



# Challengers

## Impact Report 2021

Learn more about our cover stars on page 4!

# Welcome from our CEO Gen!



Gen Dearman, CEO

2021 was a year which proved that working together and staying true to your values provides the best outcome. We started to feel that our sense of normality had returned at Challengers, and it was amazing to see the beaming smiles on the faces of children, young people, staff and supporters alike, with face-to-face service delivery increasing. Our services still run on the same ethos that Dr Helen Foley and founding partner Colin Hassell first established more than 40 years ago – and we continue to welcome and celebrate every child for who they are.

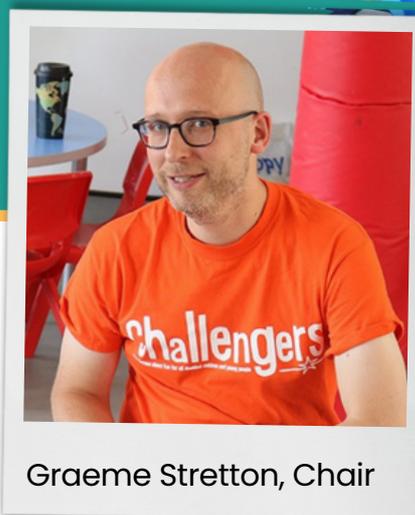
As one of the newest members of Team Orange, I have witnessed the extent to which our important work makes a difference and positively impacts on families. It's wonderful to see parents benefit from the respite our short breaks offer, knowing their child is happy and safe, and to witness young people being free to play and experience new things, having the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers. While we are delighted to have our doors open more, we have also continued to offer virtual Challengers sessions on Zoom to ensure that we provide as much support as possible for our children and young people.

To quote the famous mobile advert we all remember, "The future's bright, the future's orange", and I truly believe the future is bright for Challengers and 'Team Orange'. Another cohort of children have learnt and grown at our inclusive Pre-schools over the last year, and it really is fantastic to see disabled and non-disabled children playing and exploring together without biases or pre-conceived ideas, and celebrating their differences. We've still got a long way to go, but I'm proud to know that we're helping to raise the next generation in this way and moving closer to achieving our vision of a more inclusive society. It has also been wonderful to see the growth of our 555 service during 2021, which offers urgent support for disabled young people out of education. The more we can do to nurture and support children and young people, and equip them with skills and confidence, the more positive the future will be – not just for them, but for their families and the wider community.

On behalf of Challengers, whether you are new to Team Orange or have been here from the very beginning, thank you for helping us ensure the magic of play lives on.



## A message from our Chair



Graeme Stretton, Chair

On behalf of the Board, I would like to express how immensely proud I am of everything that the team has achieved over the last year. We were not alone in having to rapidly innovate and adapt to an ever-evolving environment and new normal, but I think we stood out in the way that we overcame those challenges and turned many of them into opportunities.

This hasn't always been easy, so I would like to pay tribute to our wonderful team and our supporters for their resilience and remarkable work during the course of 2021. They are at the heart of how we deliver, and you can see in this Impact Report that the charity has continued to provide an amazing service for disabled children and their families.

At Challengers, our passion for inclusive play and leisure is driven by our vision of a world where all children and young can play together freely. Sadly there are still so many barriers that prevent young disabled people from having fun and being included, which means our services are still very-much needed, but we are starting to see a shift in attitudes and I am confident that the charity's important work contributes hugely to changing our society for the better.

We enter into 2022 as a financially robust, stable charity, with a wonderful new CEO at the helm. I know Gen will lead the charity to even greater heights, and reinvigorate and expand our impact and reach. I am excited about the many opportunities on the horizon and all the fun we'll have along the way with our incredible children and the wider Challengers family. Thank you for your support, and here's to another fantastic year and making a difference!

*Graeme Stretton, Chair of the Board*



## 2021 on Social Media



Andrew Man

Thank you Challengers for all the hard work you've done in providing such a fantastic environment for our children to thrive and grow despite all the problems you've had to face! And thank you for keeping them safe in your settings with your COVID procedures!

