Amazon Wishlist has been carefully put together by staff from all departments across our three hospice sites, containing items that will help us to deliver our services. From arts and crafts used in Time to Create sessions to hand casting kits used in memory making activities, your donation will help us to support patients and their families.



Scan the QR code to view our Wishlist.



Read full article online

Sustainable Giving

The business community across east Kent support Pilgrims in many ways, from charity of the year partnerships to organising events to raise funds. This year, Pilgrims has been generously supported by the team from Folkestone based construction company, AW Group who have donated hundreds of pounds worth of materials, which would otherwise go to waste.

We have received timber to help revamp our nurses station, strip lighting and glass panels to be used in our retail shops and much more. Most recently, our maintenance team at the Canterbury hospice were able to construct a lockable store room from donated timber and a new flooring from vinyl tiles.

Thank you to the team at AW Group, who have chosen to support Pilgrims as their charity of the year for 2025. They recently raised £5,255 by cycling from Folkestone to Paris and taking part in the Pilgrims Way Challenge.



If your business would like to support Pilgrims Hospices, please contact Leila from our corporate partnerships team to find out more.

Email: Leila.ilkhan@pilgrimshospices.org

Michael:

“Pilgrims care makes me feel at ease”



Michael Taylor was diagnosed with liver cancer in 2015. He exceeded his 5-year prognosis, and continues to live well at home in Herne Bay with support from Pilgrims Hospices.

[Read full article online](#)

Born in Bromley, Michael was raised by his mother, Winifred, and many doting family members. His father, John James Taylor, was a firefighter, but sadly died aged 28, when Michael was three days old. After marrying his wife, Brenda, the couple moved to Faversham and started their family – Helen, Paul, who sadly died of cot death aged 14 months, and Rachel – and now have five grandchildren.

Michael was referred to Pilgrims in 2021 and attended Time to Create, therapeutic art groups that run at the Therapy Centres on each hospice site, offering relief from the challenges of living with a terminal illness. By then, Brenda had Alzheimer’s disease, but she was able to accompany Michael to the groups.

Michael said: “The Pilgrims team was extremely good; they chatted with Brenda while I got on and did my own thing. I enjoyed it very much. The food was so lovely too, beautiful! Especially the cheese omelettes. We attended for quite a long time, but it eventually got too much for Brenda, so I stopped for a few years.”

Michael enjoyed a career as an architectural technician. Initially working in London and Kent, he eventually ran his own practice – Rowlett and Taylor – in Broadstairs with his colleague, Malcolm. He continued to draw, paint and build models into his retirement, so Time to Create appealed to his artistic flair. He credits Pilgrims with getting him back into his creative hobbies:

“After Brenda went into a nursing home, I had a phone call from Elizabeth in the Pilgrims Wellbeing team asking if I’d like to re-join Time to Create. Pilgrims provided a taxi for me, which was amazing. I hadn’t done any art or drawing, hadn’t touched a paintbrush or pencil, since I’d stopped going. Making art at Pilgrims again got me completely turned around. I’m a bit of a loner, so I had been sitting in a chair for two years doing absolutely nothing, and now I can’t stop painting and drawing!”

Michael has been so well supported that he no longer feels he needs to attend Wellbeing groups, as Pilgrims has enabled him to live comfortably at home. He now plans to attend his local Age UK group, which offers the chance to socialise with others.

Michael continues to paint and draw, and recently sketched Herne Bay train station.

Although Michael doesn’t feel he needs Pilgrims now, he knows he can access their support in the future:

“I’m not worried about death (can’t say I’m looking forward to it or wishing it was tomorrow!), but it doesn’t bother me because I have a strong Christian faith. I feel at ease, because if my health deteriorates, I can go back into Pilgrims’ care. Everybody I’ve met at Pilgrims is so kind – from the receptionists, to the catering and care teams, and everyone in between. They always make the time to talk to me, even if they’re rushed off their feet.

“I would say to anybody in my situation – who is lonely and has lost interest – to ask Pilgrims about their Wellbeing groups, because I have found them really worthwhile. They get you out of yourself, and I’m so grateful to Pilgrims for getting me involved.”

For more information on Pilgrims Hospices’ Wellbeing Programme:

- Visit pilgrimshospices.org/wellbeing
- Email wellbeing.enquiries@pilgrimshospices.org
- Call the Pilgrims Hospices Advice Line on **01233 504 133**

Each year, Pilgrims Hospices care for thousands of people across east Kent, with services provided from its three hospice sites in Ashford, Canterbury, and Thanet, as well as in patients’ own homes. It costs over £17.2 million annually to run these services, much of which comes from the generous support of the local community.

Who will you dedicate a dove to?

This December, we warmly invite you to join us for **Trees of Love**, the largest remembrance in east Kent.

Dedicate a dove in memory of your loved one to be placed on the trees and come together at the hospices, or in the local community, to enjoy festive carols and refreshments, and reflect on treasured memories.

