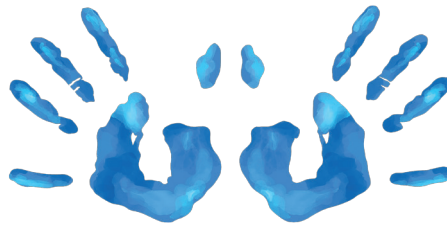


PLAY SKILL

Skills for play, skills for life



Impact Report 2022



PLAYSKILL

Skills for play, skills for life

Playskill is a local charity supporting pre-school children with physical disabilities & delays in Hertfordshire, and their families.

The unique one-stop-shop service offers a free term-time specialist playgroup with expert physical therapies; vital support and training for parents; an all-important network of fellow parents; and respite events for the whole family all year round.

Playskill relies on grants and donations in order to keep its valuable and much needed services running.

Welcome

In 2022 we helped 96 children with a physical disability/difficulty and their families with more than 350 children and their families supported since Playskill's inception.

We continued to run our groups and secured funding to carry on our Springboard Project as part of our core service in 2022, further strengthening our ability to intervene at the earliest possible stage with this remote screening & signposting service.

2022 was also the **moving year** and began with a physical move to new premises, and continued with **moving goalposts** as Covid was still very much part of our lives during the first part of the year.

In January our offices and all Watford-based groups took up residency at Langley Road, owned by Watford Mencap. The move coincided with record levels of Covid sickness but once again we rose to the pandemic challenges we faced.

As the Covid cloud started to lift during the Summer term, we trialled taking two of our less vulnerable groups back to the pre-pandemic model of eight children per group. Covid restrictions led us to the reduced four-group model previously but there are so many benefits to the larger group and we were keen to offer these to families again. It became evident that Langley Road would not be a suitable long-term venue for this model due to the small rooms, so a search for new premises began.

Over the Summer it was a pleasure to run family events which are so important for creating support networks and friendships. We ran a successful Professionals Conference, a new pilot course focusing on

psychological support for our parents and restarted our face-to-face Parents Breakfasts.

Like many charities, Playskill switched to the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) charity status, resulting in a new registered charity number.

Please take the time to read the personal stories of the families we support which so perfectly demonstrate the positive impact of our service.

It is only with the support and generosity of our fundraisers, donors, supporters, volunteers, trusts and foundations that we have been able to achieve so much and continue to provide our vital service **free** to families. **Thank you.**



Andrea Clarke MBE, Playskill Director & Paediatric Physiotherapist




2022 in numbers

96 

children with physical disability/difficulty and their families supported in groups and through Springboard

87% 

of children's SMART targets (in the areas of gross-motor, fine-motor, and communication) were achieved in groups

93% 

of parents/carers said they had **learnt skills** to carry on with their child; and **increased confidence** in how to support them

56 

families assisted by our Parent Support Team

180 

parents/carers attended **29** training sessions

16 

social/respite events, attended by **334** family members

Since Playskill began in 2006 we have supported more than 350 children and their families.

In 2022 our work was made possible by:

38 

dedicated members of part-time staff (**11** full-time equivalent)

50+ 

volunteers, who generously gave an estimated **5,500** hours of support

a skilled Trustee and Leadership team, with more than

60% 

having lived experience of disability/caring

Lisa's Story

“ Our four-year-old son, Charlie, has severe global development delay, epilepsy and numerous other health issues caused by a rare genetic syndrome. We've been attending Playskill since he was one.

When we started at Playskill during COVID, the service was online. **When everything else shut down we were left alone, but Playskill was a ray of light helping us on Zoom every week.** Everything they have done for us from a physio/speech and language/occupational therapy point of view has been just great. But it's more than that. They have always been there with tissues and a cup of coffee when I'm feeling the strain of life - living with Charlie's health challenges. As do all families in our situation. It's really, really tough. **Playskill has been there for us.** They understand what we're going through and support us in so many ways. Thanks to the charity's events, I've been to the mum's meal, pamper evenings and taken my eldest son on the sibling boating trip. Spending quality time with my other children is especially important as one-on-one time can be difficult when you have a child that needs so much additional support.