Like Reply 1 y



13.1k fans

764 posts



9,519 engagements



2021 in numbers

738



children and young people supported

65,900



hours of fun and inclusive play

17,246



sessions held across the South East

93%



of children rate their happiness at Challengers a 4 or 5 out of 5

80%



of parents agree that Challengers helps with their own mental health

90%



of parents would recommend Challengers to a friend or colleague



## 2021 for families at Challengers

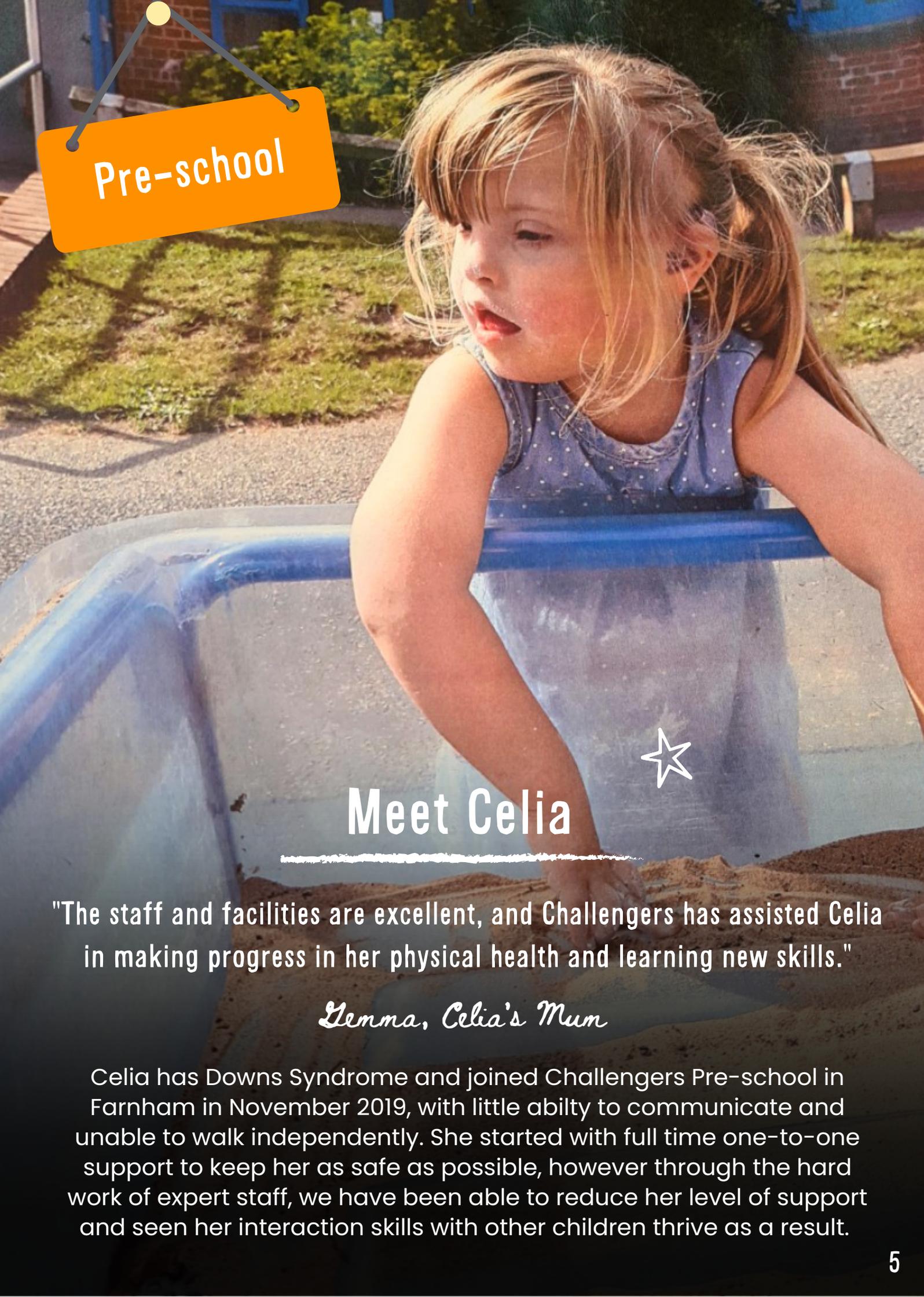


Challengers is for the whole family. It's not just about providing inclusive play, leisure and early educational opportunities to disabled children and young people, but also about benefitting parents, carers and siblings.

