

Annual Impact Report 2022 – 23





Transforming the lives of children and families



Driving positive change around SEND in the early years



Promising the best start for every child



Welcome from Chair of Trustees, Russ Fowler

The Dingley's Promise team has been supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families across Berkshire for forty years, an achievement to be greatly celebrated and reflected upon. Not only have we positively impacted many young lives during this time, giving many the opportunity to access mainstream education or to transition successfully to a specialist setting, but also often providing a lifeline to families struggling with the complexities and challenges of getting the best start for their child. The vast experience gained over this time has equipped us to effectively support children who are being failed by the system and to ensure that children with SEND have the best possible chance of fulfilling their individual potential – something we believe that every child has the right to.

The lack of funding and investment in early years SEND across the country has directed our strategy to extend our knowledge and experience as far as we can nationally, to reach as many children with SEND as we can. Opening new centres where Local Authorities share our passion to make the early years more inclusive and alongside this, establishing a training programme to increase the skills and confidence of practitioners in early years settings in all parts of the UK. Our training can be undertaken remotely and responds to the current needs and challenges of practitioners working with children with a range of needs and disabilities.

We are a year into a five year expansion strategy and as this report reflects, we have made a change in our organisation to ensure that we can successfully implement this strategy. Welcoming the opening of our Gloucester Centre, building the footprint for future centres and developing our training offer. With the ongoing support of donors and Local Authorities, we are excited about the future of Dingley's Promise and as we celebrate and reflect over the achievements of the last 40 years, look forward to continuing our positive impact of the lives of children with SEND and their families for many years to come.

Russ Fowler
Chair of Trustees

Our Reach and Impact

2022 - 2023



The total number of children we directly supported increased by **15%** since the previous year, we are again reaching more children than ever



We reached **7179** children indirectly through training



100% of families rate our Learn Through Play sessions as Excellent or Good



100% of families rate our Family Support Workers as Excellent or Good



53% of our children transitioned to mainstream education



93% of families feel more positive about the future since starting with us



We reached **320** children directly through our centres and Family Support Service

Reflections on the year from Catherine McLeod, CEO

Our 40th year has been a year of continued growth and change, with more impact than ever before. In this special year we have opened two new Dingley's Promise centres, in Gloucester and Southampton, and are talking to a number of Local Authorities about how we can support them to build more inclusion in the early years. We have worked hard to develop our training programme, and as a result we have now reached over 7,000 learners. We are seeing the growth of an early years movement, and the number of children benefitting from the training has risen substantially to almost 20,000. I am so proud of the impact we are having on the national conversations around early years. The highlight of the year for us was when the government announced that the standard training for early years practitioners is changing to include a whole section on SEND and inclusion, something we have been championing for a number of years.

A key concern from us has been a drop in the number of children transitioning to the mainstream, despite the fact that this year we have seen lower levels of need in our children.

We are committed to understanding the complexities around decision making on next steps for children as they leave us, especially when these numbers fluctuate. We have found that in many cases the issue lies around insufficient

places or poor quality of provision for children in some mainstream settings. Where this is the case, we are dedicated to where possible, working with the Local Authorities to help them make improvements.

While this year has been outstanding in terms of growth and reach, there is a lot of change in the organisation. Our staff teams deserve huge respect and thanks for continuing to do what they do so well within a rapidly changing environment. The early years sector is in a recruitment and retention crisis, and pressures are high. Despite this, we continue to find amazing new people to support our children and families, and our teams in the centres and in management have been resilient and committed in the face of these pressures. I cannot thank them enough for what they do, and look forward to growing and strengthening our team further in the coming year.

Catherine McLeod MBE
Chief Executive of
Dingley's Promise








Introducing our Gloucester Centre


We are very proud to have opened our Gloucester Centre in January 2023. The Centre is fully funded by Gloucestershire County Council and the team have worked in partnership with the Local Authority at every step of the journey to ensure that we are fully meeting the needs of the Gloucester community with our nursery provision.

