



Challengers★

Impact Report 2025–26



Welcome

A message from our CEO, Gen Dearman

This Impact Report is more than a record of activity; it reflects the difference that can be achieved when people, communities, partners, and stakeholders come together around a shared purpose. Over the last 12 months, we have operated against a backdrop of ongoing local government reorganisation, uncertainty around funding, and a growing demand for our services. What has remained unwavering throughout is our determination to use the power of play to transform the lives of disabled children, young people and their families, creating meaningful and lasting change.

While numbers help us measure progress, they only tell part of the story. The outcomes presented in these pages demonstrate the power of #TeamOrange – a life enriched, a barrier removed, a connection made. Behind every achievement is the dedication of our staff, volunteers, supporters, partners and the families we work alongside. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to our journey over the past year.

We are proud to share this report with you and invite you to celebrate the progress we have made together, while looking forward to the possibilities that lie ahead.



A message from our Chairman, Russell Harvey

Once again, over the last year, Challengers has shown the power of our work and the dedication of #TeamOrange in creating more unforgettable moments for children, young people and their families.

While funding pressures remain a real challenge, I deeply admire the team's resilience as they continue to secure the support needed to keep making such a vital difference.

As Chair of the Board, I have been extremely pleased to welcome four new trustees – Ashley Carter, Holly Goodwin, Dr Ruth Milton and David Stam – who, with their strong and broad skillsets, are already guiding and supporting Gen and the senior leadership team in our plans for the year ahead.

Challengers has much to be proud of and so many highlights to mention but I am particularly looking forward to my visits on scheme this summer.

This is a favourite time of year for me, when I am able to go out and meet the teams and children, and be reminded of the profound impact Challengers has on disabled children and young people, and on their parents and carers. Seeing each young person included, supported and able to have fun is always a powerful reminder of why our mission matters.





About Challengers



Our Vision

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



Our Mission

To transform the lives of disabled children, young people and their families through the power of play.



No child or young person will ever be excluded from our services due to complex needs or financial circumstances. We are dedicated to ensuring every child receives the right support to take part, connect, and fully enjoy meaningful experiences with us.

Our Services

Play: Ages 4 to 12

Youth: Ages 11 to 18

555 Service: Alternative provision for children and young people who are currently out of education, ages 5 - 18

The Hub: Holistic support for families of disabled children

We support families in



Our impact

Now 18 months into our five-year strategy, we are seeing tangible evidence of the difference our work makes.

The outcomes and stories shared here demonstrate the life-changing impact of providing opportunities where every child can belong, be themselves and reach their full potential.



Enrich the wellbeing and confidence of disabled children and young people

Providing safe, inclusive environments through our short breaks and play schemes, Challengers gives disabled children and young people the opportunity to be themselves, build confidence, develop new skills and form meaningful friendships. As a result, they become more confident, less isolated and better equipped to thrive.

What our parents say...

"Challengers has improved every aspect of my child's life, helping her grow in confidence and learn to find herself."

"He gets to be himself in an environment where he is not judged for being different."

Our Impact



88% of parent carers say Challengers helps improve their child's mental health



89% of parent carers agree that Challengers helps reduce their child's loneliness and isolation

Advocate for families and challenge barriers that exclude them

We have continued to develop and expand our Alternative Provision, supporting disabled children and young people currently out of education. This may be due to them awaiting a suitable school placement, because they have been excluded, or because their current school place cannot provide the appropriate support.

Our non-exclusion approach enables us to remove barriers that prevent many children from accessing support elsewhere, ensuring every child has the opportunity to be included, valued and supported. We continue to bridge gaps in provision, opening doors to opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach.

Our Impact

54% of children supported had previously been excluded from other settings

91% of families said Challengers helps build a more inclusive community



What our parents say...

"Challengers was the first setting to accept him."

"Only Challengers have given him an environment that understands and supports him."

Connect families, reduce isolation and build community

We create opportunities for families to connect, share experiences and support one another. By bringing together people who understand the challenges of raising a disabled child, we help families feel less isolated, build meaningful relationships and become part of a supportive community.

Our Impact

81% of families experienced reduced isolation



61% connected with other families through Challengers



93% say Challengers helps improve their wellbeing as a parent/carer



What our parents say...

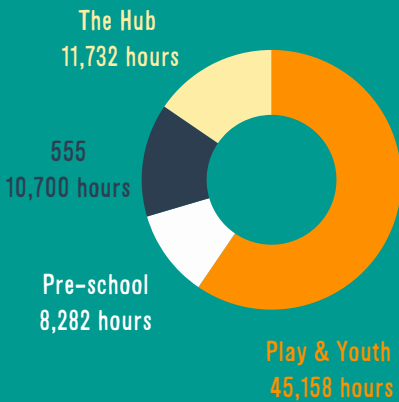
“Accessing Challengers has changed my life. I have friends and a community that doesn’t judge.”

