

Challenging the Barriers to Play

3 Year Strategic Plan

2018 – 2020



Challengers

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1. Background

Vision

Like every charity, Challengers has a Vision of how we would like the world to be as well as a Mission that describes what we do to achieve that Vision.

A world where all children and young people can play together, freely.

Mission

To provide truly inclusive, fun and safe places where all disabled children and young people can spend time with their friends. To offer a positive impact for families and the wider community.

Where we came from

Challengers (Disability Challengers) was established in 1979 as The Guildford Adventurers to address the lack of play for disabled children with Challengers Guildford Playcentre opening in 1984 and change of name in 1995. Since then, the organisation has grown substantially and now operates across Surrey, Hampshire, West Berkshire and West Sussex, with a split headquarters in Guildford and Farnham. The organisation celebrates its 40th birthday in 2019 and in 2017 provided for over 1,400 children delivering over 141,000 hours of fun.



Why we exist

1. To provide inclusive play and leisure experiences that disabled children and young people want to attend. This is because there is still a real shortage of provision and so disabled children and young people don't have the choices that their non-disabled peers have. In 2016, the charity Sense identified that 51% of disabled children are intentionally excluded from play opportunities in the UK. Challengers is an organisation that has a unique approach to working with disabled children and young people because it is inclusive, normalised and we will never exclude a child.

2. We provide a short break for families with disabled children. There is a great deal of research that continues to tell us that families with disabled children are often isolated and under significant pressure and hardship. In 2017 as part of the Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP), Contact a Family (CAF) identified that:

★ **97%** of families with disabled children feel that the public do not understand the challenges they face

★ **80%** of families have received offensive remarks about their disabled child.

★ **43%** of people in Britain don't know a disabled person

★ **67%** feel uncomfortable speaking to a disabled person.

It is not always easy to find a provider that they trust but when they do they have the opportunity of being able to achieve a short break. This will mean that they have the time and space to do what they need or want to do and so the family unit gains in resilience.

Raising a disabled child is complex and often hard work; a short break can make a real difference for the entire family.



3. We believe that we deliver services in a truly inclusive and aspirational way and in doing so we can make an impact into the way that society views disability. This is because at Challengers, we demonstrate through our actions and behaviour that there is no reason why disabled children and young people should be excluded from playing an active part in society because of their impairment or disability.

So we lead by example and share our approach with other professionals and organisations. Our team is fundamental to delivering positive change; they often come with little or no experience of disability. After induction and training they can be seen supporting children and young people with confidence, a real commitment to equality and a 'can-do' approach to inclusion. They leave us with informed and inspired views that change the way they live their lives. They tell us about how they go on to influence their own friends, families and colleagues to think differently; social change in action.

The spirit of enthusiasm and energy that pervades the team is exceptional and our future relies on us nurturing this and doing all we can to value our staff and volunteers, without whom we would not have the service we have today.

The Challengers Approach is central to this (see Appendix 1) and reaffirms that we do everything to include every child.

Current Position

Challengers' core service is meeting the needs of disabled children and young people through play and leisure. This has not changed in 37 years and the charity has resisted the temptation and pressures to deviate from this by starting associated services or to become, for example, a 'one-stop shop' provider. However we are often asked to consider delivering additional services linked to what we currently do. At every stage we need to think carefully about these opportunities to ensure they fit with strategy. This strategy is developed from a clear focus on what is needed, which comes from what parents and children tell us they need.

Families tell us that the service we provide is still relevant because, although there is some change, the need has sadly not diminished. Whilst disabled children and young people remain on the edges of society with not enough choice for how they enjoy their free time, we see the need for the services we provide and a clear vision for the future. At the same time we have adopted a subtle shift in our communications to be able to contribute to national conversations around services for disabled children. This is due to the fact that we have such a sound reach across South East England and meaningful relationships with families that offer a real opportunity to support critical dialogue.

"I think Challengers is a great place for me. If Challengers wasn't there, I wouldn't be able to play and have fun"

Our mission means our focus has to be on assuring high quality provision and that funding is protected for such essential services. Therefore we need to continue to champion our core services above diversification as this will enable us to reach more and have greatest impact. We want to be known as being excellent at what we do and that our non-exclusion policy offers us the opportunity to influence change.