As with our other centres, the aims are:


 To provide childcare entitlement for eligible children whose needs cannot be met in mainstream provision


 To facilitate multi-agency assessments and evidence-based interventions to support child development


 To inform planning for the next stage of the child's education and then provide an outreach service to support successful transitions to the child's next setting.

 To ensure that all children can access their entitlement in early education to improve outcomes for young children and reduce the current inequalities between children in greatest need and their peers

Since opening this year, the centre has supported 44 children between April and the end of June:

 16 of these are children who accessed an early years placement

 28 families received outreach support

 12 of which attended the centre's Stay and Play sessions

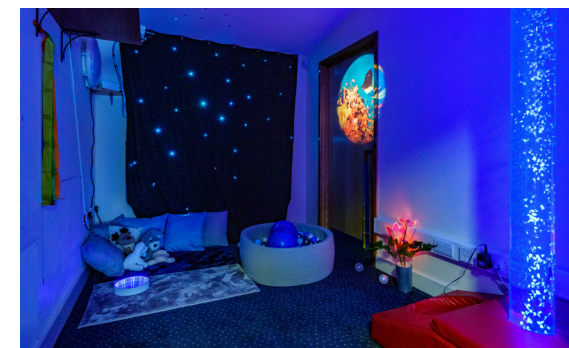
Of this cohort, five children attend Dingley's Promise Gloucester centre and a mainstream provision nursery as a dual placement. Where we work in collaboration with other settings, sharing learning and information, it can be an extremely valuable process and often accelerates children's readiness to access a mainstream primary setting in the future.

The primary category of need for the children in the centre is Autism Spectrum Condition. A number of children who started at the centre came to us as a result of difficulties within mainstream nursery settings. For these children, their time at Dingley's Promise has given parents the confidence to leave their child in the care of somebody else, integrate with other children and make developmental progress with the right support.

Currently 3 children are due to start school in September 2023, 2 of whom are transitioning to mainstream primary schools, and one parent has requested a special school place to be named on the child's EHCP.

At Dingley's Promise it is paramount that we offer support to highest need children and their families. In September we are welcoming 3 new children to the centre who have complex medical needs and currently access support through the James Hopkins Trust. Our team will ensure a gradual and thorough transition alongside the parents of these children and undertake the necessary skills and first aid training to best support the children's individual needs within our setting.

We are so proud of what we have achieved in our Gloucester centre and want to congratulate the team there on the success of their first few months. We look forward to welcoming new faces into the centre in September and supporting more families.





Looking to the Future

One consistent thread over the past five years at Dingley's Promise has been growth, and as always we are ambitious about the future.

Our fifth centre in Southampton is now up and running, and we are working hard with local families and stakeholders to make sure this is actively improving the local situation for young children with SEND. We are excited to be offering a much-needed service to the community in Southampton, and have been warmly welcomed by professionals and families in the area.

We have recently secured a sixth centre, also on the south coast, and are now in the planning stages for opening in 2024. In addition, we are talking to a number of Local Authorities in the north of England about potential plans to open a group of Dingley's Promise settings. We will also continue to offer support and advice to Local Authorities wanting to improve early years inclusion.

We expect our training reach to grow further, and we will continue to engage more Local Authorities in the Comic Relief Programme. By the end of 2026 the project will reach 30,000 practitioners – approximately 10% of the national workforce.

With a general election likely in 2024, we are also creating our first 'Manifesto for Early Years Inclusion', and will be launching this at our event in the House of Lords later this year. We'll also be sharing it with MPs from the key parties in order to influence policy. We will be carrying out research on areas that are key to our lobbying for change so that we can contribute new statistics and information to the national debate.

To support all of this growth, we will look to strengthen our operations team by introducing the roles of Chief Operations Officer and Quality Manager. As an organisation increasingly being asked for guidance and information, this is a critical step, and will further strengthen both our practice and influence.

"My son wouldn't leave the house at one point as he thought we were attending his previous setting. Now he is more than happy to come to Dingley's Promise. The staff are all lovely and I trust them completely. I know he is safe and looked after which is such a massive relief."

