





www.wearebeams.org.uk

Allsworth Court, 38-40 St David's Road, Hextable, Kent BR8 7RJ

WE ARE BEAMS

We Are Beams is a local charity that supports disabled children and their families in Kent and Medway. The disabled children and young people who access our services are aged between 4-19 years. They will usually have one or multiple learning difficulties, complex health needs such as Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy or another life limiting disease, physical or sensory impairment, challenging behaviour as a result of their disability, Autism or severe ADHD. Our work is divided up into six key areas. These are:

- Short Breaks Service Providing holiday play schemes, day trips, family outings and hourly care.
- Family Advice Service Providing 1-1 support, parent support groups, themed workshops, telephone helpline, parenting programmes, EHCP support. At any one time, we support 450 families.
- Direct Payment Service Offering help to 1200 parents in receipt of a direct payment.
- Payroll Service for parents and small businesses.
- Brokerage Service Offering care and support to young people transitioning into adult care. We are currently dealing with 27 clients for Brokaerage and 13 for person centred planning.
- **Dragon's Retreat** 6 bedded Overnight Respite-currently caring for 64 young people for 1-3 days on average for respite.

We need to raise £2.5 million each year in order to continue our care services to the most vulnerable in society.

The Beams' Family Advice Team is usually the first point of contact into the charity for most parents. The first contact will be emotional, sometimes tearful when the parent of a disabled child is desperate, seeking help and advice and has no one else to turn to.

Parents and carers may be referred by the local school, GP, Healthcare Practitioner Community Paediatricians, speech and language Therapists, specialist nurses, educational professionals and other charities such as the National Autistic Society, Homestart or they can self-refer, with or without a diagnosis for their child.

The role of the Family advice team is to provide the right advice and support to parents so that they can make the best choices for their disabled child. The advice we give is for any financial matters, education, health, transport and mobility, emotional support for parents and offering

parenting programmes so that the family can meet the disabled child's needs.

The Family Advice Service supports families in Dartford, Gravesham and Sevenoaks, although helpline calls are received from a wider area, particularly neighbouring Boroughs.

We specialise in supporting children and young people with Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder



TRACEY SAMS FAMILY ADVICE MANAGER

The Family Advice Team has faced significant challenges in adapting to the evolving landscape following the lockdown period. Families experienced prolonged isolation, often stemming from fears developed during extended time away from broader society. As a result, the team is now managing an increased number of severe and complex cases linked to social isolation. Key issues include supporting mental health, addressing anxiety, and overcoming delayed development in children and young people.

One of the primary concerns for families remains securing the right educational environment for their children. Approximately 80% of the team's time is dedicated to helping parents navigate paperwork, attend meetings, and address inconsistancy with support.



The impact of their work is evident in recent evaluations:

92% of parents

reported feeling socially isolated before engaging with the team, and the same percentage stated they felt much less isolated after receiving support. This included establishing peer networks through support groups and parenting programmes. Initially, only

56% of parents

felt informed about handling their child's disability. After receiving support, 98% felt confident and wellinformed.

100% of parents

surveyed stated they
would recommend
Beams to others dealing
with disability challenges,
reflecting the team's lasting
impact on families' lives

96% of parents

of parents confirmed we had a positive impact on their mental health and **95%** of their children reported improved wellbeing.

SEN AND DISABILITY IN KENT

In Kent, there is significant concern regarding the lack of sufficient Special Educational Needs (SEN) support. Despite efforts, Kent County Council (KCC) has been grappling with an increasing demand for SEN placements, leaving many families struggling to find appropriate support for their children. The SEND Sufficiency Plan for 2023-2028 highlights plans to expand SEN provision, but resources remain limited, and many schools reporting they are already stretched too thin.

Some parents and advocacy groups argue that existing policies seem geared more toward budget cuts than adequately meeting students' diverse needs.

Parents have expressed frustration over KCC's plans to redirect children with moderate SEN from specialized schools to mainstream schools, which they argue are not equipped to support them. This shift has raised concerns that children may face greater mental health challenges, like anxiety and school avoidance, as mainstream environments lack the necessary specialised resources.

