Foreword by Natalie

Hi, I’m Natalie. I’m 20 and I work for Break. But I also have another hat I wear - I am a care leaver.

I moved out of care when I was 17 which is slightly earlier than others. I was too young to go on the housing register, but I was able to get on Break’s Staying Close, Staying Connected service. They helped me find somewhere to live and I’m still there now with the addition of two cats! Break also supported me with driving lessons and insurance which has really helped me maintain my independence.

I came to work for Break through two internships which I had heard about from my transition worker, and thought I would apply. I didn’t expect to get both of them! But was really happy I did!

My roles are Business Support Intern where I work closely with the Heads of Services, and Co-Production Intern helping to run our young people forums. We want to be able to capture their thoughts and ideas with the aim of championing their voices at both a local and national level. I’m also helping in redeveloping their lifelong offer which is really exciting!

Through being a care leaver I’m able to relate to our young people and understand what they may struggle with. And I’m also able to help those who work at Break understand the issues we face.

I love the fact that my roles have a positive impact on young people like me, and I love that Break have been there for me to give me this opportunity.
Welcome

What an incredible year it has been!

We have opened services and welcomed new young people into our homes in Suffolk and have achieved the (almost) unachievable by having all of our services rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. We have had over 30 giraffes in our Standing Tall sculpture trail in Cambridge and we continue to outperform competitors in our charity shops.

It is fair to say that all of this would not be possible without our colleagues, volunteers, trustees, supporters, donors, customers and, especially, our young people. They are the reason Break exists and doing the best by them is what motivates us all to do what we do.

We always like to look back on the year and think about personal highlights and it is always hard to pick just one or two. The Christmas Concert with even more of our young people involved in the wonderful evening. Being brave enough to stand tall in front of over 400 people is no mean feat - add singing to that and, well, you have the special something that Break is all about.

I spoke to two young people returning from an event earlier this year. Between them they had called about 40 houses “home”. I asked them where their roots were, where they felt they belonged. Without a beat, they both said “Break”. Wow. That is why we do what we do, that is why we continue to strive to be the best – and that is why your continued support is so necessary. Thank you all for making the magic happen!

Who we are

As one of the leading charities dedicated to supporting young people with care experience across East Anglia, we want to provide the best individualised care for the children, young people and families who need us.

We invest in our young people and the team around them so they can lead a bright and successful future.

Our vision

A world where all young people, whatever their start in life, have the opportunities and relationships they need to thrive.

Our mission

To give care experienced young people the love, support and ambition they deserve.
The Break approach...

1. Short breaks home
2. Disability homes
3. New homes that opened in Suffolk this year!
4. Group homes
5. Intensive or solo homes, including:

...Our impact on our young people

- 83% felt more able to deal with challenges and setbacks
- 66% felt their skills for living independently had improved
- 75% felt they had made new friends
- 80% reported progress towards their goals
- 273 Opportunities to try new skills and grow confidence, including 76 barista training sessions on our CoffeeBreak van
- 83% reported feeling less lonely
- 444 Hours of support given through our Emotional Wellbeing Service
- 27 Young people have learnt new skills through our Building Futures construction and DIY project
- 35 Mentors
- 10 Foster carers
- 4 Support foster carers
- 1 Family assessment centre
- 100% of our homes have been rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted

Young care leavers supported by Staying Close, Staying Connected
Relationships

For over 50 years we have been a relationship-based organisation. We know first-hand how important consistency is for our young people.

We work hard to build and maintain relationships in our workforce, our stakeholders, funders and supporters so we can continue to support our young people.

Making the move

Since winning a contract with Suffolk County Council we have opened three new homes, meaning we can support more young people across the region.

These homes will be using our successful solo model. This approach helps those who have experienced significant trauma, and who may be finding it difficult to connect with others. By offering personalised and tailored support we can offer them wraparound support.