"Dingley's Promise is our daughter's first experience of SEND education and the staff have been very kind and caring towards her. The Stay and Play sessions are lovely to have on offer."



Our Family Support Offer

Our Family Support Workers in each centre continue to play a vital role in guiding families through the uncertainties of their journey. As well as providing a listening ear and emotional support through what can be a hugely stressful time, our Family Support Workers are able to signpost to relevant local support services, help with form filling and entitlements, give advice on behaviour or developmental strategies, and link them with Dingley's Promise and local events which their child may enjoy.

Our Family Survey comments reflect the importance of this support to families:

"I was able to talk openly and confidently to the Family Support Worker. She really helped me with my concerns and kept in contact offering help and advice."

"It is always helpful, emotionally and practically, to find someone that is willing to hear me and has the ability to understand my child's challenges and my family's struggles. Also, the Family Support Worker's advice and the information and videos that she sent were useful for me."



100% of families rate our Family Support Workers as Excellent or Good



A case study of Family Support and Impact – Reading Centre

The family self-referred via the website in May 2022 and asked the centre manager for a referral form for a place in Dingley's Promise Reading after the paediatrician recommended it. Their child has a syndrome which has resulted in multiple developmental differences for him. At the time of referral, the child was 2 years of age.

At the beginning of June our Family Support Worker introduced herself and offered a home visit to discuss how she could support in the interim, whilst their child waited for a place in the centre. The home visit was carried out and following observation, information and support was given with communication and language, including providing bespoke visuals for use in the home. The family were invited to attend our group sessions and from working closely with them, it was identified that their main areas of concern were him being able to socialise safely with other children as he had been born during the pandemic and as such had missed opportunities in this area.

Initially we invited them to a Family Connect Session where they met two other families with similar aged children who were also on our waiting list. We did this in our quieter upstairs room and designed the learning opportunities with motivating sensory activities and some physiotherapy resources to help with his gross motor skills as these are also a difficulty for him. After attending this group session and meeting other families and children, the family's confidence increased and they felt able to come to our main Stay and Play session, attending several of these whilst on the waiting list for a place in the centre.

In the meantime, they were also supported to make a referral for Portage to become involved with their son as well as given information on two year funding and how this would be accessed for him. The family also took up the offer of free circus tickets from us and were able to go and enjoy this performance as a family, something they could not have imagined previously.

In December 2022 they were offered an afternoon place for their son at the centre. They continued to attend the Stay and Play sessions with him and due to his familiarity with the setting from them visiting frequently, he settled in immediately and began accessing his sessions fully and making great progress.

The family continue to access 1:1 support from us when they feel they need direction, as well as attending our online information sessions. Now the conversation is moving towards the future and starting school in 2024. The family plan to give him some access to mainstream nursery this year, to ascertain which setting would be most beneficial for him. The family are amazed and delighted by his progress and extremely grateful for the support we have given throughout their journey, which has opened doors to potentially accessing mainstream education in the future.

Celebrating 40 Years



1989

James and Thomas

Back in 1986, twin boys were born; James and Thomas.

“My lads are happier than they have ever been, in supported living in Wokingham, about a mile apart. They see each other frequently and are well supported to have a great life.”

Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) in their early years, James and Thomas' severe learning disability meant that they had no spontaneous speech and very little understanding of the world around them. Struggling to cope at home, their mum was referred to Dingley's Promise in 1989, opening up a circle of support of parents with newly diagnosed children.

“Meeting other mums was a lifeline for our children, who rarely got invited anywhere by mums who didn't understand. It was great to develop friendships that are still strong 30 years later. With many miles between us, we still meet at least twice a year.”

Dingley's Promise supported James and Thomas to get to the centre via a taxi and unlike other playgroups had the added advantage of providing advice from health professionals including speech and occupational therapists. Dingley's Promise provided a springboard to access other opportunities to support the twin's development, which has proved invaluable for paving the way for their future happiness.