During group sessions the staff are so helpful, looking after my baby so I can focus on Charlie, but at the same time allowing her to enjoy the same developmental play as Charlie.

Charlie has progressed from not being able to roll or sit up properly to taking assisted, independent steps, which has been so wonderful to see. I was crying mess when that happened – but they're on hand with the tissues and everyone is so supportive. When these milestones happen in group, the whole room cheers - it's a wonderful feeling and a supportive environment.

The group is fantastic but there's so much more outside the sessions, I don't know what I would have done without them.

When you have a disabled child, there are so many forms to fill in – and at a time when you are not in the frame of mind to be filling forms. **The Parent Support team help you through step by step.**

The team advise what you're entitled to and what you need to fight for. Sure enough, I didn't get it without a fight, but I would have never known to push so hard if it wasn't for Playskill. You're told that you're not eligible, but Playskill know you are and encourage you to keep pushing. And thanks to them I did... with a positive outcome.

Playskill have been amazing and I can't thank them enough for everything that they've done for me, Charlie and the whole family.

– Lisa



Playskill Groups

Children attend our free term-time groups with their parents/carers where they receive expert support from a physio, occupational and speech and language therapist. Each group session uses play as a tool for development (including messy play, sensory activities and soft play) helping children to gain key skills, confidence and independence. Parents are trained to replicate the therapies at home to maximise impact.

2022 was the first year since the pandemic that we were able to deliver all groups face-to-face.

“My son has completely smashed his objectives. As a family, it was really important for him to achieve these, e.g. feeding himself and saying hello!

Across our six groups:

72

children and families were supported in group sessions

31

new children & families in 2022

87%

of children's SMART targets set were achieved

Our end-of-term parent questionnaires showed*:

Parents who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the following statements:

Over this term at Playskill:

I have seen changes in my child's ability to **communicate**:



80%

I have seen changes in my child's ability to **use their hands to play**:



86%

I have seen other **physical signs of progress** in my child:



88%

Playskill helps my child to:

Improve emotional and/or mental wellbeing:



76%

Be more independent:



85%

In addition to helping the children directly, Playskill also supports parents and carers through hands on modelling and advice from therapists and specialist workers in the weekly sessions.

93%

of parents/carers had increased confidence in how to support their child

93%

felt they had learnt skills to carry on with their child

80%

said they would implement the skills they had learnt on a daily basis

**Percentages based on 118 responses to our end-of-term parent questionnaires in 2022.*

“ This group has lifted me to achieve great things with my daughter and feel confident in my family. I don’t think I would be where I am today without this support.

“ The class has really helped my daughter and given her the skills and confidence to help her achieve her potential.



Supporting parents and families

Parents tell us of the struggle they face trying to find information and access services and support they need, and are entitled to. This can cause stress and anxiety and leave some families in financial hardship.

Our **free Parent Support Team** and **parent training** are key to helping parents/carers navigate a range of health, education, care, financial, legal and emotional challenges. **Parent Support** offer free personalised advice on a range of often complex and confusing matters. In addition there are **remote and face-to-face training sessions** delivered by experts in their field, aimed at developing parent/carers knowledge, skills, resources and confidence to support their child.

56 

families were helped by our Parent Support Team, many on multiple issues and across multiple terms

The most common themes for support were:

1. Nursery/school issues
2. EHCPs
3. Family-related
4. Housing
5. Monetary and benefits

29 

training sessions were attended by **180** parents/carers

88% 

of parents/carers said they had gained skills to help their child*

96% 

said the training was relevant to their needs*

*Percentages based on 114 responses to our Parent Training Feedback Forms in 2022.

Training topics and content are based on the needs of children/families attending groups. In 2022, courses included **disability benefits advice; wills, trusts & power of attorney; attention skills; numeracy; fine motor skills;** and more. Alongside a pilot course with the charity, Growing Hope, called When Dreams Change which focused on **psychological support for parents** – run with the support of Adeyfield Free Church and their counselling service.

“ My partner and I have learnt so much, receiving essential help to navigate the SEND world.

