

30 Years of Support A Lifetime of Impact



newsletter

SUPPORTING DISABLED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

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We Are Beams Celebrates 30 Years of Supporting Disabled Children

We Are Beams is proudly celebrating 30 years of providing support to disabled children and their families across the community.

Founded in 1996 by a determined group of parents who believed they could create better opportunities and support for their disabled children, the charity has now grown from a small parent-led initiative into an essential service. Today, We Are Beams supports more than 500 families and children at any one time.

Over the past three decades, the charity has helped thousands of families navigate the complex challenges of caring for disabled children. At a time when families need support more than ever, We Are Beams remain a critical source of strength and stability for those caring for a disabled child.

We dipped into the archives and fondly look back over the last 30 years, remembering some of the milestones that have shaped our journey.



1996

The charity was founded by a group of parents and called The Parents Consortium, originally offering short breaks for disabled children and family day trips.



2002

Our Family Advice Service was introduced providing guidance and support to families navigating life with a disabled child.



2004

The first garden was created, offering a peaceful outdoor space for children and families to enjoy.



2007

A sensory cabin and playroom was built, giving children a safe and stimulating environment to learn, play and explore.



2013

Dragon's Retreat Respite Unit opened to provide essential respite care for families.



2017

The charity changed its name to We Are Beams.



2020

Despite a very uncertain time during Covid- Beams quickly adapted and continued to support children and families at Dragon's Retreat and Family Advice worked remotely with support groups via zoom.



2020-2021

Beams delivered PPE to families all over Kent on behalf of KCC and managed the Kent Toy Scheme with over 1000 children receiving toys and play equipment.



2023

Over £200,000 was raised for our Plant a Smile campaign, to fund the creation of a fantastic new, fully inclusive garden space.



2026

Beams celebrates 30 years, supporting 500 families at any one time and generating £2.5 million to continue delivering our vital care services to disabled children and their families.

Family Advice

This year has started with a bang. Just a few months in and the team have helped 716 parents through our advice helpline and drop in clinics. No appointment is needed to come along to any of our advice drop ins. You will always receive a warm welcome from one of our experienced team members. Details and timings can be found on our website here wearebeams.org.uk/family-advice/

We would like to introduce the wonderful Jan Gordon, who has stepped in to the volunteer role at our Dartford Advice Drop in following the departure of Lucilla Potts. Lucilla had been volunteering with us for a number of years and will be sadly missed.

In January, we also welcomed Camille Rickwood to our team. Camille has been developing a dedicated support offer for parents and carers of children under five, helping navigate key areas of early development such as potty training, sleep routines, food challenges along with advice on supporting play at home and ideas to promote learning and school readiness. Support

is available on a 1-1 basis to ensure parents receive practical, personalised guidance that works for their family.

Alongside this, we also run weekly "Explore and Discover" sessions and a termly "Make a Mess" session.

Explore and Discover offers a calm and welcoming environment where children can enjoy messy play, creative activities, and imaginative exploration.

£3 per session - To see dates and to book your place visit www.wearebeams.org.uk call **01322 668501** or email Camille.rickwood@wearebeams.org.uk



Make a Mess...Get ready to squish, splash, and dive into the mess! These fun, termly sessions are all about hands-on messy and sensory play, with lots of exciting textures, colours, and activities to explore.

Accessible Facility Hire for All at We Are Beams



We Are Beams facilities are fully accessible and available to hire to the local community, schools, and SEN groups. The facilities provide a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for children, young people, and families.

The space includes a large accessible garden with specialist outdoor play equipment, an accessible swing, trampoline, sports equipment, water play, and a growing area for plants and vegetables. There is also a cinema room featuring a 98-inch screen, a tailor-made media wall, surround sound, and ambient lighting.

Additional indoor spaces include a soft playroom with a ball pit, a fully equipped sensory cabin with colour and light columns, an interactive wall carpet and projector, and a large playroom with a TV/DVD player and games console. A kitchen and dining area is also available for group meals, and family gatherings.