Pilgrims Hospices at Canterbury, Thanet and Ashford Saturday 6 December, 4pm

To take part, visit pilgrimshospices.org/treesoflove, or contact our friendly Supporter Relations Team on **01227 782062**

Invites to follow in early October

Firmager, St Nicholas Church, Church Lane, New Romney, Sunday 6 December, 3pm

All Souls Church, Cheriton High Street, Cheriton, Sunday 7 December, 5pm

St Leonards Church, Oak Walk, Hythe, Sunday 14 December, 3pm

St Alphege Church, High Street, Whitstable, Sunday 14 December, 4pm

St Peter and St Paul Church, Minnis Lane, River, Dover, Sunday 14 December, 4pm

Charing Crematorium, New Court Wood, Charing, Tuesday 16 December, 4pm

Barham Crematorium, Canterbury Road, Barham, Wednesday 17 December, 5pm

Herne Bay Crematorium, Bullockstone Road, Herne Bay, Friday 19 December, 6pm

St Luke’s Church, Hollicondane Road, Ramsgate, Saturday 20 December, 6:30pm

Jade and her grandparents, Viv and Bill



My Nan, Viv, was the heart of our family

A devoted wife, a loving Mum and a proud Nan. She made every birthday special with homemade cakes, and every holiday memorable, whether it was abroad or a week at Butlins.

Nan was a teaching assistant for over 30 years, and was so generous with her time to students and colleagues – always with kind words and on standby for a cuddle.

When Nan was diagnosed with cancer, we knew we needed an extra helping hand. Our collective fears were put to ease when we were introduced to Pilgrims. She felt so comfortable, and at peace, with the Hospice at Home team. They made her smile and giggle when some days felt darker than others.

My Grandad suffered a stroke in 2022 leaving him bed bound, and Nan’s nurses made sure their beds were pushed together so they could fall asleep holding hands, just like they used to. It was those little things that brought a lot of comfort.

Pilgrims’ care extended to us all, I received Bereavement Counselling to help me process

everything after Nan’s passing in September 2024. It was when I was waiting for one of the sessions that I saw the leaflet for Trees of Love and I knew I wanted to dedicate a Dove in memory of my Nan and for my Mum and Father in Law who also sadly passed that year, with support from Pilgrims in their final days.

Trees of Love helped make our first Christmas without our loved ones feel that little bit more special. The service was so calming, reminding me of Nan, and it was a comfort to see our doves lit up on the tree.

Our family will forever be grateful to Pilgrims Hospices for everything. Supporting them at such a special time of year makes it all the more meaningful. Will you join me?

Jade x
(Granddaughter of Viv)

[Read full article online](#)

Dead Good Artists exhibition gives new life to local artwork

During January-April 2025, Pilgrims Hospices collaborated with The Wooden Box Gallery in Ramsgate to develop Dead Good Artists, an exhibition of artwork by people who have died, and the stories behind it.

This was part of Pilgrims' Compassionate Communities project, working with local communities to encourage more open discussions about death, dying, loss and grief.

People often leave their creative work behind when they die. These legacies can bring comfort and joy to their loved ones. For others, the responsibility of taking care of these memories may not be so easy.

Dead Good Artists invited anyone who has become a custodian of a loved one's artwork to share it for inclusion in a gallery setting, giving it new life. It offered an opportunity to honour and share these personal creations, recognising the individuals behind them – those who are no longer with us.

Exhibitors were invited to attend one of two workshops facilitated by Pilgrims team members, where together they were encouraged to reflect on the profound responsibility of becoming the custodian of someone's artistic legacy, exploring both the joys and challenges of preserving and carrying forward their creative spirit.

Mark and Jacky Ogilvie from Ashford submitted work by their daughter, Elspeth, who was cared for at Pilgrims Hospice Ashford and died in December 2024.

They said: "As Elspeth died very recently, this exhibition is helping us with grieving her loss. The simple acts of writing a short bio, choosing a photo, selecting and mounting her work, and taking it into the gallery, have been emotionally challenging. But it also feels helpful.

"Elspeth enjoyed participating in Time to Create therapeutic art groups at the Ashford hospice. She never thought her work was "good enough", so it's lovely to see it exhibited in the company of others', and to hear that people are interested. It's been so nice doing something positive in Elspeth's memory; this is part of her legacy."

Another exhibitor said:

"When I saw the callout for the exhibition, I immediately knew that I'd like to submit a piece of my grandfather's art. He constantly drew and created out of nothing; he'd use the back of a cornflakes box or whatever was laying in the kitchen, and a real mix of media, to create these intricate pieces. It wasn't as though he could earn his living through art, and it actually means quite a lot to the whole family that he's now hanging on a gallery wall."

Visitors enjoyed the exhibition, too: "Very moving. I would like to see this theme return; the accompanying texts are lovely and help the work to come alive."