“ Playskill pick you up and show you how to look after your child, access therapy, financial support, and encourage parents to look after themselves.

“ Parent support was a huge factor in changing our housing circumstances which has helped us physically and mentally.



Emma & Jackson

Jackson has Down Syndrome and attended Playskill for four years.

“ Jackson spent a wonderful four years at Playskill, achieving so much and, thanks to the consistent, weekly early intervention he received in that time meant that he was adequately prepared for starting school. But as he prepared to graduate from Playskill, we faced another challenge, the EHCP application process. The Playskill reports provided the relevant information in the absence of NHS reports as Jackson had only been seen at this point by NHS physio, still on long waiting lists for the other services he needed.

The Parent Support team also provided **invaluable guidance** during this process, and the friends I had made at Playskill were also a huge help, **understanding what we were going through**. I soon realised that I was very lucky to have made a network of wonderful parents at Playskill, who we are still in touch with today. Jackson is at a mainstream school, so although we have made friends with parents there, no one truly understands the journey of a SEN parent unless they too are on it.” - **Emma**



Bringing families together

Playskill brings families together through the groups and training sessions, but also by organising inclusive family outings, social and respite events.

“It was fantastic to meet fellow Dads going through similar challenges.”

Support networks

Connecting with other parents in a similar situation can be a great source of **practical and emotional support**, helping families cope and **reducing feelings of isolation**.



81%

of parents/carers said they do not attend any other playgroups in the area

Social activities and respite events

A host of **free family and social/respite events** for both current Playskill families and graduate members (past families), provide **opportunities to have fun with the whole family**, enjoy new and shared experiences, or give parents and siblings **a chance to recharge**.

334 family members joined **16** events organised by Playskill
(**76** Playskill children; **93** siblings; **165** parents)

Being able to meet up with fellow Playskill families socially helps me*:

Create friendships and support networks



90%

Have a break and help my mental health



90%

Benefit from other Playskill parent's knowledge and experience



90%

Events included **whole-family** accessible **outings**, in a safe and inclusive environment, such as farm, boating and theatre trips. **Respite activities** for parents/carers, including mum's pamper evening, parent meals and dad's golf trip, and **sibling events** from go-karting to mini-golf and more.

*Percentages based on 78 responses to our 2022 Event Feedback Forms.

“ It was a well needed break for me and my son. As a sibling to a child with SEN this doesn't happen very often.

“ It was a fab evening... discussed things I hadn't even spoken to my best friends about. Great to meet mums on similar paths to me and just get it.



“ Playskill events give us the opportunity to try things we would be too nervous to without Playskill's support.

Long term engagement & support

Once children graduate from Playskill, families can become Graduate Members (for a nominal £20 annual subscription), enabling them to continue to access Parent Support, Training and social/respite events.

65 

graduate members continue to be involved in our work

Vinay & Nihal's Story

“ We were blessed by the birth of our beautiful daughter in 2021. Aliyana was diagnosed with hypotonia (low muscle tone) age nine months. This impacts her core strength, gross motor skills, feeding and speech.

These challenges affected meeting her milestones and is characterised as global developmental delays. She also has a rare genetic disorder which may effect her cognitive ability, the health of her heart, her kidneys, and many other factors. There's still a big question mark looming over how able bodied she'll be as she grows up.

While Nihal and I have always known that Aliyana will continue to be the perfect version of whoever she's meant to be, the medical side of her journey has been really tough. Our whole world was turned upside down as we struggled to come to

terms with the situation with emotions ranging from denial, fear, worry and guilt. There is so much darkness in not knowing if your daughter's health is okay. The sense of helplessness paralyses you.

The medical journey tested us in many ways - our marriage, our relationship with our family, friends and our work. You build up the courage to take action and then quickly realise how many hurdles there are. We are told for neuroplasticity, early intervention is everything. Get your daughter the help she needs immediately. But with year plus waiting lists, lost referrals and constant delays - paediatrician; dietician; speech therapist; physiotherapist; occupational therapist, it feels like they're playing tennis with you, and each advice contradicts the last. No answers, but more and more questions. **We felt lost and helpless. Then we were told about Playskill.**

“ The growth and progress Aliyana has made is testament to Playskill's work.

