



# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2020-21



"We are transforming the Early Years for children with SEND"

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## Welcome

**As in previous years, this report sits alongside the Trustee Report and Annual Accounts for the previous fiscal year covering April 2020 to March 2021.**

It is difficult to overstate the direct impact the various lockdowns and other measures brought in to combat the spread of COVID-19 have had on the children and families we support, our teams, and wider communities. While framed by the pandemic, this past year shines bright with the passion, perseverance, commitment and strength of our staff and volunteers, led by our impressive CEO Catherine and her management team.

Having taken the role of Chair in May 2020, it has been truly inspiring to see how Dingley's Promise has been able to continue to provide support to our children and families, despite Centres closures and restrictions in place regarding in-person visits. We have also managed to continue increasing our impact on the national stage by further extending our training programme and have played an active role in the debate around Childcare and Early Education as part of the APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group).

As the Trustee Board continues to focus on closely supporting our CEO and her team, we also look to the future and the opportunities available to us in further growing our charity's reach, impact, and reputation. Key to this strategy is furthering the cause of inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in mainstream education as well as growing our national training programme, ensuring many more children and families will have the opportunity to access the quality of services offered by Dingley's Promise. We have strengthened, and will continue to do so, our Trustee Board with the necessary skills to ensure the Trustees are able to adequately support these ambitious plans.

These are exciting times for Dingley's Promise and with so many new opportunities ahead of us I am confident we will be able to go from strength to strength. On behalf of all our Trustees I would like to thank once again our dedicated staff and volunteers for their tireless work throughout these very challenging times. You are all the true heart of this exceptional charity and the positive impact you make every day is immensely important. Thank you also to everyone who funded Dingley's Promise during this critical time, without you none of the charity's wonderful achievements would be possible

Thank you all,

**Michael Scheepers**  
Chair of Trustees

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Scheepers', written over a faint background graphic of a smiling face with hearts.

# Our Reach and Impact 2020-2021



We reached **198** children directly through our Centres



We reached **130** families through our outreach support



We reached **3177** children indirectly through training



Our total reach this year increased by **1044%**



**68%** of our children transitioned to mainstream education



Only **30%** of our children's learning suffered due to the pandemic compared to **86%** nationally



**100%** of families felt positive about the future as a result of our support



**95%** of our trainees felt more confident in supporting children with SEND in the mainstream



## Reflections on the year

What an incredible year this has been. I don't want to use the word 'unprecedented' because it has become very overused in relation to the pandemic, but I do want to express just how intense and unpredictable it has been for us.

Our children and their families have made their way through the pandemic, and despite the very real difficulties and isolation have emerged with far fewer negative impacts than children nationally. This is something we are incredibly proud of.

As an organisation we have changed and adapted constantly to ensure we were providing the right support at the right time to both families and our own teams. From pages 6-10 this report will focus on how we adapted in our Centres and in our Family Support programme, and the impact that had on those we are committed to supporting.

While the heart of what we do will always be our Centres, this is the year that saw us become a national influence through our training programme. A landmark 1000 people across the country accessed our training, and we joined our first Department

for Education-funded national project to improve practice – all of which you can read about in more detail on page 11.

Dingley's Promise is committed to making sure every child with SEND gets the best start, and for anyone who knows us well this means we are ambitious and constantly improving and developing our services. On pages 12-14 you will be able to read more about our plans for the future that will both help our children recover, and also spread good practice and influence policy nationally. There is no national charity that focuses specifically on children with SEND in the Early Years and we are in demand to ensure the Early Years Sector considers children with SEND, and the disability sector considers the Early Years.

I hope that you enjoy reading this Impact Report and learning more about the steps we have taken to ensure that children with SEND and their families were not forgotten during the pandemic. As always, we are in awe of our children and their families, who inspire us every day, and who have borne the brunt of the pandemic, but who are still striving to be the best that they can be. Our promise to them is that we will do everything in our power to give them the best start, to support them in achieving their potential, and to ensure their voices are heard.

