

CONNECTION, BELONGING AND BRIGHTER FUTURES

OUR AMBITIONS FOR 2026-2029



ellen
macarthur
cancer trust



“People stop showing up once you finish treatment because they think you’re all better. The Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust makes a massive difference because they’re always there.” – Rosa

WELCOME TO CONNECTION, BELONGING AND BRIGHTER FUTURES OUR AMBITIONS FOR 2026-2029



Today, 12 young people have been told they have cancer. Tomorrow there will be 12 more. And the day after that and the day after that.

Our purpose is clear: to give every one of these young people the springboard to believe in their brighter future after treatment ends. To build back the independence cancer has stripped away; the optimism to think about what’s next; and the acceptance that comes from realising you’re not the only one.

What we achieved through our 2023-25 Ambitions was game-changing. As a small charity, we became sector leaders in areas such as impact and equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging, while supporting our highest ever number of young people and our income weathering the economic storm.

Now we look ahead to the next four years with confidence and curiosity. We will build on the solid platform of the past three years, while continuing to ask the challenging questions that ensure the needs of young people always come first.

How do we create even deeper connections with and between young people and keep nurturing

a community where everyone feels they belong and can be their authentic selves? We will need to listen, learn, adapt, innovate and back ourselves.

The story of our impact – almost 3,700 young lives changed by the end of 2025 – is one to tell proudly, and by 2029 we want more young people to be experiencing that unique Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust magic every year.

This is what drives our Ambitions for 2026-29. To deliver...

- Connection and impact for more young people
- Stable and sustainable growth to do more
- The organisational foundations to achieve our Ambitions

The connections we build together over the next four years will shape young futures far beyond. Let’s make it happen, together.

Dame Ellen MacArthur

The last three years (2023-2025) –

HOW DID WE DO?

WE ACHIEVED MANY OF THE THINGS WE SET OUT TO DO...

Building belonging

Our first Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging Plan 2023-2026 provided the bedrock to addressing barriers to support and creating a safe community that celebrates everyone being their authentic self, while a new Racism and Discrimination reporting process is keeping us accountable.

Went further

Young people who need support beyond trips can now access free monthly online mental wellbeing support, delivered by youth cancer mental health charity Mind Over Cancer (October–May), alongside extended specialist one-to-one counselling for those with more acute needs.

Supported more

After the inevitable impact of the pandemic on our sailing and outdoor adventures, 2023-25 saw a return to pre-COVID levels of young people supported with more than 650 experiencing the life-changing magic of our trips in both 2024 and 2025.

Drove impact

Impact measurement using the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and a new real-time impact dashboard (ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org/impact) have been embedded in our work. Belonging is measured using ‘Recommendation to a friend’ scores, while impact data is also now captured for siblings.

Developed volunteers

Our first Volunteer Strategy strengthened recruitment, onboarding, allocation, retention and equity. There are now 400+ volunteers supporting trips, events and other activities. 168 volunteers and skippers were trained in Mental Health First Aid, and new RYA courses introduced to build sailing skills and increase impact.

Shaping the system

We teamed up with partners in the young people’s cancer sector on ground-breaking research into the ‘State of the System’, then joined the visionary North Star Cancer Collective, created to turn key report findings into system-shifting action (See p20-21).



BUT THERE IS STILL WORK TO DO...

Keep building belonging

Between 2022-25, the number of young people of colour on trips increased from 9% to 14%. But we have only scratched the surface of achieving real equity, with much more to learn and achieve to truly build belonging for all.

Green commitment

Progress was made in sustainability and making more green choices for trips and, as an organisation, we started understanding carbon measurement. Now we must use this to further help shape decisions to reduce our environmental impact.

Diversifying income

New income streams emerged in 2023-25, while investing in trust and foundations and philanthropy resource led to a 29% increase in income in these areas. Yet we have not reduced the reliance on one funder to the extent we hoped.

Evolving cancer landscape

COVID left a legacy in how and where young people are treated for cancer, with disparity across the UK. Understanding the national picture, and what it means for how we engage with young people, is a cornerstone of our 2026-29 Ambitions.

“There is much more to you than what you went through.”

Sophie

Diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin lymphoma aged 16.

After treatment is a difficult time. Your life has changed massively to a new normal, and you feel unsafe in your own body.