“ Playskill have taken the time to provide expertise, knowledge and advice on how we can not only navigate, but thrive in this new 'world'.

Knowing that Aliyana will get the much needed speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy has given us hope, an action plan and strength to continue. You get to meet other parents and become part of a community and no longer feel alone.

Playskill has been a lifeline. They've showed us how to navigate through these unknown waters to get what's best for Aliyana as quickly as possible. The growth and the progress that she has made is testament to Playskill's work.

Nihal and I have stopped feeling sorry for ourselves. We started openly talking about our family's journey, taking control of the narrative to showcase Aliyana as the inspiration that she is.

Through Playskill we became less scared of unknown waters. The seeds of strength

that Playskill have planted manifested with me spending most of my Summer actively jumping into these unknown waters - literally in to rivers and lakes. I spent hours staring at the darkness, not sure what's lurking below but still moving forward. My daughter, my wife and Playskill gave me the strength to be able to swim eight hours across the length of England's largest lake, Lake Windermere. Swimming close to 20km is an incredible achievement but mainly because I know that these efforts will lead to us playing a small part in helping Playskill continue to help other families like the way that they have helped ours. And it's been our family's greatest honour to fundraise.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

- Vinay



Reaching more children and families

Springboard Project

Families with disabled children continue to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to its long-term impact on healthcare services. In 2022 families faced lengthy delays for vital appointments, referrals and therapies, with Occupational and Speech and Language Therapy particularly affected. These delays could have a significant detrimental impact on children's development as well as parental mental wellbeing.

Our Springboard project, introduced during the pandemic, is our early intervention tool. Through this remote support, we rapidly assess children newly referred to Playskill, provide therapy input, advice and signposting, to help a greater number of children and families at the earliest opportunity.

“Families remain reliant on the voluntary sector to act at speed before the opportunity to help their children is lost, and before the statutory sector seems able to help. Playskill does this wonderfully well.

Jane Young, Director,
The Sylvia Adams
Charitable Trust

43 

children/families received early help, with remote assessment, advice and support

13 

new children/families were seen, on average, in Springboard each term

27 

children seen in Springboard fed in to Playskill groups, with others receiving advice & signposting

Professionals Conference

During the Summer term we ran a successful Professionals Conference which further **extended our links in Hertfordshire**, hosting education and early years professionals, outreach and social workers – all of whom come in to contact with families in need and can offer the lifeline of referring to Playskill.



Emma Shumake, Early Years Care Co-ordinator

“ Twelve years ago, I worked in a nursery where one of the children had Cerebral Palsy and attended Playskill. The parents raved about it and I was sold! Since then, I have referred many children to Playskill and watched them flourish as a result.

I am now an Early Years Care Co-ordinator working within the Public Health Nurse Service for Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust. For those families whose children have physical needs and disabilities, I see that the support just isn't there for them as promptly as they would hope - NHS referrals have long waiting times. Families are told of the importance of early intervention to improve outcomes, but with long waiting lists if they are unable to afford private treatment, the opportunity for early intervention is missed. These families are often dealing with complex health needs, financial pressures and feelings of isolation.

My role is to help families navigate the sometimes-complicated Health, Social Care and Education system. To be able to tell them about Playskill is a lifeline and a huge relief, giving them hope beyond the long waiting lists. When I discharge them, I feel reassured that they're in safe hands with Playskill - not just in terms of the expert therapies, but all the additional support they offer.

In all the years I've worked with the charity I've seen them go over & above for families. They never give up on anyone and children are given every opportunity to reach their full potential. Working so closely with Andrea and others, we're able to provide continuity between us, and Playskill will refer back to me so we can signpost to additional services.

With some families I've referred, parents can be nervous. At this young age, it may be the first time they are accessing services relating to disabilities and it can be difficult for them to see other children and accept what may be ahead. But once they join, they see a positive impact on their child's development and relief that someone is there to help. As well as the invaluable connection with other parents who are in the same situation - something not to be underestimated and not otherwise available in mainstream services. I hear from them how positive and supportive Playskill is to the whole family.