1994

Charlie and Gabriella

In 1994, we welcomed Charlie to Dingley's Promise and in 1996, his sister Gabriella.

“Charlie now has two degrees from Exeter University, lives in London and works for a charity. Gabriella also has two degrees and is building her career as a teacher in a special school in Poole. I am so proud of all that they have achieved. Gabriella has taken her childhood roots and turned them into something so valuable and Charlie has a big group of friends and a better social life than me!”

When Charlie was referred to Dingley's Promise, he was just two years old and recently diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Charlie didn't really play with other children and needed speech therapy each week. Other parents seemed wary of him, as he never spoke and didn't behave like other children. Back then Dingley's Promise was in one room in Battle Hospital. In the following years, Charlie's sister joined him at Dingley's Promise, having been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and in need of physiotherapy.

“The group at Dingley gave Charlie the chance to interact with other adults and to learn that there were other people who could meet his needs.”

Travelling to and from Reading from their home in Wokingham, four days a week, whilst caring for another sibling was taking its toll on the family. The idea for satellite centres was born and the family passionately supported the new development of services. Securing a clinic room for one morning a week at Wokingham Hospital and financial support from the Electricity Board, Wokingham Dingley's Promise was opened.

“I have been so pleased to see Dingley's Promise go from strength to strength – they have come such a long way from one room in an old building in one hospital.”



2010

Louise

Dingley's Promise provided Louise with a safe, creative and fun place to be herself and achieve her best. Having moved back to the UK when Louise was only 2 years old, her family were struggling to access vital health services including physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. Searching online, they found Dingley's Promise and Louise was soon invited to join in sessions at their local centre. Straight away Louise was engaged in therapy through play to help her develop and learn. She was socialising with children her own age.

“We had a place we trusted to look after Louise while we could have a break; a coffee and a chat with other parents.”

Louise started progressing physically, mentally and socially. The family were taught exercises and fun games to help continue Louise's learning at home too. With a taxi service to overcome the barrier of getting Louise to the centre, a library service and support from experienced staff, Louise flourished.

“The early positive socialisation at Dingley's Promise made Louise become a confident child, who will interact with anyone now.”

Louise still sees friends that she made all those years ago and her family feel assured that giving Louise the best start set her off on the right path.



2014

Otis

Otis' family found Dingley's Promise through an occupational therapist giving them a leaflet, a moment his mum described as 'life changing'.

“I was having a really difficult time, the normal parent and baby groups were really difficult to go to and didn't feel supportive. So once I had that flyer I arranged to go along and they were so comforting and wonderful.”

Otis enjoyed attending the centre and his family really appreciated that his brother could also be involved in holiday playschemes and trips. The benefit to the whole family was clear, with Otis' development coming on in leaps and bounds and sessions providing respite for his mum when no other support was available.

“What I remember most is the friends we've made. We're still in touch with a lot of families that came here and we're really thankful for that. It made a huge difference to our lives to have somewhere to go that people understood, because there wasn't anything like that for us at the time.”

2018

Charlie

Charlie started at the Wokingham centre in 2018, enabling him to develop his social skills as well as access support with speech and language. The sessions also allowed his mum valuable time with Charlie's sister to do different activities together.

"As soon as you walk through those doors, you're embraced and it's like a family. And there's always people there, there's always people to talk to."

Charlie currently attends a specialist school where he enjoys spending time with his friends and watching the cows outside. With the support from Dingley's Promise, his family felt empowered to advocate for Charlie's education and secure him a suitable provision.

"That's what we really got out of Dingley's Promise; the help that they gave us as a family. They embrace you, they guide you so you know what is available out there for you. I don't think we would be where we are now without Dingley's Promise."



2022

Liam

Liam came to Dingley's Promise when his family completed a self-referral to the Reading centre; after his parents noticed some developmental delays, Liam went on to receive a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition.

"It took a bit of time for him to get used to the new environment, but he's really settled now, and you can see he's thriving and learning new things from the experiences the staff are giving him."