**Catherine McLeod MBE**  
**Chief Executive**

# Our Centres

Our Centre-based services have been running since 1983, but this year saw the biggest challenge the teams have ever faced. Within the first two weeks of the first lockdown (Spring 2020), we moved all of our child and family support online, creating shared online systems to track the support we offered, to support our own teams and to coordinate our online materials for families. Half of our Centre staff were furloughed, and the rest were redeployed to work from home using our online systems.

Our families were able to access one to one support over the phone, through online meetings or even via emails and texts. They had the opportunity to access group sessions with their child, where we continued with familiar routines they recognized from the Centres. They were also able to join online family support sessions during the day or in the evenings to keep in touch with each other and share worries or difficulties, and we delivered 737% more family sessions than ever before.

In June we reopened our Centres, and remained open throughout the rest of the pandemic – despite lockdowns. At first only some children returned, but by September almost all children were back in the Centres amid tight hygiene measures. Our teams identified that the higher the needs of the child, the more they had been affected by the lockdowns, and so a recovery programme was designed. This involved group activities focusing on the three areas of development that had slowed the most for all of our children – physical development, speech and language and emotional health. For children with higher needs, there were tailored one to one sessions of massage and physical activities – aiming to help them to recover from the loss of support they experienced over the course of the pandemic.

The impact of our remote programme and recovery programme were dramatic, and by the end of the year the majority of our children were showing improvement.



Our Reading Centre

## How COVID impacted our delivery



We delivered **13506** hours of support in our Centres – a third fewer than usual



We ran **295** parent sessions – a **737%** increase



During the first lockdown alone there were **1295** support contacts with parents



Our trips and playschemes stopped completely

## How COVID affected families



During lockdown, **60%** of our parents said that Dingley's Promise was **"The only support they had"**.



During the pandemic, **75%** of families faced delays to routine health appointments with **51%** causing a negative impact on the child's condition (*The Disabled Children's Partnership Survey*)



with **51%** of those delays causing a negative impact on the child's condition (*The Disabled Children's Partnership Survey*)

"Dingley's Promise provides our whole family with much needed support and information; it's the only constant "service" in our life and without it we don't know what we'd do, or where our daughter would be now. We feel extremely lucky that our daughter has the opportunity to attend Dingley's Promise."

**West Berkshire Parent**

# Our Family Support and Outreach

Never in our history has our family support offer been more important. Our family support team was central to our remote support programme and involved in its design from the first days of the first lockdown. For the first time, our organisation worked across all three Centres as one, establishing a triage system for families who needed support. Since the support was remote, the family support workers led on allocating families in need to the team member with the best skills to help them – regardless of which Centre they worked in. As a result, we were able to support 130 families whose children did not attend any of our Centres, ensuring families were not forgotten during lockdown.

Over the summer, our family support programme continued throughout the holidays in recognition of the stress and difficulties our families were facing. Our family support workers and some of our Centre staff worked to ensure there was support at this vital time – something we had never done before.







In October, with the relaxation of some restrictions, we began to plan to introduce ‘Walk and Talk’ sessions for families so that our family support workers could meet parents face to face again and really listen to how they were feeling. These were vital for parents who had been struggling for so long without face to face contact, and became a key part of our delivery over the winter and into spring. Parents felt much more comfortable opening up, confiding and having a cry when they were physically with our team, and it was a reminder that no matter how useful online services were, there is no real substitute for actually being together.

The impact of the family support programme was dramatic this year. It was the difference between families feeling they had been forgotten and knowing there was someone there for them. In fact, 60% of our families had no other support other than us during the pandemic – a fact that is mirrored in national statistics which suggest that children with SEND and their families were forgotten during COVID.

*“It has been hugely beneficial over the pandemic to know that someone is available on the end of the phone to talk to – at times Paula has been a huge support in my house!”*

**West Berkshire Parent**

*“The walk and talk sessions give me the opportunity to open up and talk freely. If I want to get upset and let it all out Tanya is there to offer any support she can.”*

**Reading Parent**

# In The Words Of Our Parents

“My beautiful daughter Callie is autistic. She struggles a lot with understanding the world around her and communicating how she is feeling. She goes through so much inside that beautiful little head of hers and life is extremely overwhelming for her at times.