Our cover stars, the Morris family, are a prime example of a family that not only reaps the benefits of Challengers in many ways, but also gives so much back to the charity. Not only did Mum, Natasha, run the 2021 London Marathon raising an incredible amount, she's also a Parent Ambassador and Trustee, providing valuable parental insight and feedback.

While children Toby and Lilly (our cover stars!) attend Challengers, parents Natasha and James are able to work, spend time with family, and take a break from their demanding care responsibilities – something which is essential to their own mental health and emotional wellbeing.

**Challengers holistically supports families  
to lead happier, healthier lives.**



Pre-school

## Meet Celia

"The staff and facilities are excellent, and Challengers has assisted Celia in making progress in her physical health and learning new skills."

*Gemma, Celia's Mum*

Celia has Downs Syndrome and joined Challengers Pre-school in Farnham in November 2019, with little ability to communicate and unable to walk independently. She started with full time one-to-one support to keep her as safe as possible, however through the hard work of expert staff, we have been able to reduce her level of support and seen her interaction skills with other children thrive as a result.



## Celia at Challengers

*Mum Gemma says:*

Celia has always been a very happy and social child since joining Challengers, and it has been a joy to see how Celia is now so independent and is now able to walk with confidence – and has even started to run! Celia is able to access more equipment as her physical skills have developed and she has started to enjoy singing songs and dancing.

Her communication skills are developing well, she can sign using Makaton, and is using a wider range of words. As well as singing, Celia likes to be creative, using chalk to draw and make markings on the ground outside.

**Challengers has enabled Celia to be included in play with her peers. The children who attend Farnham Pre-school don't seem to notice or treat a child differently if they're not able to talk or walk like they can. Celia has made friends who love her for who she is, and she has been able to learn so much from her peers!**

# 97%

of parents consider our staff to be good or excellent



“

The Play and Youth scheme staff do an absolutely amazing job. They are dedicated, energetic and all-round great individuals who put so much into keeping children and young people happy, and making sure they have a brilliant time when they come to Challengers.

”

**Alison, Parent Ambassador**

## #TeamOrange



# Meet William



Play schemes



"Honestly, we cannot thank Challengers enough for everything you do!"

*Peter, William's Dad*

William is six years old and has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and his brother Conan is four years old. William started to attend our Kingston Play scheme in March 2021, and his younger brother Conan has since joined him at weekend sessions, giving parents Peter and Chloe some much needed respite.

# William at Challengers



William likes to do everything at Challengers – he just loves to play! He's very active and engages in indoor and outdoor activities. He's non-verbal essentially, so any response can be garnered from whether or not he's happy when he knows it's Challengers day – which he always is!

His little brother Conan is a bit more apprehensive, but settles after a few minutes and really enjoys playing there – he especially likes to play with the costumes!

**For our family, it means the world to have the support that Challengers provides us. Our biggest hurdle as a family is that we never have any time for ourselves. Life without Challengers would be a lot more stressful for us as parents."**

Scan the QR code to  
read more about  
William



# Family feedback



My child is only 4 and is mostly non-verbal, so doesn't have the language to really express how she feels.

However, the speed at which she dashes into Challengers in the morning, the excitement she shows in the car when we pull into the car park, and the smile on her face after a play day speaks volumes.

Challengers has been an incredible discovery for her and for our family. When she is happy and in a good mood, we can all be happy.

## Guildford Play



Jenny Nichols

We ❤️ the Challengers Zoom Sessions! They bring a huge smile to our Son Matthew's face. Thank you Sara & Co for all the energy you put into them xxx

Love Reply 51 w



## Virtual sessions

Our son absolutely loves it! On the day he goes he wakes up and says 'My play scheme day today' with a big smile on his face. He also said that he likes Challengers because they truly understand him.



