



Family childcare stories

Challengers' families

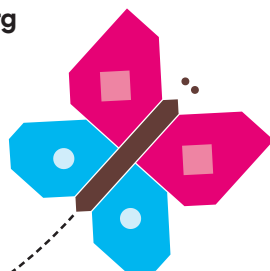
Challengers is a charity set up in the 1970s to fill a gap in childcare, after school and holiday activities for disabled children and young people. It has a purpose built centre in Guildford, Surrey, for children with complex needs and their siblings, an inclusive pre-school in Farnham, youth clubs, a young adults service as well as holiday clubs, family days and pop-up activities in and around Surrey and Hampshire.

Their well trained staff team are at the heart of the organisation. Parents describe their passion, enthusiasm, energy and professionalism which sets them apart from other services. Their extensive training covering everything from play, behavioural support, non-crisis intervention, specific feeding methods and communication techniques means that they never turn a child away no matter the severity of their impairments.

They ensure that despite the high level of expertise and one to one support that is offered to children, families are only ever charged a small cost. Through fundraising, corporate sponsorship, local authority funding and events, they are able to heavily subsidise the range of care and activities on offer.

www.disability-challengers.org

We spoke to
a number of
families who use
their services:



"Challengers is a life-saving service, where no child is excluded. The amazing staff normalise life for the whole family. We trust them implicitly."



Sarah, Tom and Bobby

"They are amazing, they take the time to understand each child and what they like doing, to bring out the best in them. They don't exclude children or tell them they're naughty or silly. They find solutions to ensure children have a happy time. I chose them for my older son who doesn't have special educational needs because of the outstanding care they offer all children which sets them apart from other providers. Tom is now a very empathetic, emotionally intelligent young boy, who just wouldn't have developed in the same way at any of the other nurseries I visited."

Fantastic inclusive childcare for children with or without special educational needs and disabilities

Sarah chose Challengers pre-school in Farnham having visited other settings that she felt didn't quite fit the bill. She wanted a nursery that was inclusive, creative and that would offer something extra. Challengers pre-school offers the full Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum for up to 30 children with 15 of the places reserved for children

with special educational needs and disabilities. All children participate in the extensive range of play and early learning activities, including a soft play area and outside space. Some children have very complex needs and have one to one support whilst others have no additional needs or a lower level of need.

Sarah's younger son Bobby is now at Challengers, and this has proved to be a good choice for him too. Bobby has delayed speech and is awaiting assessment for emerging special educational needs. Sarah describes the staff as being very passionate about each child and Bobby's eyes light up when he attends. They know him very well and when he has a melt-down, they try and find the cause and help to fix it. They would never tell him he's silly or naughty.

Sarah says it can be very isolating having a child with special educational needs; other parents can make thoughtless comments, so meeting other families from Challengers has benefitted their whole family. They regularly attend the Challengers family days and her family have found a strong circle of friends through Challengers.





Gail and Fergus

Gail has been involved with Challengers for many years. Her son Fergus who is now 11 is very vulnerable; he uses a wheelchair, is fed via a gastrostomy and is very dependent. He attends the after school club in Farnham and is collected from his school by Challengers staff who take him to after school club until he is collected by Gail or his PA at 6pm. This, Gail says is just one of the aspects that sets Challengers above others. "The transport service they offer means I don't have to break off what I'm doing to collect him from school and take him to after school club."

Changing family life

Gail says, "I can't possibly give him the same play opportunities that he has at Challengers. He is very vulnerable, needs a hoist and has personal care needs which means it's become very difficult to take him out. I have utter faith in them – they normalise family life for all of us. I can go out shopping, spend time with my other children and even have a haircut!"

Paul, Callum and William

Callum and William are very active, bouncy young boys. Callum is eight and has severe autism, William is six and doesn't have any special educational needs. When Paul became a single parent a few years ago, life became very difficult until a neighbour who is a volunteer for Challengers suggested he contact them.

"They have been a life saver!" says Paul, "the fact that both Callum and William can attend after school club and holiday club together has meant that I can continue working. I never have to worry about them, I trust them implicitly. Because of Callum's condition, I won't leave him with anyone else except my mum, but she can't care for them all the time and they need to be with other children having fun."

Paul describes how the staff just accept Callum, "they never judge him and he is able to do what he wants to do in a fun, friendly environment. They are amazing, it's a pity there aren't more services like Challengers for all families. It's also great value for money, they don't pass on the extra costs to us parents – I'd love to pay them more if I could!"

For more information about childcare and family services, visit:
www.familyandchildcaretrust.org