Our culture is positive and ambitious and offers individuals the opportunity to innovate to meet challenges we face. This is vital for us right now; a perennial discussion is funding and how we build a sustainable financial future. Funding for the sector has been tested and the charity has sustained ever declining contributions from statutory sources as local councils manage their own financial challenges. At the same time the sector faces additional pressure from BREXIT and the increased competition this means for charities as a result of reduced available grants. We have managed to increase voluntary income to offset such reductions and we need to find a way to continue this. It is therefore critical for us to be clear about our mission and impact on the community we serve.

This plan addresses how we ensure that we are providing for as many children as possible, whilst assuring the quality of what we do and planning for the future. It also highlights the key questions underpinning the organisation for 2018 onwards and against a back drop of considerable change and challenge for all third sector service providers.

2. Methodology

We approached this planning by considering the strategic plan for 2015 which had been reviewed each year by trustees and Senior Management Team (SMT). The plan had been adjusted each year and deemed as relevant and achievable. For 2018 it felt that it was time to review it completely and write a new plan against an ever changing political, economic and environmental backdrop.

The Strategic Plan is to provide us with focus on the overall purpose of the organisation and our long-term direction and aims. Whilst strategic plans usually cover a 3-5 year period, this one is 3 years because of the potentially dramatic changes that could occur in the financial landscape we are working within.

This is to be supported by a 3 year Strategic Financial Plan which will outline what is required of the organisation to achieve the income to deliver the plan and accommodate key assumptions given what we know about the financial landscape. We will always have an Annual Operational Plan to focus on the detailed tasks or activities we need to do to achieve our strategic aims.

We started with a workshop for the SMT to review our plans to date against our Vision, Mission and Charitable Objects. We then worked through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) exercise to set the foundations of our discussions and planning. We used the results from family and child feedback, staff engagement, as well as our historical data around delivery and financial performance and in no particular order we have developed a summary.



Clarification of key objectives

Once we had done our SWOT analysis we discussed the findings and developed an approach to use our strengths to counter threats and make opportunities a reality. This enabled us to clarify the main strategic issues for Challengers.

3. Where we need to go next

One of the key areas of discussion that was explored in these exercises was what did growth mean for the charity? It is a hungry ambition that the charity continues to work to address the unmet need, and we are always excited by the opportunity of reaching more children, young people and families, but mindful of doing so in a way that does not exhaust capacities and threaten quality of provision. At the same time we are conscious of financial sustainability and how we are planning to sustain services for the future. It is never an easy decision to close a service because of lack of funding as families have made Challengers part of their lives, but at times difficult decisions such as this need to be made to assure the wider organisational delivery.

It is acknowledged that the charity is often asked to develop new opportunities to meet a need and that is an attractive prospect. We have history of managing to use our strengths to find a way to make that a reality but at the same time we are starting to find that we also need to say 'no' when it isn't viable (with existing and/or no increase in back office support) or when it is considered 'mission drift'. It feels like the right time to reflect on the development of the organisation and achievements to date and map this against the current threats and opportunities we face. For the first 37 years of the charity's life, development had meant a number of different things and we felt that we needed to define what the future might look like as part of our strategic planning based on our assessment of where we are in our organisational maturity.



The organisation grew from delivering in one location to developing new locations in Surrey in response to opportunities, including in 2009 'Aiming High for Disabled Children' when a significant increase in statutory funding supported the development of new play and youth schemes. At this point the organisation had a number of play and youth schemes that were a mix of year round (Saturdays, half terms and holidays), holiday and overnight schemes. In 2012 there was a further opportunity to work with Hampshire and we grew our reach to establish a further set of locations across a new county and then initiated a further relationship with Berkshire (Reading and Wokingham) and most recently West Sussex (Chichester).

This geographic growth was reviewed and considered alongside parental feedback that families needed more. It was very popular and schemes became busy quickly but on review we agreed that all schemes needed to find a way to be year round as families told us that Challengers should support throughout the year and not just in the holidays. The charity took on that growth target to gradually develop all schemes into year round schemes which was a considerable financial and operational challenge, especially when considered against the backdrop of decreasing statutory contributions.

Following 'geographic' growth and 'calendar' growth the charity grew yet again in developing services by making more of a commitment to the 'tail ends' of service delivery for the organisation; preschool and young adults. The charity established a second inclusive preschool in Guildford in 2016 to match that in Farnham and 2 new young adult schemes in Epsom and Basingstoke to match those in Farnham and Guildford so that there was a more equitable and balanced 'template' of services across our footprint.