We have built strong working relationships with Suffolk County Council which has helped us connect with the local community. Through this we have had held three open days where residents were able to visit the homes, meet staff, trustees and leadership and gain an understanding of what we do. We have also attended parish council meetings to talk about the work we do and to continue to build that strong link.

Councillor James Reeder, Cabinet Member for Children’s and Young People Services, said: “We are thrilled to be working alongside Break on this important initiative. Break has a proven track record of providing exceptional care and support to children and young people. Together, we are dedicated to enhancing the lives of children and young people in care in Suffolk.”

Since opening in January 2024, all the homes are already making substantial progress. The new staff have created safe, therapeutic and nurturing environments, and this is having a positive impact on our young people.

James’ story

James* was living at home with his father and his brother but was displaying some challenging behaviour, putting his and the family’s welfare at risk. His father was finding it increasingly difficult to give James the care he needed as his behaviour began to escalate.

Since being with Break, James is making significant progress and has built excellent relationships with adults based upon trust.

“We are thrilled to be working alongside Break on this important initiative. Break has a proven track record of providing exceptional care and support to children and young people. Together, we are dedicated to enhancing the lives of children and young people in care in Suffolk.”

James’ Dad.

“In a short time, this home has become a beacon of hope for James. With Break’s support, James is on a path towards a brighter and more promising future and is receiving the individualised support and care he needs. Break’s compassionate approach, coupled with the dedication of the staff, has created a nurturing environment where James can heal and grow and hopefully have a loving and fulfilling future.”

- James’ Dad.

*Names have been changed for privacy.
Break Therapeutic Services

Our young people need to be in safe and stable relationships so they can begin to heal from the trauma they have experienced. We are committed to a trauma informed approach in all we do and the Break Therapeutic Team ensures that the wellbeing of our staff and young people is paramount.

“Our young people have often had really difficult experiences in their lives. This can make it hard for them to trust adults and know they will get what they need,” explains Debbie-Louise Maher, Deputy Manager of Break Therapeutic Services.

Break staff said:

“It’s helped me to realize that what I do matters, just being present makes a difference and that I can be more forgiving on myself.”

“It was good to see that no matter where we work in Break, we are all hoping for the same things for these young people - to feel safe to be able to have safe relationships and to be able to fulfil their aspirations.”

Corporate Relationships

Our corporate relationships enable us to raise not only income but also awareness of the work we do to a wider audience.

This year we’ve built on new and existing relationships with Keir, QD, Xaar, Mortgage Advice Bureau, Breakwater IT and Keeler Recruitment. They have all supported us by taking part in new challenges, from marathons to skydives and charity clay shoots or golf days, or through doing their own in-house fundraisers.

In early 2023 we launched Cambridge Standing Tall. Working alongside key partners Cambridge BID and Alan Boswell Group, amongst many others, we brought more than 90 giraffe sculptures to the city in Spring 2024.

January 2024 saw the launch of our seventh Norwich and Norfolk sculpture trail, GoGoSafari. This 18-month project will see not one, but five fantastic sculptures arrive on the streets of Norwich in summer 2025.
We have also recently celebrated our two-year charity partnership with Cambridge-based company Xaar. To date their employees have raised a staggering £35,772 which was then doubled by the company’s generous matching policy, bringing the total to over £70,000!

“When we began our charity partnership with Break two years ago, we knew immediately we had found the right partner. Our shared journey together has delivered big and tangible impacts. It has taught us a great deal too about societal challenges and the ways we can make a difference if we work together towards a shared goal. Many of our colleagues tell us they really value the opportunities that our partnership brings. For example, the sculpture trail in Cambridge opened up inspirational and engaging fundraising activities for many of our staff – including our young apprentices. Everyone at Xaar shares a real sense of pride in what we have achieved together.”

- Graham Tweedale, Chief Operating Officer, Xaar

What’s next?