Additionally, the cost of placing children in private SEN schools has soared, indicating a further gap in accessible public options for families in need.

In the UK, children with autism who do not receive early support and intervention can face numerous challenges affecting their education, mental health, and social integration.

The Children and Familes Act 2014 is good legislation. What is broken on a daily occurrence, is in the cases we support are 'breaches of statutory duty' time and time again. Each time causing injustice to a child.

Here are some key insights on the implications of unmet support needs for autistic children:

Increased Mental Health Risk: Children with autism and other disabilities who lack adequate support are more likely to experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders. The National Autistic Society notes that without early intervention, autistic children are at a higher risk for co-occurring conditions due to unmet sensory and social needs. Many children with autism struggle in mainstream educational environments that lack the resources for individual support. A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism found that 60% of children on the autism spectrum were waiting over a year for school-based support, often leading to disengagement, school refusal, or placement in inappropriate settings.

Autistic children who do not receive early and specialised intervention often face social isolation. Lack of support with communication and social skills can result in difficulties forming friendships, leading to isolation from peers, which has lasting effects on social and emotional well-being.

Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's commissioner for England has also expressed concerns regarding the experiences and challenges faced by children under five in the UK today, especially if there is a disability in the mix. In her comments, she highlighted the crucial role of early childhood support shaping long-term outcomes.

Economic Cost: The cost associated with autism is significantly higher for those who do not receive early support. Costs extend to the broader healthcare and social care systems, as well as impacts on family income due to the need for parents to reduce working hours to take on caregiving roles.

Poverty and disability often intersect significantly for families in the UK, creating financial and social challenges that

disproportionately impact households with disabled family members. Here are some relevant facts:

Higher Poverty Rates: Families with disabled children are more likely to live in poverty compared to those without. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, nearly half (49%) of children in poverty have at least one disabled parent or sibling. Disability often results in additional costs and barriers to employment.

OUR EXPERIENCE

We Are Beams was founded 29 years ago by a group of parents raising children with disabilities. Today, it operates under the guidance of a board of trustees, which includes four parent service users and five members from the business community.

Many of our staff bring a combination of lived experience and professional expertise in social care, ensuring a compassionate and knowledgeable approach to supporting families.

Our Family Advisors have the following experience:

- Eight team members have substantial personal experience of living with a disabled child
- Formal management qualifications (ILM)
- Teaching qualifications (adult education)
- 27 years' experience of developing and managing an holistic service
- 20 years' experience working knowledge of special educational needs and disability law and supporting Education Health Care Plans (EHCP).
- Extensive experience of multi-agency /partnership working.
- Training and experience of key worker/lead professional role.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder trainer (Cygnet Parenting Programmes)
- Parenting practitioner (Webster Stratton) and licenced practitioner for the Cygnet Parenting Programme.
- Updated Safeguarding training
- Substantial involvement in strategic planning for disability services in Kent alongside Kent Safeguarding Board, Kent PACT, Local authority and Kent Community Foundation.
- Training in suicide prevention in young people.
- Lead charity in a consortium of smaller charities offering

- Family Advice Services and training consistently across Kent. This group is named TOTIUS. This is so that we can discuss outcomes, new practices, best practice, and government applications for funding as a group.
- We work with the local authority in Kent, Medway, Bromley, Bexley, Havering and Greenwich for our Short Breaks Service.
- A consultant, funded by the National Lottery, conducted a strategic review of the charity, highlighting that it is both well organised and effectively governed.

We support the local community by opening up our building with our facilities to local schools to use for their SEN students. We also go into schools to teach/present about our work with disabled children.

We support other local charities that have a synergy with our work such as Elliott Homes Memorial, Homestart and More than Words.

We organise grants for individuals outside of our charity work so that their lives are a little easier. We have organised three garden makeovers, two adapted vans, three new electric wheelchairs, a bedroom makeover, new kitchen appliances and clothing for a young person in need during the past 18 months...