Rebekah Sunshine, owner of The Wooden Box Gallery, added:

"I knew it was something that was really needed, but I didn't quite realise how it was going to impact people. It's been amazing and moving. It was lovely to work with so many different people, hearing their family's stories and bringing their loved ones back into our reality to talk about them. I'm so



happy that lots of family members had the opportunity to have their loved ones' artwork on the wall, especially as they may not have done that when they were alive – it's a really proud moment for them. Pilgrims has been so supportive, especially with organising and facilitating the workshops for our exhibitors."

Sophie Van Walwyk, Compassionate Communities lead at Pilgrims Hospices, said:

"The Dead Good Artists exhibition was such a wonderful way to celebrate the lives and works of so many talented individuals, who are sadly no longer with us. To help support exhibitors through their ongoing grief journey, Pilgrims created a safe space that encouraged reflection on both the beauty and burden of custodianship together. Learning more about the impact of both the artist's life and death, brought a deeper level of meaning to each piece of art."

[Read full article online](#)

To find out more about Pilgrims Compassionate Communities work, or if you would like to become involved in creating a compassionate community across east Kent, please visit pilgrimshospices.org/compassionate-communities



Christmas Cards 2025

Order online at pilgrimshospiceshop.co.uk



1. Ramsay
Happy Christmas



2. The Long Journey
Best Wishes at Christmas



3. Burgundy Wreath
Best Wishes at Christmas



4. Hello Teddy
Happy Christmas



5. Red Brick Christmas
A Very Merry Christmas



6. Camper Van Christmas
Best Wishes at Christmas



7. Canterbury in Winter
With every good wish for Christmas and a Happy New Year



8. Kent in Winter
With every good wish for Christmas and a Happy New Year



9. Deal in Winter
With every good wish for Christmas and a Happy New Year



10. Tenterden in Winter
With every good wish for Christmas and a Happy New Year



11. Twin Pack 2
Hoe Hoe Hoe & Four Candles
Happy Christmas



12. Twin Pack 3
Sleightime Santa & Scooter Santa
A Very Merry Christmas



13. Twin Pack 3
Robins Gate & Jingle all the Way
Best Wishes at Christmas



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20 assorted cards
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4. Hello Teddy, 125 x 125mm, £3.50			15. Bumper Pack. 20 assorted cards, £5.00		
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There is more merchandise available at the three Pilgrims Hospices sites in Canterbury, Thanet and Ashford. Please go to our website at pilgrimshospices.org for details.

Kiren Vyas: From Pharmacy to Pilgrims' Walk and Talk Volunteer

For Kiren Vyas, caring for people is more than a profession – it's a life philosophy rooted in lived experience, cultural values, and deep empathy.

With a career in pharmacy spanning over 30 years, Kiren has always focused on improving quality of life through medicine and people-centred care. Today, he shares that same compassion as a volunteer for Pilgrims Hospices' Stepping Stones bereavement support programme, co-facilitating Walk and Talk groups across east Kent.

Born in Uganda to Indian parents, Kiren and his family were forced to flee the country during the 1972 expulsion of Asians under Idi Amin's regime. "My mum was visiting the UK at the time, and my dad called to say we weren't going back. We had nothing – no home, no money – and had to start again." After a few years in London, the family settled in South Wales, running a corner shop in the Rhondda Valley. "We experienced racism and hardship, but those early struggles shaped me. They taught me the importance of resilience, kindness, and community."



These values were nurtured further by Kiren's Hindu upbringing and close-knit family. "My father and Mum always stressed the importance of treating others with dignity and supporting one another – something I still carry and instil in my own family today."

After studying pharmacy at Bradford and earning a PhD in Cardiff, Kiren developed a broad and accomplished career in the pharmaceutical industry in drug product development and commercial manufacture in various therapeutic areas including HIV, cardiology, respiratory and oncology.

In 2019, he was selected for GSK's prestigious PULSE programme, spending six months with Save the Children which included supporting activities in Kenya.



"It was a turning point – returning to East Africa reminded me of where I came from and why people-focused work is so important."

In 2020, Kiren's father died in hospice care, an experience that stayed with him. "The staff at St Christopher's supported Dad and our whole family with such dignity and care. It was unforgettable and inspired me to give something back to the community and volunteer."

Kiren has been living in Canterbury since 1998 and is currently working as a pharmaceutical consultant. Kiren gives his time to Pilgrims' Stepping Stones Walk and Talk group.

"We walk, we talk, we listen. Whether we're discussing running, fishing, computing or knitting or understanding the grief, the friendships formed between individuals are real and lasting. We support each other."

Also, a passionate fundraiser, Kiren completed the Brighton Marathon for Pilgrims in 2024 and is training for the Manchester Marathon in 2026. "Volunteering gives me purpose. I've always believed that when we take care of others, we find connection – and meaning – for ourselves too."

For more information about bereavement support available or to access any of our services, please call us on **01233 504 127** or email steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org

[Read full article online](#)

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