## Eastleigh Play



Star  
Fundraiser

Paige joined Challengers as a Youth Worker in 2017... four and bit years on, Paige has not only worked at three of our schemes, she's also taken part in fundraising throughout her time with us, raising just under £1,000 for the charity!



**"During my time at Challengers I've met some truly incredible young people, who have taught me a lot about friendship, patience, courage, and how to land a joke perfectly! Challengers, and its mission, holds a special place in my heart and I wish to continue to support the charity where possible."**



Scan the QR Code to read more about  
Paige's art fundraising challenge



Youth  
schemes



## Meet Francesco

"Challengers is like an extended family for Francesco"

*Sandra, Francesco's Mum*

Francesco has been attending our Youth schemes since 2018. Challengers is a place where he can go to enjoy fun activities, feel happy and supported, and interact with other young people like him. Francesco really loves cooking at Challengers, and going out on day trips – especially visits to the farm and Legoland!



## Francesco at Challengers



Francesco has autism and learning and communication difficulties, as well as gross and fine motor difficulties, sensory disorder and low muscle tone. Since attending Challengers he's been more positive interacting with different people and is more confident. Challengers has benefitted his communication and social skills, and he's now able to participate in a range of activities which all contribute to building valuable life skills.

**When Francesco is at Challengers, my other son and I can have a break which has a positive impact on our mental health. He and I both need a break from his brother's noises and behaviour, so it's great that Challengers gives him a chance to rest and have a quiet space for himself.**



## Challengers 555 Service

Our 555 Service offers urgent support to families of disabled young people who are currently out of education.

Sometimes this is because the young person has been excluded, or because their current school place cannot provide the appropriate support.

We offer a fun, safe space at Challengers during the day where our highly trained staff help young people to learn valuable life and social skills, build their confidence, and prepare them for a successful return to school. We create a bespoke support plan for each young person, and develop strategies to enable future school facilities to appropriately support them.



"As a parent of a young boy with Autism Spectrum Disorder who was suddenly excluded from school aged 9, I was left feeling alone and let down – our family was suddenly in crisis – but then I came across the Challengers 555 Service which literally saved us and made me feel like I wasn't alone anymore.

My son loved attending and built friendships with staff and other young people that attended. Once an appropriate school placement was found, Challengers supported my son back into school where he is now 2 years later and very happy. I now work for the 555 Service, supporting other families in their crisis and letting them know they are not alone."

**Jade, whose son attended 555**



# Fundraising superstars!

Our wonderful supporters are part of what makes Challengers so special! Here are a few of our favourite fundraisers from 2021...



## Rachel and Sarah's Thames Path Challenge

Farnham mums Rachel and Sarah decided to take on an "ultra challenge", walking 100km along the Thames Path in just TWO days in September - a route that is fondly known as the 'foot shredder'! They raised over £2,000 for Challengers and gained a lot of sore muscles and blisters!

## Isla and Orla's Mini Triathlon

11-year-old Isla and her cousin Orla took on a mini triathlon to raise money for Challengers in 2021. Isla's younger brother Ayrton started at our Guildford Pre-school last year, and he's been so happy there that it inspired them to raise money specifically to help build a brand new playground at the centre!

## Ben's 100 Miles

Former Challengers attendee Ben walked and triked every day to reach his target of 100 miles, along with the support of his family and friends. Not only did he finish the challenge 25 days ahead of schedule, he also raised more than 150% of his original fundraising target - incredible!





# A big #TeamOrange thank you to...

...The wider community, and our much appreciated grant funders!

The vital work that we do is dependent on your support, and we are incredibly grateful to all of the generous organisations that have supported our work, including...



**The Baily Thomas**  
Charitable Fund



**Barrow Hills**  
SCHOOL



THE  
**JULIA AND HANS RAUSING**  
TRUST



Peter Harrison  
Foundation



We'd like to give a special shout out to the Community Foundation for Surrey for awarding us two grants this year. This kind of support helps us to continue breaking down barriers to play for disabled children and young people.