We have a reputation of being very community focused.

Child Protection and Children in Need

Safeguarding children is a key priority for the charity. The Head of Charity serves as a Safeguarding Lead and actively participates in the Kent Safeguarding Children Board. To uphold child protection, Beams maintains robust safeguarding policies, procedures, and training, ensuring every child–irrespective of age; gender, religion, or ethnicity is protected from harm.

The charity's safeguarding goals include:

- Protecting children from abuse and maltreatment.
- Preventing harm to children's health and development.
- Ensuring children grow up in safe and supportive environments.
- Taking decisive action to support the best possible outcomes for all children and young people.
- Ensuring all staff are trained in Safeguarding practices.

Some of our more complex cases that have developed as a consequence of the lockdown period are:

- We have reported more children with complex needs, including ASD and ADHD, excluded from school.
- Incidents of extreme violence and domestic abuse towards family members.
- Manipulative and controlling behaviour within the family dynamic.
- Multiple A&E visits related to behavioural crises.
- Engagement in dangerous, promiscuous behaviour, highlighting severe vulnerability.

By providing intervention, guidance, and a collaborative approach with other services, we aim to improve outcomes and ensure every child is protected and supported effectively.

FAMILY ADVICE OUTPUTS

TELEPHONE SUPPORT

2705
CALLS TO THE SERVICE

DROP IN
ADVICE CLINICS FOR 1-1
SUPPORT- 92 CLINICS
AND 497 PARENTS
SUPPORTED. MANY
WERE THEN REFERRED
TO OTHER BEAMS
SERVICES.

PARENTS
SUPPORT
GROUPS -12 IN
PERSON WITH
78 ATTENDEES

EXTERNAL
GROUP SUPPORT
- 16 SESSIONS
WITH 41
ATTENDEES

CYGNET
PARENTING
PROGRAMMES 7 SESSIONS WITH
69 SET OF
PARENTS

ADHD
WORKSHOPS
- 2 DELIVERED
WITH 20 SET OF
PARENTS

HEALTH AND
WELLBEING
WORKSHOP FOR
PARENTS -30
ATTENDEES

Parent quote:

"The support I have received from Beams since the birth of my sons is truly amazing; every member of the team I have been in contact with has been extremely knowledgeable and helpful. The disabled children and families in Kent are so very lucky to have such a wonderful charity there to support and guide them, so thank you".



OUR OUTCOMES

TO PREVENT
A FAMILY
FROM
FALLING INTO
A CRISIS

TO SUPPORT
THE PARENTS TO
BUILD STRONG
RELATIONSHIPS
WITH OTHER
PARENTS

REDUCE SOCIAL ISOLATION FOR PARENT AND CHILD IMPROVED
MENTAL
HEALTH AND
WELLBEING FOR
THE WHOLE
FAMILY

INCREASED
CONFIDENCE IN
DEALING WITH
DISABLED CHILD
AND DISABILITY
SERVICES.

BETTER
EDUCATIONAL
OUT COMES
FOR THE
CHILD

NEW
PARENTING
SKILLS AND
COPING
STRATEGY.

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ADVICE

98% of respondents were very satisfied by the services received by Family Advice

93% of respondents felt that the Family Advice Team understood their concerns

100% would recommend the Family Advice service to others

96% felt that Beams has had a positive impact on their mental health and well being

Prior to using Beams services **92%** of respondents felt some isolation, afterwards **92%** felt none or less isolation.

Parents and carers were asked

Tell us a little of how you feel today. What would be the consequences of not receiving any support

"Overwhelmed, hear people talk about different things related to ASD but I don't know where to start"

"Today is a bad day. I feel helpless and overwhelmed for me and my children"

"I feel extremely stressed and overwhelmed, I am hoping to receive the right support me and my daughter so desperately need"

"I feel exhausted and overwhelmed, burnt out, depressed, family breakdown"

"Really fed up! Quite isolated and feel my family may break up"

"Deflated and unsure of next steps"

I am emotionally distraught, and struggling to keep my head up"

"Feeling a bit lost with the education system and feel my son is being let down without the right support in school"

What impact have our services had on your family?