My friends didn't know what to say because they couldn't imagine themselves in my position, and that was a really difficult thing. My friends and I grew apart because of it.

But we are still the same people, we don't want to be treated differently. Our lives have been turned upside down by the diagnosis, so being treated the same, giving us that normality, is really helpful.

To be able to come sailing makes you realise how much more there is to the world than your cancer and how much more there is to you than what you went through. Everyone is on the same

wavelength. You don't have to worry about what to say.

At the barbecue, one of the boys went, 'okay, so what kind of cancer did everyone have?' So, we all started shouting what cancer we had, we got to see who had the same as us and got to talk about it. It was really fun to chat and not have to explain certain things people might not get, like PICC lines, Hickman lines, stuff like that.

It makes you realise that, despite everything you went through, you can do more than you could before. I had never sailed a boat; I would never have had the opportunity. Now I'm putting the mainsail up, putting out the boat's protective fenders, pulling ropes. I volunteered to do everything. I was like, pick me! It was so much fun.



SHAPING OUR AMBITIONS

Addressing the challenges we have

These Ambitions are shaped by more than six months of speaking and listening to the people who care most about the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust.

Our staff, volunteers, skippers, young people, hospital and charity partners and trustees, all were engaged and consulted as we bid to understand what we needed to consider in the four years from 2026-29.

What we heard led us to a set of four challenges; things we need to address and measure so we keep achieving our purpose – to inspire young people to believe in a brighter future living through and beyond cancer.

Our 2026-29 Ambitions are the way we will do this.

“My Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust experience was about rediscovering things. My passion, drive, and peace. Just sitting in front of a sunset for 10 minutes really clears your head.” – Tegan

MEASURED, SUSTAINABLE, PURPOSE-DRIVEN GROWTH

Between 2026 and 2029 we will consolidate, strengthen, and grow, and build on the solid foundations laid over the previous three years, particularly in impact, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging, and mental wellbeing support.

Growth will be guided by three interdependent factors – **money, demand and quality** – so financial health and operational capacity always move together.

All decision-making must be rooted in building belonging by design and lived experience, for which we will develop separate strategies to be accountable.

FROM CHALLENGE TO AMBITION

We have taken the four challenges (p9) and translated them into nine Ambitions that set out how we will address them.

These new Ambitions are a mix of new ways to approach emerging challenges and evolving established 2023-25 Ambitions.

They ensure the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust heads into the next decade more confident, equitable and connected than ever.

THE CHALLENGES WE NEED TO ADDRESS

CHALLENGE ONE

How do we meet young people and siblings where they are so every one who needs support can get it – now and by 2029?



CHALLENGE TWO

How do we deliver maximum impact at the right time for all young people living through and beyond cancer and their siblings?



CHALLENGE THREE

How do we grow income and build financial resilience to achieve the objectives of this business plan and beyond?



CHALLENGE FOUR

How do we grow the organisation in a way that is measured, sustainable and driven by our purpose?



BELONGING BY DESIGN AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging and lived experience will be at the heart of all our decisions.

OUR AMBITIONS FOR...

YOUNG PEOPLE AND SIBLINGS

Connection and impact
for more young people

“Being with people who had had the same experiences as I did was the first step towards emotionally healing for me.” – Timur



OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS WE WILL...

Know the need

Speak to all young people's post-cancer needs and realities, connecting and communicating in ways that remove barriers and says we 'get it'.

Nurture networks

Build and strengthen connections with current and new sector partners – charity and clinical – and explore other opportunities to meet young people where they are.

Drive impact

Ensure all our programmes – first time and return trips, siblings and year-round mental wellbeing support – achieve the greatest impact at the right time.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL...

Ask them

Understand and ensure all young people and families get what they need when they need it, to feel ready to say 'yes' to and then join their trip.

Develop pathways

Grow our expertise of the UK treatment landscape and be responsive to changes in treatment and regional variations to be where young people are.

Be brave

Review our programmes, using impact and other data to deliver the most relevant, meaningful and equitable experiences at the time they need it.

SUCCESS WILL MEAN WE ARE...

Reflecting society

Using key UK demographic and population indicators to ensure we are visible to and engaged with all young people living through and beyond cancer and their siblings.

Being transparent

Using our Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and Net Promoter scores to evaluate the wellbeing and belonging of the young people and siblings we support.