Funded by





# Corporate support

Founded in 2001, our Business Club is a group of around 40 like-minded businesses, who pay a membership fee to support Challengers and the concept of 'Business for Good'. After dramatically reducing our face-to-face contact during 2020, we were delighted to start our in-person networking events again with the Business Club this year, hosting fascinating talks with Paralympian Rachel Morris MBE, businessman Robert Lewis, and motivational speaker and mental health expert Marc Caulfield.

**"It offers us the opportunity to engage with like-minded people and businesses, with the hope of generating new motivations and support when we need it"**

Paul Giniver, Plan A Architects



**Scan the QR code to find out more about our Business Club**

Throughout November and December 2021, we were delighted to be supported by Brewers Decorator Centres as part of the Vibrant Lives campaign. They donated 30p to Challengers for every purchase of Albany tinted colour – raising a whopping £10,634.10!

**Brewers**  
DECORATOR CENTRES

**84% of our Business Club members recommend joining**



Angela Goodwin ♦ @CllrAGoodwin · Jan 8, 2021

Thank you @D\_Challengers for supporting families and their children / young people in the best way you can...

After a difficult year for everyone, full of restrictions and social distancing, 2021 truly brought #TeamOrange back together and allowed for more Challengers events to go ahead as planned!

Our children and young people, families, staff, volunteers, and supporters all came together at a number of events over the year, reminding us the importance of persevering through difficult times and coming out the other side.

## Our 2021 events



## Kelly's Cycle Challenge

We were thrilled to see more than 300 amazing cyclists take part in our first in-person event in May 2021! A big thank you to our friends at Kelly's Storage Charity Events for organising and covering all events costs. Together we raised an incredible **£35,338.42** which could fund 196 days of play at Challengers!



## Motoring Event

In the summer we were delighted to welcome new and returning guests to our 8th Annual Motoring Event. With a glorious ride through the Surrey countryside, a fascinating private museum tour and a delicious picnic, it was the perfect summer's day out.

## London Marathon

After a long time coming, it was fantastic to finally see our amazing runners take on the iconic London Marathon in October 2021! Together the team raised a smashing **£48,000** for us, and inspired us all with the passion and dedication they showed throughout their training journey, all the way to the finish line.



Scan the QR code to read more about events on our website





Star Supporter

“Thank you to each and every member of the Challengers team and keep doing what you do!”

*George Breare, Marathon Runner 2021*

George's brother Mickey attended Challengers for many years, making his London Marathon journey an extremely personal and touching one...

# George's marathon experience

“

It has been a real privilege to run for Team Orange. From meeting everyone at the Challengers Pasta Party and hearing the amazing, inspiring and touching stories of the other runners, to putting on my running bib for the first time, to seeing my friends, family, and Challengers staff at mile 21, those experiences will stay with me forever.

I feel very proud to have raised nearly £8,000 for such a brilliant cause. Knowing that the money is going to be used by the truly phenomenal Challengers staff to support young disabled people across the South of England, and change their lives for the better, makes every training run, every mile of the course, and every painful stretching session 100% worth it.

”



# What's in store for 2022?



There are lots of exciting things coming up for Challengers in 2022, and we'll be continuing work on our key objectives to ensure that the service we provide is the best it can possibly be, for disabled children and their families, our staff and volunteers, and our supporters. Watch this space!



A brand-new, inclusive playground at our Guildford centre

Known and loved fundraising events... plus some new ones!!



The launch of our sparkling new website

Increased transition support for children and families



Building the foundations for a community hub to provide more holistic support

Thank you to everyone who has supported Challengers in 2021. We look forward to continuing working together, ensuring the magic of play lives on.

# Challengers

Play is vital to every child's happiness and development, but sadly too many disabled young people miss out on it every day. That's where Challengers comes in...

Challengers is an independent charity that gives disabled children and young people the opportunity to play, have fun, and make friends in a safe environment. Each year, we support more than 700 children aged 2-18 at our inclusive Pre-schools, Play and Youth schemes across the South East.

We welcome every child and will always find a way to support their needs. Our work provides a positive impact for families and the wider community.

**Challengers, Stoke Park,  
Guildford, GU1 1TU**

[www.disability-challengers.org](http://www.disability-challengers.org)

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