"They have empowered me to continue trying to get my child the support he needs"

"Really relaxed our mind after speaking with Tracey. She helped us so much with our son's journey. Be forever grateful"

"We could not have got through the maze of EHCPs and getting our children extra support without Beams, it is an invaluable service to have access to and we know how fortunate we are to have access to this! Thank you"

"I can honestly say I could not have managed without Beams. I was going round in circles trying to find help and support until a friend recommended Beams The help and support has been amazing. They have eased so much stress within our family I cannot thank them enough"

"I feel We Are Beams have helped me put things in order and prospective. And feel like I'm moving forward instead of stuck"

CASE STUDY

Tishe's Story



Tishe, is a vibrant, energetic 6-year-old boy who faces significant challenges due to his diagnoses of ASD, Global Development Delay, and ADHD. He is part of a loving family and lives alongside his twin sister and parents.

Tishe is non-verbal so often gets frustrated when he cannot communicate his needs, as a result, he can hit out and often his sister and mum are caught up in this frustration.

Day-to-day life can be very challenging and unpredictable for Tishe's family; he needs lots of extra attention and support with all his personal care. He is very clingy so consumes a lot of his parents time, affecting his sister's access to the same level of attention.

Unfortunately, the family have been unable to find Tishe a place at a suitable SEN school. This has all caused the family a lot of stress and Tishe is missing important education to enable him to develop and thrive.

As a family, they are unable to take part in normal family activities such as going to a cinema or restaurant. Tishe is unable to sit still for long and has sensory processing difficulties so noise and crowds are overwhelming. The family had been searching for a suitable holiday club for Tishe, he is very active

and enjoys being outdoors but sadly could not find a suitable placement would accept him due to additional needs, until the family heard about We Are Beams through the school.

Our expert Family Advisors have been able to navigate the family through their rights of finding a suitable school plus providing access to training and parent support groups. These have helped the family feel less isolated and they have gained useful coping strategies and knowledge to understand more about Tishe's additional needs.

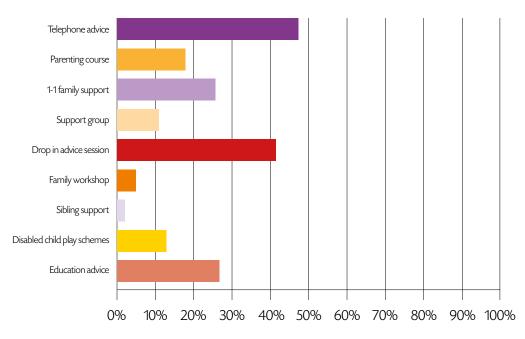
The Direct Payments team have assisted the family to find a personal assistant for Tishe for a few hours a week to allow his parents to spend quality time with their daughter.

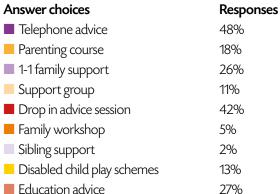
Beams have been able to make a real difference for Tishe and his family; he has joined the holiday clubs and experienced fun activities whilst building his socialisation and interactional skills. He also has enjoyed Beams parties where he has been able to feel free and does not feel over whelmed or an outsider.

Elizabeth, Tishe's mum is so grateful her family found Beams,

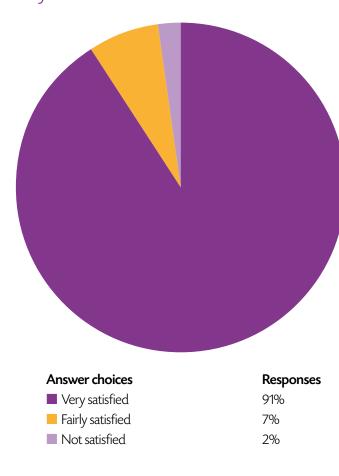
"The support Beams has given my family, through helping us find a specialist school, and finding a Personal Assistant has been life changing. Beams has made our family feel like we are not alone and gives us confidence that Tishe will be able to reach his full potential"

What services have you received from We Are Beams?