• Give even more young people a safe place to call home.
• Roll out our expertise in trauma informed practice across the organisation.
• Increase our community supporter base.
Excellence

We strive to deliver high quality in all that we do and create excellent opportunities for both our young people and our workforce.

We are always looking for ways to improve - that’s why we always listen to our young people.

Fostering Futures

Leaving care at 18 can be incredibly daunting and often young people are not ready to become fully independent. For those in foster care this can be especially challenging, as many have not been able to benefit from the government’s Staying Close offer.

Funded by CHK Foundation, our Fostering Futures project supports those moving from foster care into independent living. To date, we have helped over twenty young people feel safe and confident as they take that step towards adulthood.

We have learnt from what our young people wanted from the service and used this to influence the Department of Education’s national leaving care provision. This allows us to continue to amplify the voices of our young people within the national discussion around the development of leaving care services.

“We were encouraged by the positive goals of the Staying Close programme but understood those leaving foster care were not eligible. By offering funding we hoped foster care leavers would have a smoother transition to independent adult life, and foster carers would be able to continue to develop their ‘readiness to leave’ toolkits.”

- CHK Foundation

Outstanding services

From April 2024 all of our services have been rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Most recently, our short breaks home for young people with complex disabilities has gone from Good to Outstanding.

An innovative overhaul of their approach to safeguarding made the team stand out to Ofsted. This has now been implemented across Break’s other homes, and is already showing an impact on the young people we support.

The Record of Significant Event (ROSE) system, created together with the staff at Nelson, is a new way to identify low-level concerns. This could be a child not eating their dinner or a parent forgetting medication, and Ofsted noted that this had helped to substantially reduce the risks of harm to children.

Manager Pete Willson explains:

“This is one of things that was really recognised by Ofsted. We realised that there were a lot of things that didn't quite meet the level that would trigger a safeguarding response. It means we can capture all these little things. And if things do lead to a safeguarding concern, we've got a real timeline of when things happen and can give social workers a clear and concise picture around that young person.”
Designed to be used more as a preventative measure, it can also inform a young person’s care plan or instigate a conversation with families who might be struggling. Most recently, it has helped to support a young person whose mum had passed away and was used to shape his trauma response to help understand how he was coping.

“ROSE has really helped us to pre-empt and reduce the need for safeguarding intervention, not to build the support for safeguarding intervention. A lot of the time they don’t lead anywhere, but most of the time it leads to support for the parents and conversations with them on how we can help the family and the young person— and that’s ultimately what we are here for.”

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Ambitious

We’ve always been ambitious for our young people, staff and our services. We pride ourselves on making new into the new normal.

We want to raise the aspirations of our young people and help them prepare for adult life.

The Care Leaver Summit... one year on

Our very first Care Leaver Summit last March saw experts including Mark Riddell MBE and Julliette Cammaerts from the Children’s Commissioners Office come together with our young people to talk about the issues facing care leavers.

Following the summit, over 100 key decision makers from local authorities, housing associations pledged to continue to work together towards a brighter future for young adults leaving care. This year we’ve continued that work together to develop a proposal for regional collaboration for better outcomes for care leavers in the East.

“We’re delighted how discussions have further developed, and thanks to funding from Esmee Fairbairn, we’ve been able to put our young people’s voices at the heart of our ongoing influence and advocacy work.

“Our young people are now driving forward a Break-wide plan to identify what we collectively want to influence for those both in and leaving care. It’s in development so watch this space!”

- Stephen Hulme, Break Development Manager

Going above and beyond

Break offers individual, holistic support to enable young people to move beyond the trauma they have experienced. A comparison with national statistics demonstrates that Break’s approach is effective.

People who grow up in the care system are...

1 in 4 of the homeless population
1 in 4 of the prison population
2.5 times more likely to become pregnant than other teenagers

Break’s approach is helping to challenge this...