Dingley’s Promise has been an invaluable source of support, comfort and fun for her throughout the pandemic. They help her thrive and give her an opportunity to develop in her own unique way. I can’t thank them enough for what they do for us all as a family.”

**Sheridan, Callie’s Mum**



“For over a year Leo had meltdowns 90% of the day. With his words stuck inside and severe sensory issues causing such distress and physical pain, he had no way of communicating with us. We couldn’t be any lower as a family.

In October 2020 I made a phone call to Dingley’s Promise. Within a month of Leo being at the Wokingham Centre he could point, then other communication gestures developed. Until January this year he was completely non verbal, but because of their endless work and determination Leo now has over 200 words!

We are beyond proud of our boy and forever grateful for Dingley’s Promise who offer support in a safe environment. We can breathe a sigh of relief knowing he is having fun in the most nurturing way.”

**Andrea, Leo’s Mum**



# Our Training

As we started the year, Dingley's Promise was proud to have an accredited Level 3 course in 'Early Years Inclusive Practice', which around 50 people had accessed. Over the course of 2020-21 our training offer has transformed and now has much greater reach and potential to drive real change in the sector.

## March 2020

We adapted our course to create a simpler 'Introduction to Early Years Inclusive Practice' for practitioners stuck at home in lockdown, and in the two months that followed 767 of them signed up to receive our course materials. Despite the shorter length of course, confidence levels of the trainees to support children with SEND in the mainstream increased from 22% to 85%.

## July 2020

We were contacted by the Council for Disabled Children to join the Early Years SEND Partnership – a group of national charities delivering training and consultancy across the country funded by the Department for Education. We agreed to join and develop a second course focusing on transitions for children with SEND from the Early Years into school. Over the course of the year, we delivered the training to 220 trainees in Early Years settings and in local authorities.

## September 2020

We were overwhelmed to be shortlisted for a Third Sector Big Impact Award alongside a number of much bigger charities in recognition of the impact of our training offer. This was an important moment, as it showed us how big the potential was for the training programme to bring about national change.

## January 2021

With support from the Big Lottery, we further developed and shared our Entry Exit Pathway which is a tool to best plan transitions out of our setting and into either a mainstream setting or school. It has been key in involving families in the transition process, and importantly also gives clear guidance on how to assess the success of transitions once they are complete.

## March 2021

We secured an extension to the EYSEND Partnership project from the Department for Education, allowing us to reach more local authority areas.

Over the year, we reached over 1000 practitioners and 3177 children with SEND who they work with, and training has now become a key part of our work that helps us ensure thousands more children can get the best start.

## Our Plans for the Future

2020-2021 at Dingley's Promise saw us capitalise on opportunities that we didn't expect. We worked hard to minimise the impact of the pandemic on our children and families, and we actively worked to spread more inclusive practice at a time that practitioners were stuck at home.

During 2021-2022 we have big plans to help our own children and families recover; to increase our training and consultancy across the country, to have more influence over decision makers and to expand our services.



## Recovery work

We know that our children have particularly struggled in three key areas: speech and language; physical development; and emotional health and wellbeing. Our recovery programme will run activities to help all children recover their skills in these areas. In addition, we will run a targeted programme for around a third of our children who have particularly high needs that will focus on massage and physical activities. These are the children whose health and therapy services reduced or stopped during the pandemic, and so we are committed to giving them extra support.

We continue to respond to our growing waiting lists and late referrals due to the pandemic by developing our Family Support Programme, so that even if there is no space for a child in our sessions, we can still provide vital support to families and respond to children who may not have been identified due to the lockdown restrictions.

# Training & Consultancy

During 2021-2022, we will continue to deliver transition training as part of the Department for Education-funded Early Years SEND Partnership to ensure that children with SEND have effective transitions to school.

