



Challengers 



Impact Report 2022/3



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# Welcome!

## Gen Dearman Chief Executive Officer



Welcome to our annual Impact Report which offers insight into how Challengers has supported disabled children, young people and their families across the South East. The way we operate demonstrates that there is absolutely no reason why disabled children and young people should ever be excluded from having fun and playing an active part in society. We are proud of our inclusive approach, ensuring we find a way for ALL children to feel welcomed and safe, and that their individual needs are supported, even if they are multiple and complex.

In the last year we have seen an increase in the demand for our play and youth services, and sadly there has been under investment in these services. Alongside other charities we have faced a challenging fundraising environment and witnessed the effects of a cost of living crisis on our beneficiaries and our staff.

2022 was also a year where we saw some fantastic accomplishments. The Mayor of Guildford, Councillor Dennis Booth chose Challengers as his charity of the year, and with support from his fantastic family Mary, Natasha, Tristan and Rachel raised an amazing £66,000 for us. We pressed start on the build of our new inclusive playground development at our Guildford Site which will be open to families in the spring/summer of 2023. Through funding from the National Lottery Community Fund we were also able to announce the launch of The Hub – a new service providing holistic support to families. Co-created by our parents, it will provide services such as family fun days and peer to peer support. The Hub will be open to all families and hosted from both Guildford and Farnham sites.

We are grateful to everyone who has been part of Team Orange over the last 12 months. On behalf of Challengers we thank you and hope you enjoy reading this report, finding out more about some of our fantastic young people and reading about our impact.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gen'.



## Russell Harvey

### Chairman

After admiring the charity and the valuable work they do for so many families for many years, it's an honor to have recently joined Team Orange as Chairman of the Board. I am hugely excited to support Challengers with their ambitions and plans for next year, whilst also applauding the team for the amazing work they have done in the past year.

Despite facing difficult circumstances out of our hands Challengers has remained strong as a charity and acted with integrity to continue delivering such an important service to as many families as possible.

On behalf of the board, I would like to congratulate Gen for her first year as Chief Executive Officer and commend her management team for their dedication and commitment.



# What we do



## Our Vision

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

## Our Mission

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

Challengers is a charity dedicated to removing the barriers to play for disabled children and young people. We will never turn a child or young person away, no matter how complex their needs might be – everyone is welcome.

- ☆ Pre-school – ages 2 to 5
- ☆ Play – ages 4 to 12
- ☆ Youth – ages 13 to 18
- ☆ 555 – ages 8 to 19 (for those currently out of education)

With 42 years of history, the resources, training and equipment that Challengers provides are all used to break down the barriers that stop disabled children accessing their full potential.

Challengers holistically supports families to lead happier, healthier lives. When a child visits Challengers, parents and carers are able to spend time with siblings, work or recuperate from their caring responsibilities, essential to their own mental health and emotional wellbeing.





# Why we do it

We have been passionate champions of inclusion since the charity was established more than 40 years ago and Challengers has grown to provide smiles and laughter to thousands of disabled children and young people.



Throughout all of the work that we do to continue these services, and despite all of the challenges we face, the children and young people who attend Challengers are at the heart of it all. Parents and carers also repeatedly used the following words to describe how their child feels about Challengers:

☆ Excited

☆ Love

☆ Social

☆ Fun

☆ Safe

☆ Happy

☆ Smiles



It's even more amazing to hear from the children themselves, like this letter written by siblings Toby and Lilly (who you might recognise from last year's Impact Report!)



Scan the QR code or head to [www.disability-challengers.org/donate](http://www.disability-challengers.org/donate) if you would like to support Challengers and the work we do. Thank you!







# 2022/3 in numbers

90,065

total hours of play delivered



Pre-school: 33,726 hours

Youth: 19,592 hours

Play: 30,012 hours

555 Service: 3,738 hours



735  
children &  
young people  
supported

2,070  
sessions

85  
volunteers

28  
events



91% of parents agree  
Challengers reduces  
their child's loneliness  
and isolation



87% of parents say that  
Challengers improves their  
child's independence and  
wellbeing



95% of parents say that  
Challengers improves  
their own wellbeing as a  
parent/carer



87% of parents would  
recommend us







# Pre-School

Vinny, aged 3, is diagnosed autistic and is non-speaking with a limited understanding. After attending Guildford Pre-school for a year, Vinny's mum, Louise, told us about their experience of Challengers.

"We know his journey at Challengers will continue and they will always be a big part of Vinny's life."



"Since starting Challengers, Vinny has come on in leaps and bounds all through the help of everyone that works there. He now enjoys colouring and exploring with different textures such as sand and play dough. The workers at Challengers have worked hard to explore all options in order to help Vinny achieve milestones we struggled with, such as using a fork at lunch time and washing his hands.

