



MEDIA RELEASE

May 2026

Help make hospital a happy place this Starlight Day

Australia's broadest-reaching children's charity, [Starlight Children's Foundation](https://starlight.org.au) (Starlight), is calling on Australians to help raise **\$1.95 million** by 30 June to help make hospital a happy place for seriously ill children. The annual fundraising appeal launches on **Starlight Day (Tuesday, 19 May)**, with every donation helping keep Starlight's essential hospital programs running nationally.

Every minute of every day, a child is admitted to hospital in Australia. In that moment, their world can be turned upside down. Suddenly their smiles disappear and their lives are filled with doctors, needles, and fear. That's why Starlight exists – to bring happiness to seriously ill children when it's needed most.

Funds raised will help bring happiness to **50,000 seriously ill children** across Australia by supporting Starlight's essential hospital programs: **Captain Starlight**, **Starlight Express Rooms**, and **Planet Starlight**, the live and interactive digital platform accessible to kids anywhere via an internet-connected device.

These programs work hand-in-hand with healthcare professionals to transform the healthcare experience and provide much needed social connection, entertainment and a sense of belonging for seriously ill children and their families.

In the year ahead, Starlight expects more than **400 daily visits** to its Starlight Express Rooms and Captain Starlight will visit over **560** seriously ill children on hospital wards every day. Starlight will also create **190,000 Planet Starlight experiences** for hospitalised children across Australia by the end of 2026.

"Starlight was the spark that kept us going" – Kalee, mum to Zai

Kalee Abdollahi experienced first-hand the impact of Starlight's programs when her son Zai, then 7, was diagnosed with Stage 4 High Risk Neuroblastoma – a rare and aggressive childhood cancer. Biopsies revealed the cancer had spread throughout his body.

Zai endured 15 months of treatment, including eight rounds of high-dose chemotherapy, a stem cell transplant, multiple surgeries, radiation and immunotherapy.

"The treatment was one of the most gruelling a child can go through," said Kalee. "Our whole family's life was turned upside down. The saving grace was Starlight. As soon as Zai woke up, he asked for the Captain Starlights. Without that spark of fun, hospital would have felt empty and lonely. When you see Starlight in action, it's truly amazing."

Starlight CEO, Louise Baxter, said; "When a child is diagnosed with a serious illness, their world becomes filled with treatments, pain and long stays in hospital. They miss their friends, their routines, and the play essential for childhood. Starlight helps sick kids just be kids again. Through distraction, entertainment, and connection, Starlight transforms healthcare experiences, and provide the social connection and sense of belonging so desperately needed by the child and the family.

Starlight relies on the community for funding to ensure this essential support continues. If you believe happiness in childhood matters, please donate this Starlight Day. Every donation big or small truly makes a difference."

Starlight's national retail partner, Spotlight, along with other supporting brands will be collecting donations throughout May to help raise critical funds.

For more information on Starlight Day or to donate, please visit www.starlight.org.au.

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About Starlight Children's Foundation

Starlight Children's Foundation brightens the lives of seriously ill and hospitalised children and young people by replacing pain, fear and stress with fun, joy and laughter. Since 1988, Starlight has grown to become Australia's broadest-reaching children's charity and is consistently recognised as one of Australia's most reputable charities. In 2025, Starlight created 926,887 experiences that transformed the healthcare experience and provided much needed social connection and a sense of belonging for seriously ill children and their families. We also provided 4.5 million online entertainment experiences, and through the Healthier Futures Initiative, Captain Starlight reached 118 remote communities across Australia. Planet Starlight delivered 171,099 online entertainment experiences for hospitalised children and connected kids in 89 hospitals nationwide. Starlight also granted 424 life-changing wishes in 2025.

www.starlight.org.au