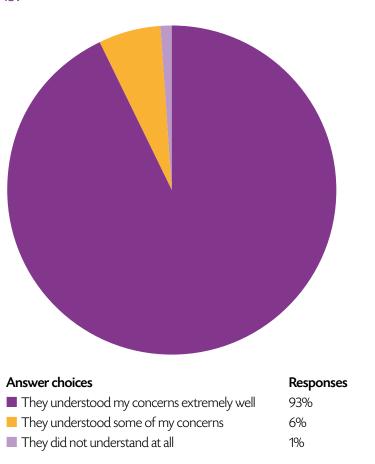




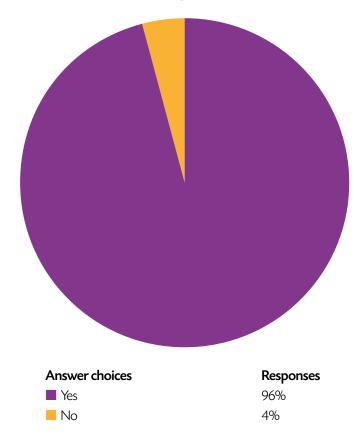
How would you describe your level of overall satisfaction with Family Advice services received?



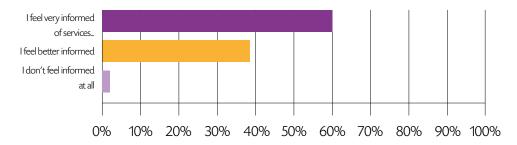
How well did you feel our staff member understood your concerns?



Do you feel We Are Beams has had a positive impact on your health and well-being?



Having accessed the Family Advice, how informed do you now feel with regards to accessing the services available for parents and carers of a disabled child?



Answer choices

- I feel very informed of services available
- I feel better informed
- I don't feel informed at all

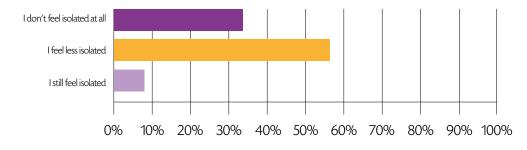
Responses

60%

39%

2%

Having received the services of Family Advice, how isolated do you feel as a parent/carer of a disabled child/young person?



Answer choices

■ I don't feel isolated at all

I feel less isolated

■ I still feel isolated

Responses

34%

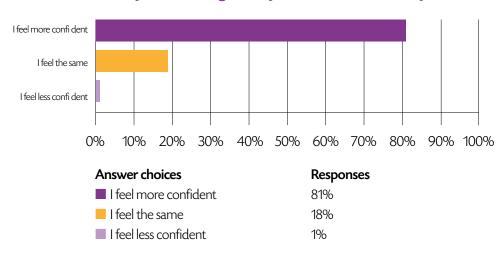
57%

8%

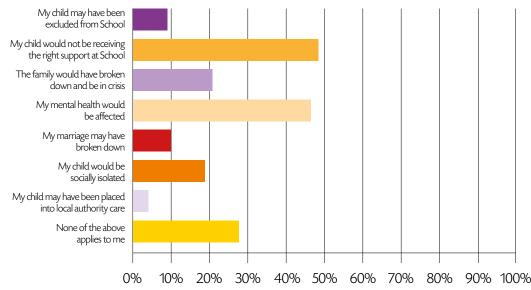




Having received the services of Family Advice, how confident are you dealing with your child's disability?



If we had not supported you or your family, could any of the following statements be true for you?