Liam's family have seen the positive impact that attending our Reading centre has had for Liam; his confidence has grown and he is learning to use visual resources to help him communicate.

"It works because we have a good relationship with the centre, the staff are so welcoming that it feels like you're one big family."

"We've really enjoyed celebrating 40 years of Dingley's Promise!"

It has been wonderful to revisit the journeys of children and families we've supported in the past, and we're looking forward to meeting many more in the future."

National Impact

Our national impact continues to grow, and this year we have seen more recognition of the role we play to ensure the voice of children with SEND and their families in the early years is heard. We have had increased requests for our support, for presenting at regional and national events, for contributing to research and for speaking to the media.

We have joined the Special Education Consortium, and were also invited to join the Childcare and Early Education Coalition to build political support and recognition of the early years sector. We continue to be active in the Disabled Children's Partnership, the Children's Alliance and the Early Years SEND Partnership.

We have continued to sponsor the APPG on Childcare and Early Education, and through this have spoken to MPs and other political stakeholders about inclusion in the early years.

Our CEO has presented at the Nursery World SEND conference, the Westminster Education Forum, the Coram online conference and the Local Government Association webinars on early years sufficiency. She has spoken on the BBC News channel about the Ofsted annual report – the first national media interview for Dingley's Promise. We have also contributed to national publications, including Nursery World Magazine and Special Needs Jungle.

Dingley's Promise has also actively contributed to government consultations this year, raising concerns about the sufficiency of provision for children with SEND in the early years. We recognise from these experiences that we need to focus on demonstrating quantitatively through our own statistics what we are seeing in the sector. We hope this will encourage engagement from government teams and influence decision making.



Thames Valley Early Years Stronger Practice Hub

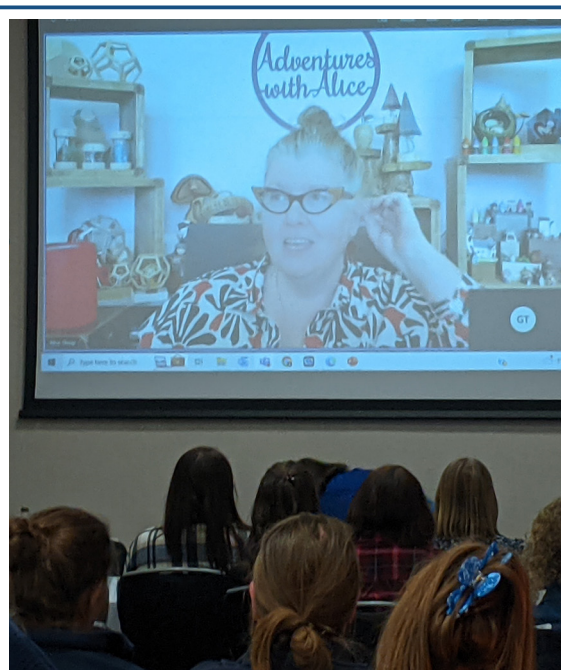
Dingley's Promise is one of five partners forming the Thames Valley Early Years Stronger Practice Hub (part of the Department for Education Covid Recovery Programme). All five partners are passionate about sharing best practice across the early years sector and supporting other settings in their delivery of inclusive early years practice.

The Hub launched in Reading on 26th April, and currently has 318 members from across the childcare sector in the home region (Reading, Wokingham, West Berks, Windsor, and Maidenhead). It has been able to offer settings 3 complimentary education programmes, as well as providing bespoke support. The Hub is actively involved in a number of networks for leaders and SENCOs, ensuring messages are heard by the maximum number of settings.

The Hub's childminder network is growing, and it is working with regional childminder experts and mentors to understand the developmental needs of the sector.

Towards the end of 2023, the Hub's reach area will expand to include a total of 28 Local Authorities, stretching from Milton Keynes to Gosport.