“Challengers has given me a community and hope when things have been hard.”

Generate as much net income as we can to invest in our vital services

The support we provide is only possible because of the generosity of our supporters, funders and partners. By generating as much net income as possible and carefully managing our resources, we can invest more in life-changing services, strengthen our long-term sustainability and ensure that disabled children, young people and families continue to receive the support they need.

Hours delivered by service...



This year, we’ve provided

75,872

hours of support to

911

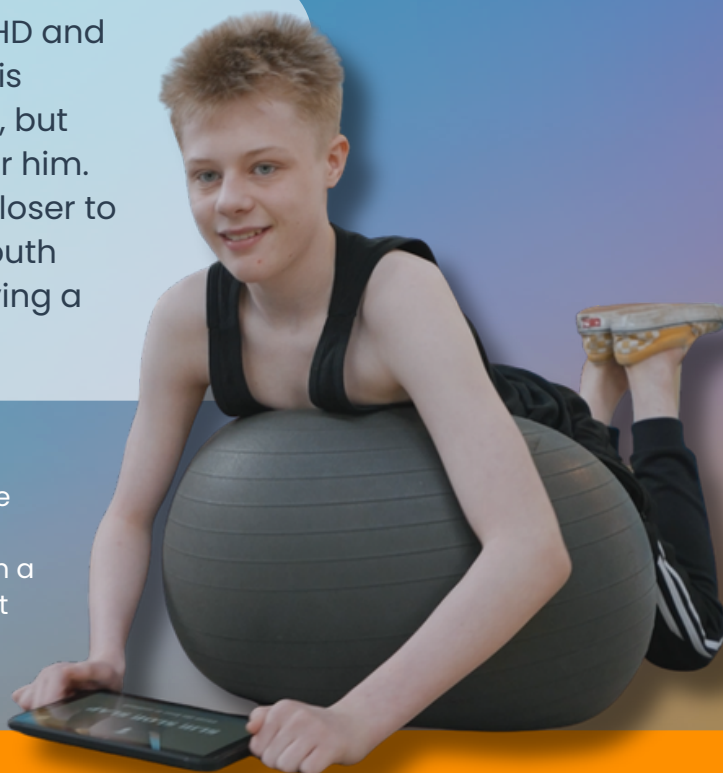
families



Enriching the wellbeing and confidence of disabled children and young people

Fourteen-year-old Bradley has autism, ADHD and pica, meaning he puts non-food items in his mouth. He's incredibly bright academically, but social situations can be a real challenge for him. His mum explains that his social skills are closer to those of a five-year-old. Now part of our Youth service, he's building confidence and enjoying a space where he feels understood...

For young people with complex needs, having a place where they feel understood and included can have a significant impact on wellbeing. Bradley benefits from a setting where staff understand his needs and support him to participate without judgement.



Mum Zoe shares their story...

Through Challengers, Bradley is able to build relationships and engage with other young people in an inclusive environment. These opportunities reduce social isolation and help develop the confidence needed to form meaningful connections.

"Bradley is thriving amazingly. He's gone up into Challengers Youth and he absolutely loves it."

Young people's wellbeing is closely linked to family wellbeing. By providing trusted respite, Challengers enables parents to recharge, reducing stress within the family and creating a more positive environment for both Bradley and Axel.

"Being a parent carer is a full-time job. I couldn't hold a job because of my children. It's hard, it is just hard and it's never ending. Challengers is one of the few places I can release both of the boys and I haven't got a panic because they're safe."

Bradley's younger brother Axel has recently received the first stage of his autism diagnosis and is already beginning to settle into life at Challengers. Like many parents at the start of their SEND journey, his mum faced uncertainty about what the future might hold and where she could find support that truly understood the needs of both her children.

Scan the QR code to watch
Bradley and Axel's story



Advocating for families and challenging the barriers that exclude them

More than half (54%) of Challengers families reported their child had experienced exclusion due to disability. (Challengers Parent Survey, 2025) Nationally, children with SEND are up to five times more likely to be excluded from school. (The Children's Society)

Chase is 5 years old and is autistic and non-verbal. He also has pica, requiring constant supervision to keep him safe.

Like many families of children with SEND, Chase's mum, Selina, found herself having to fight for the support her son needed. Without a suitable school place, everyday life became increasingly difficult, and the family faced uncertainty about Chase's future.



Scan the QR code to watch Chase's story



As well as supporting Chase, we worked alongside Selina to help raise awareness of the challenges, families like hers face when children are unable to access appropriate education. Their story was featured on the BBC, helping to shine a spotlight on the growing crisis facing children with SEND.

Selina shares their story...

"You can't just simply go to a park or a soft play because other children and other parents do not get it."