*Nationally 33%*  
**Nationally 52%**  
***Nationally 22%***

Young people currently supported by Break  
Young people in care nationally

Break 6%  
Nationally 52%**

Break 0%  
Nationally

Become homeless in the two years after leaving care
Have a criminal conviction by the age of 24
Women and girls who become unplanned mothers

*Who Cares? The link between leaving care and homelessness | **Office for National Statistics | ***Centre for Social Justice
Being part of the family business

Co-production is at the heart of what we do and our Participation Team strive to empower our young people. We do this by making sure that their voice runs through everything we do. They have a say in the decisions that matter to them, whilst also learning skills they can use as they begin to grow towards independence.

Our Youth Advisory Board is just one way for young people from across our services to offer their views on how to achieve outcomes for our young people.

Thanks to their voices, we’ve created discounts for young people in our charity shops, they have been informing our 5-year strategy planning and representing Break at fundraising events.

Many were also involved in our Christmas Campaign, with input on the messaging and design of our new Christmas jumper range!

“I've had some great opportunities at Break that have helped me grow in confidence. I'm involved in the foster care panels as well as our care leaver forum and Young People's Advisory Board. I've also been part of the panel for interviewing new staff and I'm now getting involved in staff training.

“Thanks to being involved in these, I've applied to the National Children's Bureau to become a member of the Young Care Leavers Advisory Board. Through this I hope to make an impact, help change care policies, and make a difference.”

- Richie.

“I love taking part in the Youth Forum and our Advisory Board where we get to share our ideas, voice our thoughts, and are updated on all the Break services. It makes me feel empowered and I know that I can use these as a platform to build on.”

- Tomasz.

What's next?

• Work with local universities to raise awareness for care leavers.
• Develop our Learning to Drive pledge.
• Be more ambitious for our staff.
• Create more apprenticeship and employment opportunities.

We delivered 80 participation sessions throughout the year, including:
• Our Advisory Board and Care Leaver Forums.
• Podcast and content creation sessions.
• Recruitment group.
• Fostering panels.
• Care Leavers Summit follow-up sessions.
• Young people-led training sessions.
“It’s about just having someone there.”

Our young people need good people around them, offering encouragement guidance and fun – but also being there for the tough times.

Phillip has been mentoring Lily since she was 16. She recently turned 18 and this was when Phillip realised what a challenging time this was for her and the impact their relationship has had on both of them.

“When Lily reached 18, that was a big period of transition for her and I hadn't really taken on board just how monumental and difficult this change would be for her.

“But think about it. You’ve just celebrated being 18. You’re in a loving foster home, and then suddenly you’re out - and it really is suddenly. As much as you know it’s going to happen and everyone is doing their best for you, it’s enormous both psychologically and practically. Imagine going to university, but then not being able to go back home because someone else is now in your bedroom, you know, it’s tough.

“We’ve built up a fantastic relationship over the three years. I was really nervous the first time we met, but she put me at ease. I said to her afterwards ‘Would you like to do this again’ and she said, ‘Yes as long as you feel like you want to keep doing it’, and that’s when you realise just how often she has had to deal with being abandoned and let down and this isn’t something you can dip in and out of. It might get hard, but you’ve got to stick with it.

“We’ve made some great memories together. We both love mechanics and engineering, and we have great laugh at the driving range – mainly because I’m terrible at it. And we talk about everything and laugh a lot together.

“But at this point Lily was feeling really lost and angry, and she was pushing me away. I just wasn’t listening properly to her because I wasn’t comprehending that his was huge thing for her.

“That’s when Break really supported me and their trauma training really helped me understand that her behaviour was trying communicate something to me.

“One of the key moments between myself and Lily was when I said to her, ‘I’m sorry, I wasn’t listening,’ and you could see that she’d never really had anyone apologise to her and say they’d done something wrong.