Anne Hammond who recently visited Beams with her grandchildren, family and friends thoroughly recommends a visit,

"Our family and some close friends spent a wonderful Sunday afternoon hiring the facilities at We Are Beams, and we can't thank the team enough for making it possible. My granddaughter Annabelle has complex needs and global developmental delay, and like many families, it is incredibly difficult to find places where we can spend time together and where she is safe, supported, and truly included. Being able to hire the Beams facilities gave us that opportunity. We Are Beams is a lifeline for families like ours. The facilities were perfect for our family gathering, everything was easy to organise, and we hope to hire the space again later in the year, Thank you"

To find out more about hiring our facilities call 01322 668501 ext 5

We Are Beams Joins New National Association to Strengthen Children's Respite Services across the UK



We Are Beams has proudly joined eleven other leading independent charities in the launch of the Association of Children's Respite Providers.

This new national body launched at the Houses of Parliament is dedicated to strengthening the network of respite services for children with disabilities and their families, bringing together organisations committed to providing critical support.

Supported by Mims Davies MP, the new association marks an exciting milestone for the children's respite sector. By collaborating on a national scale, member charities like We Are Beams can share knowledge, resources, best practices, and ensure the sustainability and growth of respite services across the UK.

Beams provide overnight respite care for children and young people with disabilities up to the age of 18 years. With six fully fitted bedrooms, Dragon's Retreat is an independent Ofsted Outstanding short break unit.

Robin Adams, Registered Manager of Dragon's Retreat is delighted to be involved *"We Are Beams offers short breaks for children and young people with disabilities, creating a home-from-home enriching experience, promoting independent living skills and ensuring the young person has fun. Being part of the new association is a step towards securing the long-term stability of these vital services and ensuring families continue to have access to this support"*





Celebrating Community Connections at We Are Beams

We Are Beams has been proud to welcome a number of local leaders to visit our facilities recently.

Among our visitors were the **Mayor of Dartford, Peter Whapshott**; the **Mayor of Swanley, Keith Mitchell**; the **Deputy Mayor of Swanley, Michael Horwood**; the **CEO of Swanley Town Council, Ryan Hayman**; the **Mayor of Bexley, Christine Catterall**; the **Mayor of Gravesham, Jenny Wallace** and the **MP for Dartford, Jim Dickson**.

These visits provided a fantastic opportunity to showcase the vital work we do in supporting disabled children and their families across our communities.

As a charity deeply rooted in the local area, it was especially meaningful to welcome representatives from the communities we support.

Dragon's Retreat

Our young people continue to make great achievements with their independent life skills development, we love highlighting how hard they work, well done to everyone.

At Dragons we have enjoyed some nice visits out in the community; to aquariums, garden centres, local parks and even managed to get down to the coast and have some lovely fish and chips.

There has been lots of fun in house with various arts and crafts activities, sensory, messy play, plenty of dancing in the playroom, having some pamper days and plenty of cooking. Recently we did some fruit tasting to help encourage trying different foods and promoting a healthy diet.



Over the next few months we will be continuing the 30th year celebrations and spring activities. Fingers crossed that we have some warmer weather to enjoy getting out in the community.

Dragon's Retreat Respite Unit Achieves 'Outstanding' Rating from Ofsted for Second Consecutive Year!



Dragons Retreat has once again been awarded the highest possible Ofsted rating of **'Outstanding'**, following a rigorous inspection. This marks the second year in a row the service has achieved this exceptional recognition.

The Ofsted accolade reflects a year of intense dedication by the entire team, who have strived not only to enhance the quality of care but also to create an environment that enables children and young people to learn, grow, and prepare for adulthood, while having fun and building meaningful friendships.

"Beams is a vital support to us. It makes a huge difference to know there is someone out there who understands the difficulties and challenges of having a child with autism and learning difficulties."

Olivia's mum, Donna

A lifeline for nearly two decades, Beams first began supporting Olivia and her family after her diagnosis of autism and a speech and learning disability at the age of 4 years. At that time, the charity was known as the Parents Consortium, before the evolution into the Beams you know today.

Beams support began with enrolling Olivia's parents onto the six-week Cygnet parenting course run by the Family Advice Service. Olivia's parents gained valuable insight and specialist knowledge about autism and the challenges Olivia might face.