Through such care and patience, Vinny has formed really strong bonds with his key workers. He now responds more when his name is called, and makes much more eye contact with them along with interacting during play time. It is so lovely to know that he has formed these friendships.

He always shows excitement by flapping his hands when he arrives for a day of play at Challengers. It really puts my mind at ease to know that he is attending an environment that is safe for Vinny and where he is well looked after.

They have always been on hand with guidance and helpful advice, and have really helped us set things up for Vinny for his next chapter in life when he starts school."





“More than anything, Clara loves being able to do what she wants to do, and being recognised for who she truly is”



Vanessa, is mum to 11-year-old twins, Clara and Florence. Clara has Downs Syndrome and has been attending Farnham Play since her fourth birthday after her parents found out about the charity through word of mouth at their local support group. We spoke to Vanessa about her family's Challengers experience:

“It’s clear that the staff at Challengers really take the time to understand the children and young people and recognise their strengths. After coming to Challengers for over seven years, Clara has become a true part of Farnham Play, always helping as much as possible and enjoying feeling part of the team (she even took it upon herself to give CEO Gen the grand tour on her first visit to the centre!).

As parents, Challengers gives us the time to do different things that would be more difficult to do with Clara, and allows for quality time with Florence (Clara’s sister) and to focus on the things that she’s interested in, such as going to board game cafés! Unlike other settings, which can leave us feeling unsettled throughout the time she’s there, we know that she will be looked after and happy at Challengers.



Scan the QR code to read more about Clara's story:



**Challengers means so much to both Clara and us as a family.”**



Bobby is 14 years old and attends Eastleigh Youth Scheme. Since attending, he has grown in confidence and independence!



When Bobby first attended Challengers, he appeared quite shy and struggled at times to socialise with some of the other children.

Four years on, however, Bobby has grown and flourished, forming fantastic relationships with the other young people at Eastleigh Youth who will often ask for him when he is not there. Bobby has formed lovely friendships, not only with the close-knit group of young people who he regularly sees, but he also goes out of his way to interact when he observes new young people with a similar interest.

Challengers offers Bobby a place he knows he is safe, welcomed and part of a community. He always comes in happy to see us and quickly gets involved in some form of game with his friends. Challengers also offers an environment where, on days where Bobby may have less energy or not feel up to cycling around or hosting golf tournaments on the Wii, he knows that he will be supported in having fun whatever that looks like for him. There is always someone there who understands his needs, will listen and give him the extra support he needs to have fun.



Scan the QR code to continue reading Bobby's story!



### Bobby's mum Debbie said:

"Bobby **loves** Challengers. He always has a fantastic time and always comes away from there buzzing and smiling. The staff have always been so kind and attentive, and they show such confidence and eagerness to ensure the young people have a great day. Challengers is a life line for my son as he has no social life (not for the want of trying!)"



Caitlin started attending our 555 scheme after being signposted to the service through their Surrey Case Officer. The service we provide at 555 has been absolutely vital for Caitlin, keeping routine and socialisation in her daily life as she was not attending school. The support provided for Caitlin's family has lifted the pressure and constraints of her being out of school and allowed them to continue with their lives without worry.

"Challengers has been fantastic for Caitlin's anxieties. The staff have been so supportive and nurturing towards Caitlin, and her confidence has grown so much since attending. It is so lovely to hear her share what she has got up to at Challengers, whether it be painting staff nails, or doing lots of arts and crafts!"

-Hannah, Caitlin's mum



#### Jade Monks, 555 Leader, says:

"When Caitlin arrived at Challengers in March 2022, she mainly struggled with expressing her emotions and being around other young people. This led to behaviors which resulted in a breakdown in her school placement. We support Caitlin by giving her a safe place to express herself and to build her confidence and trust with adults. Aged 11, Caitlin is able to use play to develop her confidence and self-belief - for example, playing games with staff, learning to take turns and share, and eventually introducing other young people to the game. Caitlin will now initiate play with other young people. She has a great imagination, and we use role play to develop life skills and her emotional regulation."





After saying goodbye to the Guildford centre's playground in 2021, one of our main goals for this year was to replace it with something bigger and better!

# #BigPlayAppeal

According to research from the disability equality charity Scope "half of families with disabled children in the UK face accessibility problems with their local playground". Results from our own 2022 Parent Survey showed that 94% of Surrey families felt there wasn't enough access to safe and accessible play in Guildford, so we knew we needed to change that. We made sure to conduct significant research into what kind of structure or space was right for us to install next through parent feedback and play observations.