“The Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust gives you something to live for.”

Tadiwa

Diagnosed with Optic Pathway Glioma aged one.

I used to go to hospital in London. There were so many kids I would watch play and run around, just being normal. And I would wish I was there with them. I wished that would be me one day. I never thought I would get out of hospital.

Sometimes I go out and people automatically assume I'm blind because I have a cane. This stops me tripping over pavements, but people make a path through the aisles in shops. I don't really get why people make a big deal. It makes you feel different.

I'm not saying cancer is a good thing, but it has added something to my life. It happened, and now I've gone sailing, and it's made me feel free. It was exhilarating to drive the boat. I was actually driving a 45-foot yacht!

I've met people with the same pain, the same matching canes. I was feeling

down about having cancer, but seeing how other people have progressed, it's given me a better point of view. I've built all my confidence up.

When I was going through treatment, my face was really bad and I was very self-conscious. No one on my trips has ever focused on that.

And I've met people who also have friends who literally stepped back when we said we have brain tumours. Maybe our friends were just being scared, but knowing others have gone through the same feelings I've had is nice.

Sailing with the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust gives you a sense of meaning, something to live for. Something that gives you responsibility. So, once you're older and doing more things, you're prepared. You're ready.



OUR AMBITIONS FOR...

INCOME

Stable and sustainable growth to do more

“The Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust built my confidence and made me feel like what I’ve been through was almost a normal thing, rather than being the odd one out.” – Imogen



OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS WE WILL...

Diversify income

Continue to explore new and alternative income sources so no one body represents more than 30% of our overall funding by the end of 2029.

Grow loyalty

Retain and cultivate current supporters, maximise our existing database, develop prospect pipelines and grow our networks through strong relationships and smart data use.

Spend smart

Exercise sound financial management through making careful and conscious spending and organisational investment decisions that promote financial resilience.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL...

Be bold

Innovate through a ‘try and test’ approach to fundraising and explore new commercial opportunities beyond fundraising.

Cultivate and captivate

Deliver the level of quality stewardship and supporter experiences that build long-term commitment amongst our community and inspires new supporters to stay with us.

Manage reserves

Control costs and be rigorous in our budget forecasting and risk register reviews so, when balanced with income, there are always between 6-9 months’ reserves.

SUCCESS WILL MEAN WE ARE...

Seeing real income growth

We have budgeted for 15% income growth, to £1.99m, in 2029. But this is not a target; the more we raise the more young people can get our vital support.

Diversifying income

No one funder representing more than 30% of our overall funding by 2029.

Maintaining reserves

We remain within our target of always having 6–9 months reserves.

“I needed the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust to understand my own story.”

Edward

Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia aged two.

The NHS are brilliant because they get you past it all. But having been diagnosed when I was two, finishing treatment when I was seven, I was just too young to understand it.

I didn't know why, out of all my friends, I was the only person being taken out of school. So, I boxed my feelings up and didn't want to speak about it. Then around the ages of 13 to 15, I thought, 'this is too hard'. It was too much pent-up energy, anger, too many emotions to hold on to.

I remember my doctor recommending the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust. I just wanted to try and meet people to realise that it wasn't just me. I really needed a charity like this to understand my own story.

Being able to go along as a teenager, to meet people and realise I'm not the only one, has meant that instead of my diagnosis consuming my whole life, and being like a beach ball where I can't see past it, it's now like a little tennis ball and I can see everything past it.

Cancer has just become a part of my life, not the whole thing, and I've only been able to gain that feeling and belief through these trips.

Everyone I met on these trips, the young people and the staff, made me want to face my own challenges. It was a long road, but now I feel I'm in a place where I can give back.



OUR AMBITIONS FOR...

OURSELVES

The foundation to achieve our Ambitions

“Getting out there, being on the sea, it’s something I’d never done before. It’s really far out my comfort zone. I had more fun than I’d had in a long, long time.” – Lee



OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS WE WILL...

Be the best

Take pride in who we are and what we achieve as a confident, purpose-driven team and leaders in post-treatment support, enabled by digital excellence.

Keep the magic

Understand the special ‘Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust magic’ and ensure it remains at the heart as we grow and support more young people.

Think planet

Continue becoming a more environmentally conscious and sustainable organisation and further reduce the negative impact of our activities on the planet.