Olivia is now 22 years old and is an incredibly sociable person who embraces every opportunity for a new adventure. Among her many interests, she is deeply creative, finding particular joy creating watercolour

Growing up with Beams

Supporting Olivia throughout the years



masterpieces, with birds being her favourite subject. Other interests including puzzling and keeping fit, with Zumba being a favourite.

Over the years, Beams has been there every step of Olivia's journey. She loved the Short Break holiday activities, the family events, and the afterschool clubs. These were brilliant for helping Olivia try new things, gain confidence, make friends, and experience a bit more independence in a safe and fully inclusive place. It gave her parents that huge peace of mind knowing she was being supported in a way that let her truly thrive.

Now that Olivia is a young adult, Beams support has shifted to match her next chapter and she absolutely loves being part of our Buzz Club run by the Short Breaks Service. Buzz Club has been specially created for young people aged 18 to 25 years. The club organises fun, structured trips, such as bowling, afternoon tea, and visits to the beach.

Beams is incredibly proud to have been a part of Olivia's journey over the past 20 years and are looking forward to a positive and promising future that lies ahead.

Short Breaks



During the February half term, Beamers enjoyed an exciting trip to Bowles Adventure Centre, where they took part in sledding and skiing activities.

We also hosted two successful family open sessions at Beams—one during the February half term and another over the Easter holidays. It was great to see so many families joining us.

Our current playschemes have been very popular, with young people taking part in a wide range of

activities including bowling, using the facilities at Beams, rock climbing, visiting a local zoo and archery.

We would also like to extend a big thank you to all our supporters who generously donated Easter eggs this year. The children thoroughly enjoyed them!

Visit the Beams website for updates on future events. To participate in our short break activities, you will need to be a registered member of Beams.

Beams Payroll expands its reach

Beams Payroll Service are supporting over 1,000 clients, mostly parents of disabled children to help with the financial administration of their allocated Direct Payment or Personal Budget. In recent weeks we expanded our reach to offer services for Medway residents through the Medway Council Self-Directed Support Team, as a part of wider choice to the individuals they are supporting.

We are now supporting several local Charities and Businesses with their Payroll needs too!

If you or someone you know has a need for Payroll please remember that any profit generated by our Payroll Service is returned in full to We Are Beams, supporting the valuable work we deliver for disabled children, young people and their families.

You can make an enquiry by calling the team on 01322 610840

DBS change for self-employed individuals

Legislative changes have come into force allowing self-employed individuals and personal employees to apply for Enhanced and Enhanced with Barred List(s) DBS checks for the first time.

Self-employed workers and personal employees who are paid for their roles are now able to apply for Enhanced or Enhanced with Barred List(s) checks through a DBS umbrella body, provided their role is eligible.

This change will benefit workers such as:

- Private tutors offering lessons directly to children
- Personal employees hired directly by individuals, for example through direct payments or personal health budgets

We Are Beams can provide this service. For more information please contact admin@wearebeams.org.uk

Short Break Parent Quotes

"Without these day trips, my son's world is very small, home and school. He needs a challenge, new experiences and new realisations to grow"

"A day out for my son at Beamers gives him some self confidence that he can do something without me as well as giving him independence. He is always so happy after a trip with Beams. Thank you for all you do"

Beams Host a Tea Party

Celebrate 30 Years of Beams

Host your own tea event and help support disabled children and their families across Kent.

- ☪ Afternoon tea
- ☪ Coffee morning
- ☪ Cake sale
- ☪ Bake event
- ☪ Community gathering

Together, let's make our 30th year tea-riffic!

Get Involved Today
fundraising@wearebeams.org.uk
01322 668501
www.wearebeams.org.uk

Supporting disabled children & families
RCN 1054129



We Are Beams is delighted to announce that British racing driver Nicolas Hamilton has officially joined the charity as a Patron.

Nicolas made history by competing in the British Touring Car Championship while living with Cerebral Palsy. He is a living testament to the fact that a diagnosis does not have to define a destination.

During a recent visit to Dragon's Retreat, the charity's six bedded overnight respite unit in Hextable, Nicolas shared his unique journey of overcoming personal challenges. By speaking openly about his experiences, he shared with the children how determination and

passion can drive success, both on the race track and in everyday life.