"Children with disabilities deserve opportunities to access play. This is currently something we lack in Surrey. This playground will allow children to play in a safe and secure area. Parents will feel comfortable and safe when allowing their children to play in this new playground, this is often something they can't feel in other playgrounds in Surrey."

-Challengers Parent Supporter



## The campaign

We then launched **#BigPlayAppeal** - the campaign to raise the much-needed funds to be able to begin the playground. This year, our annual Orange October fundraiser was directly linked to Big Play Appeal to maximise the funds for the playground whilst also celebrating everything Challengers.

After raising an incredible £300,000, we got the green light to begin building the playground at the end of January 2023. We look forward to watching the playground contribute to a more inclusive community, providing a place for disabled children and young people to play and thrive, and for their families to connect.



A big thank you to everyone who supported the campaign. Without you, this wouldn't have been possible!



Scan the QR code for more information and updates on the playground!



# Company Support

Partnerships Manager, Nick Adams, has been with Challengers for over a year now. He says:

"My first year of working for Challengers has been an absolute privilege – not only to see the incredible work we do firsthand, but also to work with a wonderful group of company supporters. I am excited to see what the next year brings and all of the diverse ways we'll be working with our amazing company supporters, having fun whilst raising vital funds for such an amazing charity!"



## Brewer's Vibrant Lives

During the months of November and December, Brewer's relaunched their Vibrant Lives campaign, in which for every litre of Albany tinted colour sold, they donated 30p to Challengers, raising a whopping £10,654.20! This comes after over 20 amazing years of partnership – we're so grateful to everyone at Brewer's, including their customers, that made this donation possible enabling us to provide endless miles of smiles at our schemes!

## NFU Mutual

After being nominated by their Godalming branch, we were chosen to receive a share from NFU Mutual's Charitable Trust to support frontline charities, bringing our total received from the foundation to over £15,000 over the past few years. Thank you so much for nominating us!



**NFU Mutual**

## Ramsac's 24-hour Gaming Marathon

Our friends over at Ramsac took on a 24-hour gaming marathon in November to raise money for the new playground. Over 21 staff members were involved, playing a combination of PC games, console games, and board games, and after smashing their initial £500 target before the challenge had even begun, they ended up with an impressive £1,430 total raised! Thank you for supporting us in such a fun way.

## Ethos Metrics

Ethos Metrics are supporting Challengers through free Google Grant consultancy this year, enabling us to continue to raise awareness by reaching our messages to a wider audience by managing Challengers Google Ads. In May 2023 they will be completing a 25km Jurassic Coast Challenge and are generously going to match all the donations they raise.



# Challengers in the Community

Challengers is very much at the heart of the local community. We were absolutely delighted that Mayor of Guildford, Councillor Dennis Booth, chose Challengers as his charity for the municipal year 2022/3. Throughout this time we've worked collaboratively on the following joint fundraising events, whilst the Mayor and Mayoress have tirelessly championed Challengers in the community, raising awareness and building connections.

**May 2022**  
Mayor Making  
Ceremony

**July 2022**  
Ladies  
Afternoon Tea

**December 2022**  
Mayor's Christmas  
Concert

**March 2023**  
March  
Hare Ball

**May 2022**  
Mayor's 1st Civic  
Service

**August 2022**  
Cricket Festival  
collection

**November 2022**  
Call the Mayor's  
Wine Bluff

**April 2023**  
Clandon Lambing  
Challenge

We're delighted to announce that through the Mayor and Mayoress' amazing work this year, they've raised £66,000 for Challengers!

"It has been a pleasure working with the Mayor and Mayoress of Guildford this year, their tireless work and passion for Challengers has been evident in everything they do. They've worked very long hours serving the community throughout the year, and the fact they have still continually found time for Challengers has been so appreciated by us all. I would like to sincerely thank the whole Booth family, as well as the team at Guildford Borough Council, for their amazing work which has made a huge impact."

- **Becky Cox, Community & Events Manager**





# Star Fundraiser



In September, we were totally in awe of a previous service user, Phoebe, for taking on the Spinnaker Tower Abseil challenge! Aged 21, Phoebe chose to participate in this fundraising challenge to allow other young disabled people to have the opportunity of going somewhere where they can socialise in a safe environment and give them the independence that they need. On the day, thanks to the team at Spinnaker Tower

and Hatt Adventures, wheelchair user Phoebe abseiled alongside instructor Jamie. It was a fantastic moment seeing her embark on her journey down the iconic structure, whilst applause broke out amongst the public doing their shopping and dining at Gunwharf Quay. Phoebe is not only an inspiration to us all, but shows the impact in turn that her story will have on hundreds of other young people just like her.