The discussions identified that a great deal of what we did well was because of our size, and that there were real opportunities for the charity to speak from these roots to champion the needs of disabled people, to share what we know and to try to contribute to mutually supportive relationships with the communities in which we work. We therefore agreed that our next ambition was to deepen our services which supports a key aim of the charity's; to always be thought of as a local charity in spirit with the benefit of infrastructure while being a regional charity in delivery. We should always feel local for the families and supporters but draw strength from what we know in being larger.

This may include developing the services where they already run and, in particular, the organisation needed to consider the opportunities that we have already started to explore such as 'Project Reset' (quick response leisure service for disabled young people excluded from school setting) or a Training Arm (delivering training to other organisations to expand our reach and support others to deliver inclusive play). However any new service or growth needed to build on what we have achieved to date, in line with need and protect against mission drift.

Within this is an ambition to develop deep rooted relationships with our supporters. We are proud to have good relationships with a wide range of individuals and organisations but we also know there is an untapped resource around every scheme. We believe that each community local to our scheme locations would welcome the opportunity of being a part of such social change and being appreciated by an organisation who never forgets they have a choice.

A priority for the organisation has always been **to be the very best we can be so that the most vulnerable children and young people have access to the best possible service.** This has always got to be a priority for us as we maintain a culture of always striving to be better and therefore of being a learning organisation. We recognise that the people who make that a reality are our staff team, and so it has to be a key objective that Challengers is a great place to work if we want to be reassured that we deliver an outstanding service. To be the very best we can, we must listen to the team and value them for the incredible work they do.



Our discussions concluded in some headline principles that aligned with our ambitions:

To **protect** our good reputation and champion professional delivery

To **prepare** for ever decreasing statutory income and ever increasing competition for funding and service delivery

To **safeguard** the footprint of services so that we meet the needs of the communities we currently serve

And that growth for the next 3 years means that we will focus on:

- ★ Maintaining a local, regular and normal service
- ★ Protecting and sustaining the reach of our current community footprint
- ★ Wherever possible deepening the service in a location/area and building on this with supporter development
- ★ The need to assure infrastructure and develop a split HQ of Guildford - Farnham
- ★ The ambition to achieve 2 additional venues/Challengers centres at either end of our footprint where the service is substantial with a long term view of all Challengers services running from Challengers venues
- ★ To consider and carefully review every new service idea against identified criteria
- ★ To achieve all of this we remain committed to doing all we can to listen to the team and to value them for the incredible work they do

4. Pillars of Strategy*

From here we went on to the 4 pillars of our strategy; the priority issues for us to work on and strategies for dealing with these issues. Once these had been clarified we checked ourselves to make sure that those we had chosen could fulfil key criteria and stand up to scrutiny that they are achievable and relevant for Challengers.

These have not changed considerably since our last plan but they have achieved nuances that we all agreed were relevant and important to review. These were:

1

To maintain a culture that ensures Challengers is the place to go for disabled children and young people and the charity of choice to support

2

To deepen our service for disabled children and young people across the South East

3

To be a leader in the field of inclusion of disabled children and young people

4

To achieve a financial model to create stability and ongoing revenue generation

5.0 Conclusion

Each of these OUTCOMES have key ACTIONS that ensure we achieve our overall strategic plan and that we aim to satisfy together as a team:

To maintain a culture that ensures Challengers as the place to go for disabled children and young people and the charity of choice to support:

- ★ Invest in annual scheme development plans that support quality planning
- ★ Deliver engagement programmes to capture feedback from children and families
- ★ Annually review our offer for front line teams to ensure they are paid in line with their responsibility and alongside levels of excellence
- ★ Develop an annual plan to treat volunteers and supporters with the utmost respect, never forgetting they have a choice
- ★ Ensure that this culture is the reason why supporters feel included and are engaged to work with Challengers
- ★ Achieve and maintain good or outstanding Ofsted ratings for all registered schemes inspected by 2018
- ★ Deliver a refreshed relevant and current youth/young adults service by 2018
- ★ Achieve an organisational wide pay structure for transparency as well as progression by 2019
- ★ Ensure that volunteering is prioritised and increased to 10% by 2021 in order for us to achieve diversity and enable us to do more
- ★ Establish ourselves as a truly learning organisation that values ongoing training and development by achieving accreditation for our training by 2020

To be a leader in the field of inclusion of disabled children and young people:

- ★ Undertake research to look at 'ripples of impact' and communicate by 2019
- ★ Review organisational communications through the messaging project by 2018
- ★ Achieve greater levels of inclusion by increasing numbers of non-disabled children to 20% at pre school and play schemes by 2020
- ★ Develop a voice for disabled children and young people through engagement and participation and share results annually by 2019
- ★ Identify how our training might be made more widely available by 2020
- ★ Review The Challengers Approach by 2018
- ★ Support appropriate campaigns of awareness building such as the Disabled Children's Partnership