We will also start a new five-year partnership with Comic Relief to increase the number of SEND places in mainstream nurseries. Over the course of the next five years, we will develop and deliver 10 training courses in inclusive practice, support 30 local authorities and over 30,000 Early Years Practitioners to develop inclusion strategies, and build a national movement for inclusion in the Early Years.



## Influencing

Having joined the All Party Parliamentary Group on Childcare and Early Education, in 2021-22 we will be increasing our engagement with government to make sure that, where there are Early Years discussions, the voice of children with SEND is not lost. We will also continue to be an active member of the Disabled Children's Partnership where we advocate for children in the Early Years. We will continue to build relationships with national charities, and partner on projects where we can make a difference by representing either the Early Years or children with SEND. Our overall aim is to ensure that SEND children and their families are not forgotten during third sector projects and campaigns, and in government programmes and policies.

## New services

Finally, we are aiming to develop a new kind of hub or service where we do not deliver Early Years sessions directly, but rather we provide groups and support activities for children and families, and also run support and training for local Early Years settings. The type of hub or service will depend on the needs of the new local area in which we deliver the service, and we will work closely with local authorities, settings and families to understand what is needed. As always, delivering new services will be dependent on funding and local authority support, but we are ready to take opportunities if they are offered to us so that we can positively influence more lives across the country.

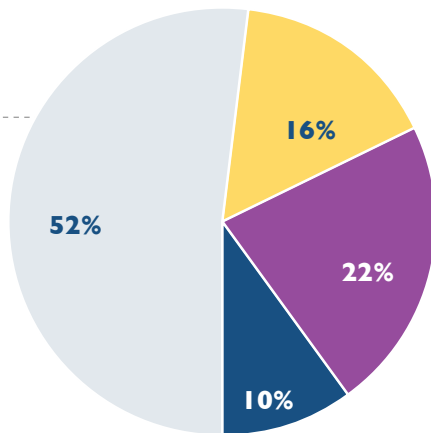
**If you are interested in learning more about any of our future plans, please do get in touch with [Catherine.mcleod@dingley.org.uk](mailto:Catherine.mcleod@dingley.org.uk) who will be able to give you more information.**



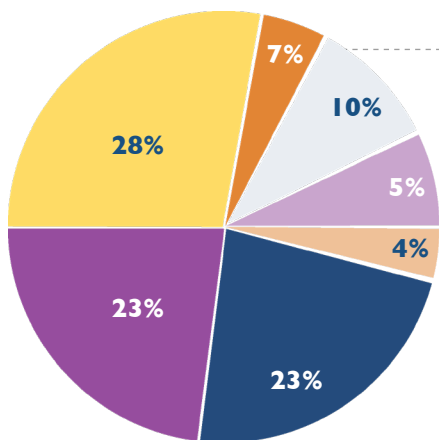
# How we fund our work

**Total income: £802,126**

- Fundraising & Donations
- Grants
- Earned Income
- Local Authority



**Total expenditure: £749,429**



- Reading Centre
- Wokingham Centre
- West Berks Centre
- Family Support Work
- Training & Consultancy
- Fundraising
- Leadership & Governance

**The largest part of our income is from non-statutory grants including large charities, trusts and foundations.**

Earned income includes the Nursery Education funding distributed by local authorities on behalf of central government

This is a summary of information extracted from the full audited and unqualified annual accounts of Dingley's Promise for the year ending 31st March 2021. Copies of the audited accounts and financial statement are available from our website, the Charity Commission and Companies House.

We were fortunate to secure substantial emergency funding to deliver our services at a time of significant need. This means that we ended the year with a small surplus that we will invest in recovery activities from April 2021 onwards – a year that we expect to be much more challenging when it comes to securing funds.

# Fundraising

In a difficult year for fundraising where all large-scale events were cancelled and many people chose to work and exercise remotely, we relied upon virtual challenges and inspiring individuals to take on personal challenges.

Supporters took on the virtual 2.6 challenge in place of the London Marathon and we even held a Drive Through Bake Sale at the West Berkshire Centre. As always Dingley's Promise staff and supporters were creative in their efforts and ensured that fundraising took place where possible. Thank you to all of our supporters who refused to let the pandemic hold their fundraising back!