Reflecting on his decision to join the charity as a Patron, Nicolas said

"I first met Beams last year when I made my announcement for the 2025 British Touring Car season. It was a pleasure to meet the children and staff, and I was truly impressed by the incredible impact the charity has on the families it supports.

I am honoured to join as a Patron and

look forward to using my knowledge and experience of disability to support the charity, as well as the children and young people that access the services, in any way I can"

Nicolas joins fellow Patrons, Milkshake! TV presenter David Ribb and Paralympian JohnBoy Smith in supporting the charity's vital work. This announcement marks a fantastic start to the charity's 30th year celebrations, highlighting three decades of dedication to the local community.

Supporting Independence Service

Brokerage Management - This service continues to provide support to people who need additional help to manage their Direct Payment.

We have continued to build a great relationship with the NHS. Alongside this we have completed 19 DBS checks for 9 of clients on their behalf.

Empower-Me – We ran a successful 6 week pilot with a group of young people earlier this year and as a result we will shortly be launching an exciting new service, Empower-Me. Our clients and their families often found it difficult to take their support plans forward and put their action plans into place. Our new service addresses this by supporting the young people on a 1:1 basis and will replace our Support Planning offer.

Empower-Me is our new registered learning provision, which supports young people to gain the functional skills they need to live independently and gain employment if that is what they want

It is a unique contextual learning opportunity, delivering functional social, educational and work related skills through our specially trained LSAs, on a 1:1 basis in the young person's own home and community. Support is gradually reduced as the young person becomes more independent. We are excited to be working with a number of young people looking to join this programme.

For more information please visit www.wearebeams.org.uk/brokerage

£7,000 raised at O2 climb



We Are Beams is incredibly proud to have raised £7,000 at its recent Up at The O2 fundraising challenge.

A total of 25 climbers took on the challenge, ascending 52 metres above London at the iconic O2. The event brought together an inspiring mix of local businesses, supporters and families connected to the charity.

The involvement of families supported by We Are Beams made the day even more powerful, with parents and children taking on the climb together. Their presence clearly demonstrated the real difference the charity makes to the lives of disabled children and young people.



A huge thank you to event sponsor **Downton & Ali Associates** for their support, as well as to all the families, supporters and local businesses who played a part in making the event such a success.

Diary of Events *Get involved!*



Can you help to support Beams?

If you are thinking about taking part in a marathon, mud run, cycling challenge or even skydiving, We Are Beams can help make it happen.

To mark our 30th anniversary, Beams have an exciting range of challenge events. Whether you are a runner, cyclist, thrill-seeker, or simply looking for a fun way to get active, there is an event for you.

Messy Dash

Sunday 5th July - Dartford Central Park

London to Brighton Bike Ride

Sunday 13th September

Tough Mudder

Saturday 19th September - Holmbush Estate West Sussex

Skydive & Wing Walk Challenge

Sunday 20th September - Headcorn

Autumn Afternoon Tea

Tuesday 22nd September - St Peter's Church, Hextable

Elton John Tribute Night

Friday 16th October - Bexley Sports and Social Club

Host a Tea Party - Throughout 2026

For more information and to sign up visit

www.wearebeams.org.uk

fundraising@wearebeams.org.uk 01322 668501 x5



Teeing Off in Style - We Are Beams Charity Golf Day Raises over £25,000



Beams is delighted to announce the resounding success of its first ever Charity Golf Day, held on Thursday 26th March, which raised over £25,000 in support of disabled children and their families.

Hosted at the picturesque Woldingham Golf Club, the event marked the official launch of the charity's 30th anniversary celebrations, bringing together supporters, businesses, and golf enthusiasts for a memorable day of sport, networking, and fundraising.

Participants of all abilities took to the course, enjoying the stunning surroundings of the Surrey North Downs while engaging in friendly competition.

Thank you to everyone who attended, supported, and contributed to making the day such a success. Special thanks go to the event headline sponsors **FLR Spectron** and **County UK**, whose generous support played a key role in delivering the event and achieving this outstanding fundraising total.



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