I will continue to promote Playskill, not only to those families in need, but to all the services who work with pre-school aged children. There are varying levels of delays and disabilities, and with Health Visiting Services and GPs so over stretched, subtleties are being missed. It is essential we ensure children and families are accessing all the support on offer.

May Playskill continue for many years to come and, in an ideal world, be there to support every child in need.



Your support

Playskill receives no government funding and we rely on the donations of our supporters to make a difference to the lives of children with physical disabilities/difficulties and their families. All our services are completely free to families attending our groups.

We had so many fantastic supporters taking on all sorts of challenges in 2022 to raise money for Playskill, with sponsored swims, marathons and half-marathons, sponsored walks...not to mention Playskill children themselves who took part in our annual sponsored obstacle course in the Summer!

With your amazing support, Playskill raised:

£395,561
in **2022**



Our dedicated runners, walkers & trekkers



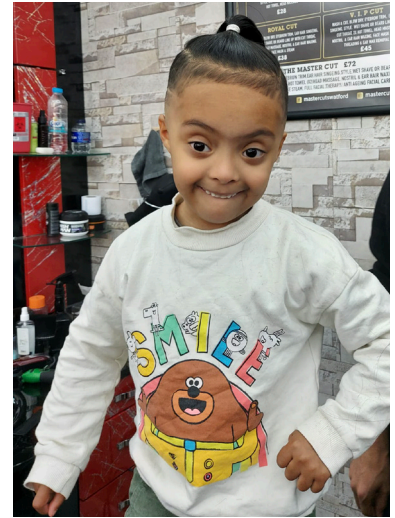
Team Playskill at the Great Big Walk for Herts



Annual sponsored obstacle course in Playskill groups



Playskill parent, Vinay, swam an epic 20km across Lake Windermere



Playskill graduate, Dexter, chopped off his lovely locks



Wear it Red – from primary school to university & beyond!



Time for tea



Christmas choirs, carol concert, gift wrapping and festive fun

“ Our fundraising plays a small part in helping Playskill continue to help families the way that they helped ours.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year our focus is to ensure every aspect of our service supports the whole family to cope with the challenges life will throw their way.

The Oxford University approved research study of Playskill and the wellbeing of mothers, undertaken by Paediatric Occupational Therapist, Kirsten Prest, underlined the importance of the parental support network. We are much more than our expert therapies in group, providing a range of training, respite and all-important peer support. Our Parent Training has become largely remote since the pandemic and hugely celebrated, but some face-to-face training has returned in the form of parent breakfasts and practical training on sleep and dressing.

Starting 2023 with all six groups now operating with eight children for a two-hour session, grants more time to build these support networks – allowing parents a child-free coffee break during session, a luxury not often afforded to parents of disabled children. The children also have more time for social interaction – essential to their social, emotional and communication development which took a huge hit during the pandemic.

The new year has seen all Watford groups move to Stanborough Park, giving us a larger and more flexible space than Langley Road with facilities to meet everyone's needs.

With some groups over-subscribed, we're grateful to have received funding in order to begin planning the opening of our seventh group in the next 12 months, ensuring no child is left behind.

The past three years have seen our families experience a huge window of isolation and a lack of connection in the community. And now additional challenges with the cost-of-living crisis. We cannot simply 'treat' the child without also addressing the needs of the wider family. That is why we are passionate about providing a holistic wraparound package of family support as early as possible. This allows us the chance to reduce potential life-long complications keeping families strong and resourced for their journey.

We hope this report will encourage you to support the valued work that takes place at Playskill, supporting children with disabilities/difficulties and their families. We simply cannot do it without you!

Stanborough Park



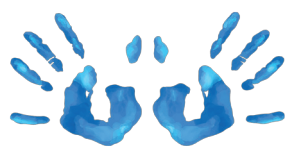
Thank you.
To donate visit
playskill.org/donate



Thank you

We are immensely grateful to the many trusts, foundations, community groups, corporate partners and individuals who have generously supported our work in 2022.





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