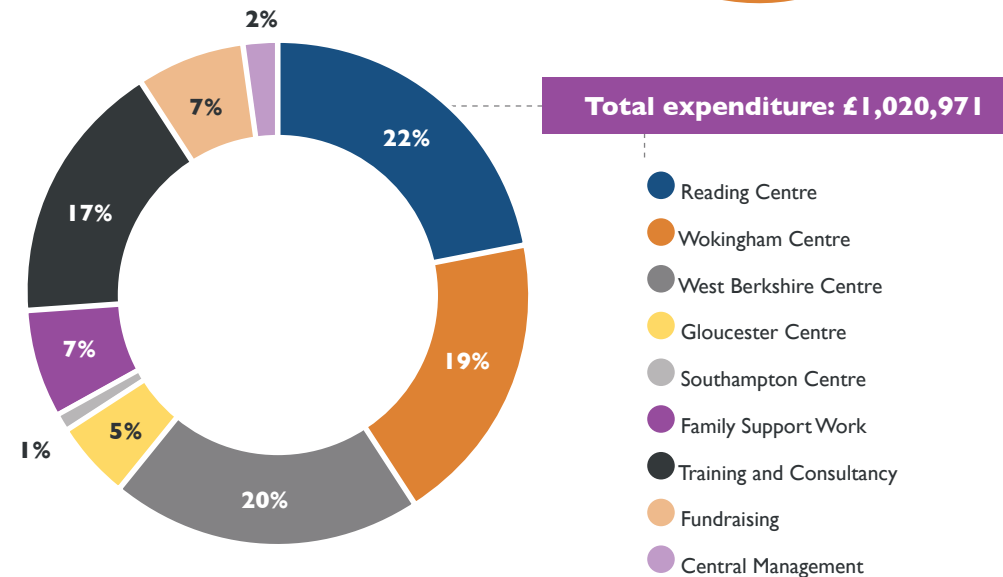
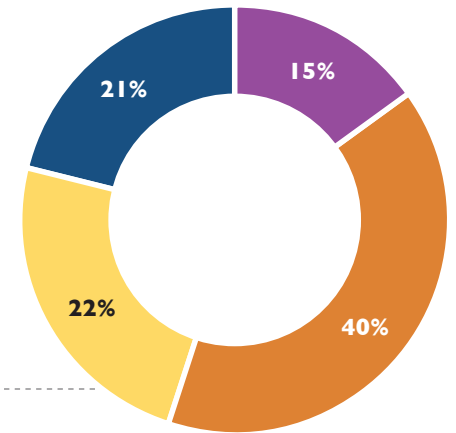
Dingley's Promise is proud to support the Hub with external communications and social media, as well as the provision of licences for our Inclusion Training Programme.



How we fund our work

Total income: £991,377

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



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 2023. Copies of the audited accounts and financial statement are available from our website, the Charity Commission and Companies House.

Our Training Programme

Another fantastic year of growth for Dingley's Promise Training. We have worked incredibly hard to lay the foundations for ongoing success and it's really starting to pay dividends.

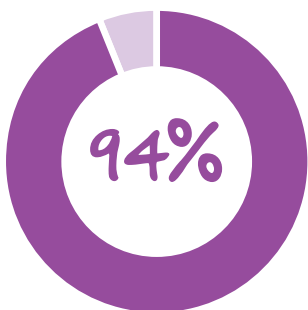
Here are some of the highlights...

Our funded work with Comic Relief has really taken off this year. We have worked with **20 Local Authorities** and **56 parent representatives** as part of our drive to create positive change for children with SEND across the nation.

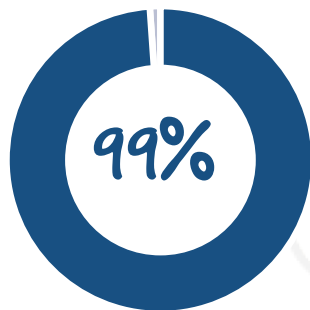
We have reached **5,414 new learners**, taking our total reach to **6,932 learners**, and have seen **4,414 completions across our courses**.

We have launched three new courses, taking our suite of short courses to five and they have all received phenomenal feedback.