To add to an already amazing accomplishment – Phoebe raised an incredible £1,467 for Challengers!

## Lorna, Phoebe's mum, said:

"The sun shone on what was an amazing day, I was simply in awe of Phoebe's courage to descend 100 meters down the Spinnaker Tower. She overcomes so much in daily life but wanted to raise money for Challengers so other disabled people have the opportunity to participate in social activities which ordinarily are not open to them. There was a tear in my eye when she reached the bottom and the marina spontaneously applauded. Magic! I am incredibly proud of Phoebe – she rewrites the rules for anyone with a disability. What next you dare devil??"





# Flo's Story

Flo's brother Adam previously attended Challengers, where he enjoyed many years of inclusive fun and play – benefitting both him and his family. Flo kindly shared with us her experience of having a disabled sibling who attended Challengers.

"Adam is 23 years old and has the rare genetic disorder Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS). There are a variety of characteristics of PWS, but the main one is an overwhelming, compulsive and insatiable appetite. On top of his constant hunger, Adam has emotional and social immaturity which often leads to challenging behaviour.

For the most part, Adam is a loving, happy and bubbly person – always wanting to chat and socialise, he loves meeting new people and feeling included.

After moving town in 2010, Adam quickly became very lonely, which caused him to act out more. Our family began to struggle to meet his needs and to keep him occupied and busy, especially when we had school or work to do ourselves. This is where Challengers was such a big help...

As soon as Adam started attending Challengers it changed all of our lives. Suddenly, he was in an environment where he was completely accepted for who he was, and he had a dedicated Playworker to hang out just with him and have fun!

Often he would rope them into his role-play games, making them the assistant chef and himself head chef. Not only did it provide Adam with much needed pastoral care, but it also gave everyone at home a break. During long summer holidays or even a weeks long half-term, Adam demanded a lot of attention. Having him out of the house for a few hours was utter bliss. We didn't have to lock all our doors or windows. We could come and go as we pleased, have people over, and just enjoy being teenagers.

**Scan the QR code to read more about Flo's story, and her play 'Aaron' on our website.**



**"Ultimately it's places like Challengers that are vital to people like him. At Challengers he felt normal, his needs were met and he was accepted. He didn't have to be anything but his wonderful, joyful and bubbly self."**





As 2022 drew to an end, some of our main objectives were to increase transition support for children and families and build the foundations for a community hub. It has always been clear to us how important it is for families of disabled children to form connections with others in similar situations.

Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, we announced the project in December 2022. Based at Challengers Guildford Stoke Park Centre, the Hub will offer virtual coffee mornings, facilitate peer-to-peer support with drop-in sessions, social groups and organised events, helping families to feel better connected and less isolated. We will also be offering regular Family Fun Days and peer support sessions in Guildford and Farnham, creating a safe space for families to connect and – of course – for the children to have more dedicated play time!

Peer Support

Coffee mornings

Drop-in sessions

Family Fun Days

..and more!

If you have any thoughts of what you would like to see at The Hub, or have anything to contribute, then we'd love to hear from you! Please get in touch by phone 01483 961962 or email the [hub@disability-challengers.org](mailto:hub@disability-challengers.org).

**Community Liaison Manager, Zoe Youkee, who has worked at Challengers since 2008 and will be fronting The Hub, says:**

"I'm really looking forward to opening our doors and working with our families to ensure The Hub is able to offer them what they need, when they need it and to being able to have a play at our Family Fun Days! I am meeting some amazing groups and organisations who can link up with our families and offer lots of specialist advice. I can't wait to welcome our families into The Hub!"



With special  
thanks to



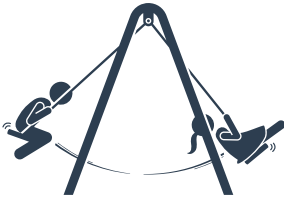
Scan the QR code to read more  
about The Hub and keep up to  
date with what is going on!





# What's in store for 2023/4?

Building on our work over the past year, we have exciting plans to enable the people we support to develop skills and confidence through play, contribute to a more inclusive society by challenging the barriers to play, and connect families together and enable a community of information sharing and support.



## Opening the new Guildford playground

New one year pilot programmes to support transition and offer family breaks



The opening and development of our Community Hub to provide holistic support for local families

Thank you to everyone who has supported Challengers this year!  
We really look forward to continuing working together to create a world where all children and young people can play together, freely.



For more information on our events, check out our website!







If you would like to make a donation to  
Challengers, please visit our website:  
[www.disability-challengers.org](http://www.disability-challengers.org) or

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