Answer choices	Responses
■ My child may have been excluded from School	9%
My child would not be receiving the right support at School	49%
■ The family would have broken down and be in crisis	21%
My mental health would be affected	47%
■ My marriage may have broken down	10%
My child would be socially isolated	19%
My child may have been placed into local authority care	4%
None of the above applies to me	28%

CYGNET PARENTING PROGRAMME 2023/2024

69 sets of parents have completed the Cygnet Parenting Programme with Beams

It is designed for parents experiencing difficulties with their child's Autism diagnosis, but is also very useful for parents with a child with other disabilities such as ADHD.

The programme runs for 6 weeks and covers the following topics:

- What is Autism?
- Communication
- Sensory issues
- Understanding behaviours
- Managing Behaviour-coping strategies

There is also a follow up session to ensure outcomes and personal goals are achieved.

The outcomes from the Cygnet Parenting Programme supports the family in key areas

- Reduction of social isolation
- New parenting skills
- Develop a parent support network
- Develop coping strategies
- Support mental health and wellbeing



100% of attendees said the course helped them to develop new parenting skills

99% of attendees agreed with our statement - The programme should support your mental health and wellbeing by giving you new strategies and skills

99% of parents learnt new coping strategies

98% agreed that this training and its outcomes might prevent a family from falling into crisis

"By meeting other parents and sharing our problems of what we are going through has really helped a lot. I used to cry and say my problem is too much but now the learning has made me free"

"The constant dread that I was failing my child because I didn't understand her or could help her with things that are difficult was also affecting my mental health. I now feel confident that I know my child and I can help her with the challenges she will face in her life"

The outcomes from the Cygnet programme support families in these key areas

I have learnt a lot from other parents going through similar things and can understand what I am going through. We share tips, experiences and provide useful advice



CASE STUDY

Ruby's Story



Ruby lives with her mother, is 16 years old and has neuro development conditions ADHD and Autism. She is non verbal and can only communicate through Picture Exchange Communication (PECS) books. This is where young people use pictures, photos and symbols to decide what they want to do or to communicate.

Ruby has very high anxiety and can show obsessive behaviour and can get very upset and frustrated with those around her. This can result in self harming and physical aggression towards others. These outbursts can be upsetting and overwhelming for her mother and family.

Unfortunately, she has not been in school for nearly 3 years and her constant 24/7 care and attention needs has been a strain and exhausting for her mother Linda. Ruby thrives on routine and structure and lack of predictable routines can escalate her anxiety. Ruby has always been very clingy towards her mother Linda and copies everything Linda does or follows her. Being out of education has meant that Ruby has lost the structure and routine that school provided as well as her dependency on her mother has grown. This has also increased the burden on Linda who struggles with her own mental health.

Linda first heard about We Are Beams through Ruby's social worker and Ruby now visits Dragon's Retreat Respite for overnight care and takes part in days out and holiday activities through Beams Shortbreaks Service.

Beams Family Advice team have given a significant amount of time to this case and the local authority, health care practitioners and Ruby's past school have failed in their responsibility collectively towards Ruby and family. We have supported Ruby's fight for an education right up to the ombudsman for social care.

Beams has given Ruby the opportunity to spend time away from her mother and have some much needed fun, try new activities and to socialise with other young people with additional needs.

CASE STUDIES

Case study - Family 1

- Mum is a wheelchair user, amputated arm, and epilepsy and learning difficulties.
- Mum struggles to retain information and be organised, she relies heavily on friends and support services to get things done for her.
- Both children have a diagnosis of Autism and ADHD.
- There is a constant cycle of Social Care involvement and mum needs support at meetings.

 There are always issues around school attendance and we have attended many meetings to discuss this with school staff and mum.

We have helped with the following:

- Completing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) forms, DLA reassessment forms, Personal Independence (PIP) forms.
- Completed family fund applications and other grant applications to get furniture, curtains, carpets, IT equipment, garden toys.

- Applied for assessment of needs for EHC Plan for both girls.
- Helped with housing applications.
- Worked on behaviour interventions and putting strategies in place to help with challenging behaviours at home.
- Mum will often call to talk about problems that is on her mind and sometimes just needs someone to listen to her.
- Completion of forms, read hospital letters, make lists of to do's.

