

# OPENING DOORS

## Why our children's homes matter now more than ever

**Right now, more children than ever urgently need the safety and stability of a children's home.**

Across England, there are over **80,000 looked-after children**. These are children who have experienced trauma, instability and loss, and who depend on the care system to help them rebuild their lives.

But the system is under immense pressure.

More young people are being referred for support, often with increasingly complex needs. As a result, the demand for safe, stable, and nurturing homes has never been greater.

At St Christopher's, we believe children's homes must offer more than just a bed. They should be places where young people feel safe, valued, and hopeful about their future.



Our homes are built around **relationships, stability and evidence-based care**. Several are **highly regarded by Ofsted**, and one has received a **national**

**safeguarding award** - recognition of the skill, compassion and dedication of our teams.

Being taken into care and separated from all that is familiar is a profound, life-changing experience. Alongside essential care, safeguarding and therapeutic support, we also want every young person to experience moments of play, joy and genuine connection - the kind of experiences that help them feel safe again, rebuild trust and begin to rediscover who they are.

And we do not stop there.

We also help young people prepare for adulthood by building confidence, practical life skills and lasting support networks

that stay with them long after they leave our care. Because when children receive the right support at the right time, they do not just cope - they begin to heal, grow and start to believe in a brighter future.

In this edition of *Opening Doors*, you'll read stories that bring this to life - showing the extraordinary difference that care, consistency, and compassion can make.

The need for this kind of support has never been greater. That is why St Christopher's has ambitious plans to open more children's homes, so that more young people can grow up in safe, nurturing environments where their wellbeing comes first.

But we cannot do this alone.

**With your support, we can create more homes, more stability, and more chances for young people to heal, grow and thrive.**

Thank you for helping make that possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jonathan'.

**Jonathan Whalley**  
Chief Executive,  
St Christopher's



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# Our new children's home shaped by young voices opens

We're delighted to share some exciting news – St Christopher's has opened a brand-new children's home, created with care, ambition and the voices of young people at its heart.

From day one, young people helped shape this home into something truly special. From the colours on the walls to the feel of each room, their ideas and experiences have helped create a space where young people can feel safe, valued and proud to call it home. It's filled with warmth, personality, and thoughtful, welcoming details that will help young people feel they belong.

This new home has been developed to meet a growing need for high-quality care, especially for children with more complex needs. It will offer vital short-term support, helping young people rebuild their confidence, stay connected to their

communities, and move forward – whether that's returning to family life or stepping into foster care. Moments like this matter. Because every new home means more than just a roof over a child's head - it means stability, opportunity, and the chance to create happy memories.

This is a powerful example of what can be achieved when we listen, collaborate and stay focused on what young people need to thrive.



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## Growing together: nurturing wellbeing through nature

Last year, our Therapeutic Team launched a simple but powerful challenge for Mental Health Awareness Week: to plant and nurture sunflowers, encouraging young people to reflect on their own growth and wellbeing by caring for something new.

Across our homes, young people embraced the challenge – they watered, tended, and took pride in their plants as they grew from small seeds into bright, thriving sunflowers. Their dedication has paid off, with several plants still standing tall months later. Along the way, young people grew curious, involved and proud of what they helped nurture.

One young person shared: *“When I saw how much it had grown, it made me smile. It reminded me that things take time, but they do get better.”*

The project has also been supported by improvements to outdoor spaces, with one of our gardens transformed into a safe, welcoming area where young people now gather, relax, and continue building their gardening skills.

From planting seeds to nurturing wellbeing, this initiative reminds us that with patience, care, and the right support, young people grow, thrive and look forward to brighter days ahead.



# Big ideas, bright futures: young people pitch for success

In February, we hosted our very first *Build Your Brand* Event - an exciting, Dragon's Den-style event designed to help our young people turn their business ideas into real opportunities.

Young people collaborated with our teams to develop their ideas, build confidence and prepare their pitches. They didn't need a perfect business plan - just creativity, ambition and the courage to try.

On the day, participants pitched their ideas to a supportive panel of professionals from business, charity, and leadership backgrounds, alongside one of our ex-residents who now runs his own business. This created an inspiring atmosphere where young people felt heard, valued and respected.

The ideas shared were remarkably varied - from tech innovations to beauty startups - and the quality of pitches impressed everyone present. Two exceptional ideas were chosen for further support: a meal-planning app and a beauty startup.

All participants were recognised for their hard work, with the winning ideas receiving funding and one-to-one coaching to help bring them to life.

The *Build Your Brand* programme is helping young people step forward with confidence and turn their ideas into opportunities, building brighter futures for themselves.



## Looking back: volunteering with St Christopher's in the 1950s

By Michael Virtue, a supporter and former volunteer

"After leaving school and completing two years of National Service, I found myself living and working in London in the late 1950s. It was then that I was introduced to St Christopher's, which at the time ran four hostels across South London, each housing some 25-30 teenage boys.

Alongside a small group of fellow volunteers, I helped organise activities like football matches between hostels, boxing competitions, cross-country runs and more.

Some of my fondest memories are of the trips we organised. Each year, we would take a group away for outdoor adventures - whether that was a weekend at an activity centre or climbing Mount Snowdon. One particularly memorable Bank Holiday, we even managed to climb all three UK peaks in a single long weekend!

Those experiences built confidence, friendships and lasting memories - for the young people and for us as volunteers too. I'm still in touch with one of the friends I made during that time, and I remember with great fondness another, who sadly passed away recently.

They were happy days full of happy memories."

Did you volunteer for us during this time too? We'd love to hear from you! Please email [fundraising@stchris.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@stchris.org.uk) or call 0208 708 7800.



# Leave a lasting impact, leave a legacy

Leaving a gift in your will to St Christopher's isn't just a one-time act of generosity. It's a decision that will create lasting change for children and young people for generations to come.

To make it easier, we've partnered with Octopus Legacy, offering you the opportunity to write or update your will for **free**.

Ready to make a difference? Include St Christopher's in your will today. You'll help us keep providing support, skills, and stability so young people thrive. **What a legacy that would be.**

Making your will is simple:

- **Online:** Scan the QR code or visit [will.octopuslegacy.com/stchrisfellowship](https://will.octopuslegacy.com/stchrisfellowship)



- **By phone:** Call **020 4525 3605** and quote **STCHRISFREE** to complete your will over the phone or book an in-person appointment.

Thank you for considering a gift that will change young lives for years to come.



Already left us a gift in your will? Please let us know by emailing [fundraising@stchris.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@stchris.org.uk)

## We are St Christopher's

St Christopher's Fellowship has been helping children and young people for over 150 years. Though our services have changed over that time, our dedication to children and young people in care has never wavered. Neither has the commitment and generosity of our supporters.

We're still here because of you, and we would like to thank everyone who has supported us, cared for us, and enabled young people to build themselves a brighter future. We couldn't do it without you.



You can keep up to date with all the latest news from St Christopher's at [stchris.org.uk](https://stchris.org.uk)

Thank you so much for your support

**StCHRISTOPHER'S**  
**CREATING BRIGHTER**  
**FUTURES**

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