"Challengers is the safest place going. You have other families that are in the same situation, you have all the staff that understand."

For Selina, Challengers provided more than an inclusive space for Chase. It gave the whole family vital support during an incredibly difficult period.

"Challengers has been my saving grace, it's been my life support for me. If it wasn't here, it wouldn't be a life really. Challengers has been a support network for me mentally, emotionally, physically."

Today, Chase has secured a school place that meets his needs, giving him the opportunity to learn, develop and thrive.

How we're helping families in crisis

Every year, Challengers supports families whose children are unable to access the education and support they need. Through our services and advocacy work, we help families navigate some of the most challenging periods of their lives.

Through practical support, awareness-raising and partnership working, Challengers continues to be a strong voice for disabled children, young people and their families, helping to create more inclusive communities and opportunities for all.



Scan the QR code to learn how we're supporting disabled children and young people without school spaces

Connecting families to reduce isolation and create a community of support

With just 36% of disabled children feeling like part of the community at their education or training setting (DCP, 2026), 81% of parent carers tell us that Challengers helps reduce family isolation and loneliness by providing them with a community. (Challengers Parent Carer survey, 2025)

For families raising disabled children, everyday life can be unpredictable. For Jasmine and her mum, Challengers provides something invaluable: a place where they can simply be themselves.

Jasmine is 13 years old and has complex autism, ADHD and pica, and her needs can change from one moment to the next.

Every outing requires careful planning, constant vigilance and, often, two adults to keep her safe.



Scan the QR
code to watch
Jasmine's story



Mum Emma shares their story...

For her family, life outside the home isn't always welcoming.

"When she wants to bolt, you've got to grab her," her mum explains. "She's strong, she's tall, so we have to go out two to one with her most of the time."

While some people respond with kindness and understanding, others stare, make comments or laugh. These moments can leave families feeling isolated at a time when they most need compassion. Challengers changes that.

Here, Jasmine is welcomed without judgement. She can play, explore and enjoy herself in a safe environment, supported by staff who understand her needs. At the same time, her mum has the reassurance that her daughter is not only safe but genuinely included.

"If we didn't have Challengers, it would be awful, to be honest with you," she says. "Not being able to bring her to a safe place, not having the support of the staff... it would definitely be really hard."

The impact reaches far beyond Jasmine herself.

Caring for a disabled child can be demanding and, at times, deeply isolating. Through Challengers, Jasmine's family has found more than childcare – they have found a community. They've built lasting friendships with families who understand their experiences and offer support, encouragement and a sense of belonging.

"Being the parent carer of a child with disabilities can be incredibly difficult and it can be really lonely," says her mum. "But you build up this really nice network of friends. As long as you've got the right people with you, then it makes it better."

Jasmine's story shows why Challengers exists. Every session gives disabled children the chance to have fun, grow in confidence and build independence, while providing families with the respite and support they need. For families like Jasmine's, Challengers isn't just a play and leisure service – it's a lifeline.

Investing in vital services supporting disabled children and young people

For Dan, Managing Director of ramsac, supporting Challengers is about far more than corporate giving. It's about helping to build stronger communities, creating opportunities for disabled children and young people, and ensuring families feel supported when they need it most.



Dan first became involved with Challengers around 15 years ago after being invited to a Business Club event by another local business. What began as a networking opportunity quickly became a long-term commitment.



Dan's connection to the charity is also deeply personal.

Dan shares his story...

"As a dad to children with SEND, I understand some of the challenges families can face and how isolating that journey can sometimes feel. Compared to many of the families supported by Challengers, our experience has been much easier, which has only increased my admiration for the incredible work the charity does."

Seeing the impact Challengers has, not only on disabled children and young people, but also on parents, siblings and the wider family, made supporting the charity an easy decision.

For Dan, the value of the Challengers Business Club extends well beyond fundraising. While members help fund life-changing services, he believes they are investing in something much bigger.

"They're investing in stronger communities and in giving families opportunities that many of us take for granted." Dan also believes the Business Club is unlike any other networking group.

"It naturally attracts businesses that believe doing good is good for business. There are no hard sales pitches. Instead, it's a genuine community of people who support one another because they're united by a shared commitment to Challengers and the difference it makes."

Dan is passionate about the role businesses can play in creating lasting social impact: "Businesses don't exist in isolation. We employ people, we serve communities and we have the ability to create positive change beyond the products or services we sell."

Supporting Challengers, he says, isn't simply an act of corporate social responsibility. It's about recognising that every child deserves the chance to play, make friends and reach their potential, and that every family deserves the support to thrive. When businesses help make that possible, the benefits ripple far beyond the families directly supported - strengthening communities and demonstrating that success is measured by more than profit alone.