To deepen our service for disabled children and young people across the South East:

- ★ Review each new opportunity whether that be more of what we do now or new services against our criteria assessment (See Appendix 4)
- ★ Develop high quality relationships with local supporters so that they know they are having an impact on their community through their support of a local charity
- ★ Fully establish Farnham as a split HQ with Guildford by developing new space by end of 2018
- ★ Identify next hub and develop a plan by 2019 describing how this will be achieved
- ★ Build a plan to deepen services by using the waiting list data by 2018
- ★ Achieve a footprint of services that offers families the opportunity of moving from play to youth in every location by 2021
- ★ Ensure we remain a local charity in every location and have marketing plans to support that including building effective funding and professional relationships locally by 2019

To achieve a financial model to create stability and ongoing revenue generation:

- ★ Develop financial strategic plan by the end of 2018 that generates income to assure a sustainable future for the charity. Ensure that this plan contributes annually to reserves by 2019
- ★ Maintain a balanced and sustainable income mix
- ★ Develop a plan by 2018 to increase and maximise voluntary income through investment and development of the team and innovation within the department
- ★ Annually increase parental income in line with cost of living but always remembering that family contribution should be reasonable and affordable
- ★ Annually challenge expenditure through ongoing business processes analysis project
- ★ Achieve and maintain 4- 6 months reserves by 2018
- ★ Regularly review opportunities to collaborate with others working in the same field to achieve efficiencies, avoid duplication and best offer for beneficiaries
- ★ Maintain good relationships with current commissioners and start building new relationships for the future by 2018
- ★ Develop a body of knowledge and skills within the organisation to continue to manage itself in line with the annual budget plan by 2019

6. Appendices

6.1 APPENDIX 1 The Challengers Approach



To enable children to challenge their impairments through play in a stimulating and safe environment



To provide suitable care for disabled children and young people whatever their disability with appropriate knowledge, skill, competence, initiative and sensitivity.



To create an atmosphere where self-expression, co-operation, learning and sharing are encouraged, nurtured and supported.



To conduct all our affairs with regard to individual differences



To create a welcoming and supportive environment and pro-actively enable young people and their families who use Disability Challengers to participate in the planning and development of our services.



We never exclude a child on the grounds of the severity of their disability and we do not set geographical limits; play and leisure opportunities for disabled young people are few and disabled people seldom have a local resource.



To positively discriminate in favour of disabled young people while inequality of provision exists.



To uphold and encourage freedom of choice for the individual and to aim to provide both Exclusive and Inclusive programmes in the communities in which we work.



To treat each other with respect and consideration.



To accept responsibility for one's own actions.



To be sensitive to everyone's right to privacy and confidentiality.



To examine what we do and continually try to improve.

Challengers Pillars of Strategy

We aim to be the very best we can be and our strategic plan has 4 principal headlines or pillars

1



To maintain a culture that ensures Challengers is the place to go for disabled children and young people and the charity of choice to support



To develop and refresh scheme development plans & young adult service



Listen to the voice of the young person & review our offer

Value our volunteers, supporters & staff, never forgetting they have a choice



Achieve Good & Outstanding Ofsted ratings  



Develop our training offer

2



To **deepen** our service for disabled children and young people across the South East.

Review opportunities that arise against our strategy



Develop high quality relationships with supporters and demonstrate their impact



Split HQ across Guildford & Farnham



Identify location for a new hub



Deepen services & address waiting lists



Ensure our footprint offers moves from play to youth in every location



Remain a 'local' charity



3



To be a **leader** in the field of inclusion for disabled children and young people

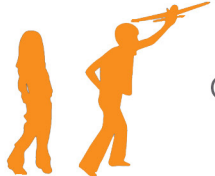
Understand the ripples of impact & the importance of public impact



Review our messaging



Increase inclusion on schemes with more non-disabled children & young people



Listen to and develop the voice of the young person



Understand how our training could be made widely available



Review the Challengers Approach



Support National Campaigns

4



To **achieve** a financial model to create stability and grow revenue

Develop a strategic financial plan which aims to achieve a sustainable future



Maintain a balanced income mix



Increase voluntary income every year



Challenge expenditure



Achieve 4-6 months reserves



Review collaboration opportunities



Develop & maintain good relationships with all commissioners