“She’s grown so much, and I’d like to think I’ve been a part of that. She’s helped me to learn to listen, and it’s OK to not have to fix things. I’ve noticed that she’s able to control her fight or flight much better. There is often a temptation to just walk away and forget it, but I think Lily has seen that there is now someone who wants to be there for her and will always be there for her.”
Sailing on
As part of our Aspiration programme, five young people aged from 16 - 22 took to the sea to take part in an epic race from Finland to Estonia, working on the tall ship *Excelsior*.

The group’s sailing experience started in 2021 with day sailing trips, before progressing to sailing around the UK coast. Then a channel crossing to Belgium in 2023 ensured they were ready for the challenging journey across the Baltic Sea.

As well being completely out of their comfort zones and making sure they follow all safety rules, the group worked on the boat. They helped to clean and maintain the ship, took on watch duty and cooking, and learned sailing skills such as knot-tying and navigation.

Asked what they will gain from this experience, the key words were: confidence, independence, friendship, travel, and learning.

“I found it really exciting. Other than the slight seasickness on the first day! Being out at sea at night was among my favourite experiences – being able to see the stars and even spot one or two shooting stars.

“I am glad I met everyone on the crew. We all got along very well, and I learned a lot about how sailing works, the names of different components of the slack, and how to maintain it on long journeys.”

- Matt

We delivered 117 aspiration and wellbeing sessions including:
- Residential trips.
- *Excelsior* sailing experience.
- Outdoor learning skills.
- Digital skills sessions.

Pathways to employment
Care experienced young people between the ages of 16 and 20 are four times more likely to be unemployed than their peers.

That’s why we create safe environments to enable the young people we support to explore, build skills and have great experiences.

Jason currently lives in one of our intensive homes and has been finding it difficult to gain work experience. His high anxiety and fear of meeting new people was making it challenging for him. After showing an interest in CoffeeBreak, Opportunities Lead Joe Walden teamed up with Break’s Therapeutic Team (BTS) to see how they could work together to help Jason feel safe.

Following some sessions with BTS, Jason felt happy to meet with Joe. Together they worked on building a solid relationship which enabled him to feel safe to work with Joe on the van.

“The whole process took around two years, and we approached it incredibly gently making sure Jason felt comfortable with everything,” explains Joe. “We took time to build a relationship so he felt safe with me and could concentrate on learning new skills. He was incredibly anxious but we started off with some low-key tasters sessions which steadily turned into training. With the help of the support workers caring for Jason, we gradually moved to serving people from Break. In March he made his first public appearance and received his first paycheck!

“The important thing was to take it at Jason’s pace. By working together with BTS, his support workers and Jason, we all understood what he needed.

“I’m absolutely delighted at how far he has come. I now get emails from him asking when his next shift will be and he’s even been ready at short notice when I’ve needed someone to help. At the moment, we’re helping him develop his confidence with customers and to identify where he wants to go to from here.”

What’s next?
- Give every young person in Break’s care access to a mentor.
- Create more opportunities for young people to find the thing that lights their spark.
- Grow the Emotional Wellbeing Service so that all young people can access this support.
Fundraising

Our work within this report is only possible thanks to the corporates, individuals and trusts who generously donate to us and offer us gifts in kind.

Break’s Fundraising Team continue to provide an excellent array of opportunities and experiences for individuals, corporates and community groups to engage with us. Many take on challenges, from marathons to skydives and charity clay shoots or golf days.

Making dreams come true at Christmas

Our Christmas Campaign raised over £15,000 for our Make a Dream fund – giving our young people the opportunity to have their dreams come true.

Dreams ranged from a day out at a theme park and going to the theatre or seeing their favourite band for the first time through to getting a new bike or taking driving lessons. Although they may seem like small asks, these opportunities can be life changing and empowering, helping them to realise that nothing is out of their reach.

This year we also launched our very own range of charity Christmas jumpers! Designed straight from the heart by Break’s young people, who understand more than anyone the wide spectrum of emotions over the festive period, the jumpers reflect every sentiment, from the “Bah Humbug” spirit to the “tinsel everywhere” vibes – encouraging you to ‘Do Christmas your way’!