Dan's message to businesses considering joining the Challengers Business Club is simple: come along to one event. "I think you'll quickly realise it's something quite different. You'll meet generous, supportive business leaders, make genuine connections and see first-hand the impact Challengers has on local families."

Looking ahead, Dan is excited to see the Business Club continue to grow. "Every new member brings fresh ideas, new relationships and more support for Challengers. That means more disabled children and young people can access the opportunities they deserve, and more families can benefit from the incredible work the charity does. That's something every business can be proud to be part of."

Scan to learn more
about our Business Club

Oscar's Fundraising Journey



Sometimes, the most powerful acts of support begin with a simple idea. For 11-year-old Oscar, that idea came from a Christmas craft activity at home, which soon grew into a thoughtful fundraiser for Challengers.

After walking past our Guildford centre, Oscar decided he wanted to raise money for Challengers. Using coloured twine, sticks and LED lights, he created handmade light-up stars to sell to friends, family and members of his local community. This was not the first time Oscar has fundraised for Challengers – at only six years old he took part in a bake sale with the help of his mother. This time however, he wanted to fundraise by himself.

Oscar taught himself new skills throughout the process, from designing the stars to carefully wrapping the twine and adding the lights. According to Oscar, the activity took patience and perseverance, especially when some parts were more difficult than expected, but knowing that the money was going to charity helped him keep going.

The fundraiser became about much more than money. Oscar built confidence, sharing Challengers' work with others, showing how creativity and kindness can inspire a whole community. His stars were bought as decorations and Christmas gifts, spreading joy while helping to support disabled children and young people who attend our services.

When asked what he hoped the money would help Challengers do, Oscar said he would love it to buy games for disabled children, "to bring them joy." That simple hope reflects the heart of Challengers' work: creating fun, inclusive spaces where disabled children and young people can play, make friends and feel they belong.

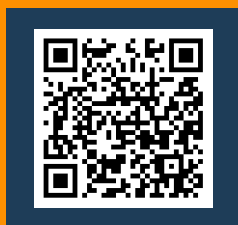
Oscar's story is a brilliant reminder that fundraising does not have to be complicated to make an impact. With imagination, determination and support from those around him, he turned a festive family activity into something meaningful for others. His kindness has helped raise vital awareness and funds for Challengers, and he is already planning his next challenge – a 24-hour board-game-athon.

For Challengers, supporters like Oscar make an enormous difference. Every fundraiser helps us to continue providing inclusive play and leisure opportunities for disabled children and young people, ensuring more families can access the support, joy and connection they deserve.

Scan the QR code and find out more about Oscar's fundraising journey



Feeling inspired? Scan the QR code and find out how to get involved



From finding confidence to creating it for others

When Chris first came to Challengers, he was just four years old. Born with a weaker left side, Chris needed somewhere he could simply be a child, somewhere he could play, build confidence and discover what he could do.

Chris shares his story...

"Those vital 12 months at Challengers gave me and my family the confidence to go out and live life as fully as possible." That confidence shaped the rest of his life.

Looking back, Chris says, "Without Challengers, I wouldn't be the person I am today."

Today, Chris has come full circle. Now Corporate Engagement Manager at Challengers, he builds partnerships with businesses across the country, bringing together companies, volunteers and supporters to help transform the lives of disabled children and young people. Over the past few years he has helped grow a thriving network of more than 100 corporate supporters, securing partnerships, sponsorships and fundraising initiatives that directly fund life-changing services.

It wasn't the career he imagined.



"When I was little I wanted to be a tree surgeon," he laughs. "But this is better."

After years of supporting Challengers through fundraising, Chris spotted a vacancy and realised he could use his experience to give back to the charity that had given him so much. Now, he says every day feels like a privilege.

"I see young people having the most thrilling time, made possible partly through the partnerships and corporate community that support us. This isn't only a job. We see how every donation is put to good use."

The impact of Chris' work is never far away.

One day, while wearing his orange Challengers hoodie in Sainsbury's, a young boy ran over to hug him. His mum explained that her son attends Challengers and sees everyone wearing orange as a friend.

"The power of what we do is often underestimated. It's worth every late night, every bit of effort."

Another unforgettable moment came at Orange Aid, when a young volunteer told Chris: "I like that you came to Challengers and now you work here. I also used to attend Challengers, and now I volunteer."

For Chris, it was a reminder that Challengers creates opportunities that last far beyond childhood.

Thirty years ago, Challengers gave Chris the confidence to believe in himself. Today, he's helping create those same opportunities for the next generation.

"I really believe I have the best job in the world because I can help give our young people the same opportunities I had growing up."



Chris' story is proof that the impact of Challengers doesn't end when a child leaves a play scheme. Sometimes, it comes full circle. A child who once needed confidence becomes an adult helping others discover their own.



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to support our work, please visit our website:

www.disability-challengers.org



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