As always, we are indebted to the many local businesses who continue to support us in a variety of ways, by attending one of our Dingley's Promise events, volunteering their time and skills, taking on a challenge for us, donating throughout the year and vitally sharing the message of Dingley's Promise far and wide within our communities.

A huge thank you also to our 'Friends of Dingley's Promise' who continued to support us via monthly donations and to all those who responded to our Pandemic Recovery Appeal with fundraising efforts and donations. Your contributions - especially during such complicated times - were vital and hugely appreciated.

We look forward to a year of more fundraising opportunities and even more elaborate and creative community and corporate fundraising events as we embrace a new fundraising landscape.







# Thank you

A special thank you to the following Trusts, Foundations, Businesses and Community Groups who supported Dingley's Promise this year.

Actioncoach Reading and Wokingham

Ascot Racecourse

ASDA Community Grants

Assura Community Fund

AWE

Baily Thomas Charitable Fund

Barbara Ward Children's Foundation

BBC Children in Need

Beaufort Financial

Berkshire Community Foundation

Berkshire Nurses & Relief in Sickness Trust

Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation

Big Lottery Fund

BNI Wokingham

Boshier-Hinton Foundation

Brighter Futures For Children

Connect Reading

David Solomons Charitable Trust

English Martyrs Pre-School

Ernest Hecht Charitable Foundation

Four Acre Trust

Funky Flowers

Greenham Trust

Henry Smith Charity

Hilton Reading

Invesco

Irwin Mitchell

J Sainsbury PLC

John Lewis Reading

Lifeline 4 Kids

Masonic Charitable Foundation

Newbury & Crookham Gold Club

Newbury Building Society

Newbury Town Council

Omni Reading

Peter Baker Foundation

Power To Change

Prudential Small Donations Fund

Reading Abbey Rotary

Reading Dispensary Trust

Rockwell Collins UK LTD

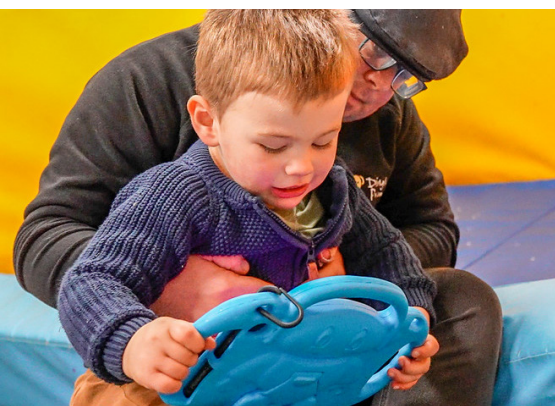
Rowberry Morris Solicitors

RSM

Silk Safety Ltd

Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust  
Souter Charitable Trust  
Sovereign Housing Association  
Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust  
Tesco PLC  
Thattham Town Council  
The Ardeola Charitable Trust  
The Childwick Trust  
The Clothworkers' Foundation  
The Cooperative Nursery  
The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust  
The Cumber Family Charitable Trust  
The Edward Gostling Foundation  
The Gannett Foundation

The Helianthus Charitable Trust  
The Steve Bloch Image of Disability Charitable Trust  
The Hobson Charity  
The Julia and Hans Rausing Trust  
The Lions Club of Henley-on-Thames  
The Louis Baylis Charitable Trust  
The Percy Bilton Charity  
Thomas Cook Foundation  
TK Maxx Community Fund  
Toy Trust  
Waitrose LTD  
West Berkshire Council  
Wokingham Town Council



# Dingley's Promise

Transforming the Early Years for children with SEND

## Annual Impact Report 2020-21

[www.dingley.org.uk](http://www.dingley.org.uk)



Dingley's Promise is the working name of Dingley Family & Specialist Early Years Centres, a company limited by guarantee and registered charity. Company Registered in England and Wales No. 07279320. Charity Registered in England and Wales No. 1137609. Registered Office: Kennet Walk Community Centre, Kenavon Drive, Reading RG1 3GD.