TO ACHIEVE THIS, WE WILL...

Champion excellence

Equip and inspire the team to successfully deliver the 2026-29 Ambitions while futureproofing our digital infrastructure and raising our national profile.

Build frontline impact

Invest in our seasonal team to keep building belonging, bridging generation gaps and supporting young people with a range of experiences and needs on all trips.

Stay committed

Measure our carbon emissions annually and explore ways to reduce our carbon footprint, while making environmentally informed decisions around things we can control.

SUCCESS WILL MEAN WE ARE...

Creating more opportunity

Increasing available trip spaces and percentage occupancy to achieve real growth in young people numbers by 2029.

A connected team

Maintaining a ‘meaning’ score of more than 85% in the annual employee engagement survey.

Being transparent

Using our Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and Net Promoter scores to evaluate the wellbeing and belonging of the young people and siblings we support.

SHARED VISION

Changing the system from the inside

As part of the North Star Cancer Collective, we are working with other sector leading charities to create change in the cancer care system. The vision? To improve long-term wellbeing for children, young people and their families, including siblings and bereaved families, who both have unique needs.

Informed by the co-commissioned **'State of the System'** report (Dartington Service Design Lab, 2024), the Collective is collaborating to bring structure, creativity and strategic direction to address the key challenges unearthed by the research.

North Star Cancer Collective Vision

“That every child and young person facing cancer receives care that’s tailored to them. They feel informed and in control, and along with their families can make knowledgeable decisions about their care and future.

“They feel empowered every step of the way, facing no gaps in support or barriers to access. They have everything they need from the beginning of their cancer journey, during treatment and for as long as they need it afterwards.”

Making our difference

'State of the System' has influenced our 2026-29 Ambitions in five key areas.

BE PART OF THE CHANGE



Find out more, use your experience and register for updates.

WELLBEING

The finding

Although young people and families report better wellbeing and quality of life than during treatment, wellbeing is still below that of the general population. There is little improvement with time – young people further from treatment reported only slightly better wellbeing than those who had just finished.

Our response

Our ongoing Ambition to 'Drive impact' is about knowing what we are getting right and what more we could do to improve wellbeing after treatment.



BELONGING

The finding

Young people from marginalised communities have even higher needs. At all points in their journey, young people and their families from marginalised backgrounds have worse wellbeing than the general UK population.

Our response

Although needs vary for different groups at different points, they were consistently higher for LGBT+ young people and young people of colour. This is why we must build belonging by design into all decisions we make across our charity.



SIBLINGS

The finding

Siblings of young people with cancer are often overlooked and under-served. They report higher needs, lower wellbeing, and notably higher anxiety than their peers.

Our response

Siblings rarely receive formal support or information specific to them, often take on caring responsibilities at a young age, and may experience challenges around bereavement. We have supported siblings since 2018, but for the first time, these Ambitions include a dedicated focus on their needs too.



ANXIETY

The finding

Young people who were treated for cancer have 36% higher anxiety than the rest of the population, and this remains true more than six years after treatment.

Our response

Our adventures make a positive difference to young lives, but they are just one week out of the year. Through our Ambitions to 'Know the need' and 'Drive impact' we will ensure young people have the mental health and wellbeing and year-round support they need too.



TIME

The finding

Young people's cancer-related needs tend to increase five to six years after treatment ends. Major life transitions can prompt young people to reflect on their experiences or bring about challenges in talking about their cancer and its ongoing impact.

Our response

Late effects can bring back trauma or trigger confusion in understanding their identity as someone who has had cancer. We must 'Drive impact' to make the biggest difference when it's needed most.



HELP US ACHIEVE OUR AMBITIONS

Do you know young people with cancer?

If you work with young people with cancer, or you know a young person who could benefit from our support, we would love to hear from you.

Visit ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org/our-trips

Can you help grow income?

What could you, your friends, family, colleagues or clubmates do to help transform the lives of more young people? Get inspired. Visit ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org/events-and-fundraising

Could you volunteer?

Use your professional expertise – from medical to sailing – tell your story or travel with young people to and from their trips, it all makes a huge difference. Visit ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org/volunteer-with-us

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE...

Visit our website at ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org



Follow @EMCTrust across social media



Call our team on 01983 297750





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