CASE STUDIES

Case study - Family 2

- Single mum, two sons aged 16 and 12.
 Oldest has Autism and Learning Disability, youngest APD, ADHD and ASD.
- History of Domestic violence in the family
- Oldest son was involved in county line activity, criminals preyed on his vulnerability.
- Family have had safeguarding concerns raised several times over the 6 years we have been working with them.

We have helped with the following:

- We have supported with health/ assessment appointments for both boys.
 Mum is on pathway for her own ASD and ADHD diagnosis.
- Have secured EHCP's for both boys including supporting with tribunals along the way.

- Oldest son is currently struggling in a specialist college placement but youngest one has successfully transferred with his EHCP to secondary (mainstream). We are working with oldest son's social worker to hold an emergency annual review to look at alternative placement.
- Have managed to engage services, which have pulled him away from this group of associates, which he considers as friends due to his vulnerability.
- We acted as point of contact for SEN solicitors assisting with the tribunal cases as mum was unable to handle or understand high volume of paperwork
- Although our core work is in relation to the children, we have to go over and above to help and support mum with a vast range

- of needs due to her own limitations and learning difficulties. This has included helping her with her own referral paperwork.

 Helping her apply for universal credit and support her with both emails and phone calls relating to admin matters for not only the children but also herself. Mum is not IT literate and now that most agencies rely on virtual meetings, we have had to go to the home or ask mum to come to the office to help her access the meetings. Mum is unable to do this without support.
- Mum has accessed our support groups, Cygnet training and recently took part in our wellbeing day. This family will require ongoing input.

CASE STUDIES

Case study - Family 3

- Sarah, a single mother first made contact 18 months ago when friends and family noticed the Charlie's development was delayed and the nursery was not supportive.
- Sarah has her own high levels of need and has very limited literacy skills
- Sarah and Charlie were living in in a very small one bedroom flat and had been unable to complete the new housing application.

We have helped with the following:

 Sarah has now been re-homed in a two-bed house and we have had successful applications to Kent Winter Energy Scheme and helped Sarah apply to the local food bank.

- Attended various meetings at nursery and then helped Sarah find a new nursery, as Charlie's needs were not being met.
- Worked with local Children's Centre so Charlie could access targeted playgroups to improve social skills
- Completed Primary school application for Charlie to attend Primary school in September 2024
- Helped Sarah with application to community paediatrician for ASD/ADHD assessment and completed all paperwork and questionnaires
- Placed Sarah on our our Cygnet Parenting Programme

- Successful application for Disability Living Allowance for Charlie
- Visual Supports made for Charlie to help him identify School and Home days
- Charlie his now accessing Beams' short break activities and thriving.
- Sarah attends family advice parent support groups, and we are helping her to develop a peer network of friends.

Parent comments

"When I came to Beams for the first time I was very confused/upset. I did not really have any support or anyone to talk to that understood. After my first meeting, I felt much lifted. Bal understood and I felt so relieved. Now I am so much more confident. I am still learning but any questions I have, beams help without making you feel stupid. They are lovely and are like friends, the support is incredible!"

"The staff have an excellent and endless knowledge of the procedures of the Local authority and what is required of them"

"Beams is a lifeline for us. For our family, our two disabled boys, for our friend's (pretty much all of whom we have met through Beams). We are a community"

"Thank you for all your support over the year. You are an amazing organisation/amazing team of individuals" "All the staff I have met at We Are Beams have been extremely helpful, professional and down to earth"

"Staff are amazing and supportive throughout, easily contactable and the knowledge they have is unprecedented. I do not know another service that could provide the same level of support and advice"

"I meet with Tracy and she was helpful understanding and empathic. A huge thank you to all involved at 'We are Beams' for providing such a valuable service"

We Are Beams, Allsworth Court, 38-40 St David's Road, Hextable, Kent BR8 7RJ admin@wearebeams.org.uk | 01322 668501









@WEAREBEAMS