A helping hand

The introduction of a new Volunteer Lead position has meant that we’ve been able to enhance our fundraising work, while also providing support across all parts of the charity.

From retail to children’s homes, volunteer teams from companies such as Aviva, Natwest and British Gas have been transforming gardens and open spaces for everyone to enjoy, while the network of fundraising volunteers have enabled events to be the very best they can be.

What’s next?

- GoGoSafari, Norwich 2025 sculpture trail: roll out of sponsorship.
- Two major new individual participation events in 2024-25.
- Development of Legacy Programme.
Retail

Our charity shops are amazing at raising funds for our vital work. This year across 46 shops we've sold over £4,272,349 worth of donated goods, which has a huge impact on the support we can give our young people.

They also play a valuable role in their communities, creating spaces to meet, exchange stories and combat loneliness while making an impact on the fight against climate change by selling secondhand items and recycling those not fit for sale. Our shops offset 1,126,150kg of landfill and saved 15,180,500kg of CO2 emissions in 2023-24.

Growing the team

We couldn’t run our shops without our volunteers.

That’s why we’re always keen to give back to our volunteers whenever we can. This can sometimes turn into them becoming valued Break employee which can have a huge positive impact not only on the individual but on the shop as well.

Ali, the manager for our shop in Carlton Colville, has helped three volunteers make the transition to becoming an employee. Most recently, she has helped Lyn - who had been a volunteer there for over ten years - apply to become Assistant Manager.

“Lyn had been a fantastic volunteer and we both knew that she could do a lot more for the shop. So when the vacancy for assistant manager came up, we talked about whether she would go for it and she decided that she would.”

In order to help Lyn prepare for the interview, Ali helped her to venture out of her comfort zone by giving her more responsibility, showing her how the shop runs and encouraging her to be the face of the shop.

“I was delighted when she got the role. It’s great having someone who already knows the customers, and the volunteers here all really respect her. She really understands the importance of the shop and has so much passion for the charity.

“She has given up her time for nearly ten years. It’s great to be able to give something back.”

In-store discounts for care leavers

This year, young people worked with the retail team to launch an initiative proposed at our care leavers forum: a discount card for our young care leavers across our charity shops.

“When they came to us to see if this something we could do, we thought it was a great idea,” explains Head of Retail Lesley Leigh.

“We really didn’t want to make it too restrictive, so decided the discount would be 50% off anything in the shop. We know that for our young people who are preparing to leave care and move towards living independently, furnishing a new home can be costly and we were delighted to be able to help. It also means we’re able to give that lifelong support as it’s something we will always have access to.”

Although the discount card is for care leavers to use, our homes also benefit from the donations with toys and books when they need them. Most recently, a box of books, toys and games was sent to a home in Bury, ready for the arrival of a young person to help settle them into their new bedroom.

A number of our care leavers have signed up to have one of the discount cards, including Maryanne, who says:

“It’s really good and a great discount to have off your purchase. It’s great for when you don’t have a lot of money, but you’re still able to get something nice.”

What’s next?

• Develop a Break hub in each shop.
• Prepare business care for large retail stores.
• Grow number of shops.
• Gather data on customer satisfaction.
We invested £15.6m into giving care experienced young people the love, support and ambition they deserve in 2023-24.

- £2,730,000 Children in residential homes
- £1,742,000 Children in solo services
- £3,010,224 Disability services
- £1,391,676 Leaving care services
- £252,502 Lifelong opportunities
- £1,681,291 Family support (including fostering and therapeutic services).

We spent £304,000 on training and developing for the 451* members of the Break team.

*256 of these worked in care.

Thank you to all our supporters.

“Most people have never been in care. They’ll have a dad, they’ll have a mum. We don’t have that sort of support from our family members. As sad as that is, it’s the reality of our lives. Break help us feel like a normal person.”

- Break young care leaver