Of those who have completed the training so far...



would recommend our learning to others



feel more confident as a result of the training

Our work on this project has seen us indirectly reach 7179 children with SEND and their families through our training programme alone. It has also seen us create a further 2975 spaces for children with SEND across mainstream settings.

We have continued our work with the Council for Disabled Children through the Early Years SEND Partnership, offering 60 places across 6 Local Authorities on our NCFE accredited Level 3 Certificate in Early Years Inclusive Practice. Feedback tells us that learners have really enjoyed the opportunity to stretch themselves, acquire new knowledge and skills, and apply them within their workplace.

We have also become an NCFE accredited centre in our own right and as a result further invested in our people to help them acquire the qualifications and experience needed to fulfil the roles that underpin a high performing centre. This is a huge achievement and one that we take great pride in.

Looking ahead to the coming year, we aim to continue growing our reach and reputation as a go-to provider of training for early years professionals. We will proactively seek opportunities to strengthen our training offer further. We will also seek to increase traffic to our website, enhance our social media presence and reach more early years professionals across the country.

We are so incredibly proud of everything we've achieved to date and are really looking forward to using high quality training to drive wider inclusion in the early years across England.



Fundraising

As we moved into our 40th year of Dingley's Promise, it was another busy fundraising year for our team. We realise that the cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact on disposable income and are truly grateful for the many people who have donated money, time or items to support our fundraising this year.

Our centre teams have been out in the community raising vital awareness of our services, at the Wokingham Christmas Fayre, Thatcham Fun Day and Forbury Fiesta. They have helped to raise over £1,000 with tombolas, cake sales, games, and face painting. Our Wokingham staff and parents also took on a 5km Wokingham Walk, raising hundreds of pounds – amazing! Many of our staff members have taken on huge challenges to support us in our 40th year.



Thanks also to the many parents who have supported us at events, and with raffles and other fundraisers throughout the year. Local businesses continue to help us and ensure that we are able to meet the demand and support more local families by running events, volunteering and making donations.

As always, we had a wonderful time celebrating at our end of year Gala event, with an amazing auction, casino and live music from the fantastic Gaz Coombes of the band Supergrass. A special thank you to The Hilton Hotel for accommodating us and making it a very special event.

Over the festive period, we raised over **£54,000** from our match funded **Big Give Christmas Campaign**; an incredible achievement. Thank you to all the pledgers and donors who helped us to achieve this.

We have exciting times ahead, with more centres opening and our teams supporting more children with SEND and their families. Your help is needed now more than ever to ensure that we can provide the services, resources and equipment each centre requires. Funding will also provide specialist extra-curricular activities and day trips for the children to enjoy. We look forward to engaging with more families and communities over the coming year.

Thank you

Thank you to all of the Trusts, Foundations, Businesses and Community Groups who have supported Dingley's Promise this year:

Action Coach Reading

Ardeola Charitable Trust

Ascot Racecourse

Awards for All

Bailey Thomas Charitable Fund

Barbara Ward Foundation

Beaufort Financial

Berkshire Community Foundation

Big Lottery

BNI Wokingham

Boshier Hinton Foundation

Brighter Futures for Children

CBZ Photo

Children in Need

Comic Relief

Connect Reading

Dynamic Media Solutions

Field Seymour Parkes

Global Make Some Noise

Gloucestershire County Council

Greenham Trust Youth Committee

Haines Hill Charitable Trust

Iconic Project Management

Irwin Mitchell Solicitors

John Lewis Reading

Miss Lawrence Trust

Newbury Town Council

Onebite

Peter Baker Foundation

Peter Harrison Foundation

Provide Security

Reading Abbey Rotary

Reading Borough Council

Reading St Laurence Church Lands

RSM Reading

SCS Ltd

Shanly Foundation

Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust

Softtalk Consultancy and Services

Soteria Planning

Souter Charitable Trust

Southampton City Council

St James's Place

The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust

The Earley Charity

The Edward Gostling Foundation

The Good Exchange

The Greenham Trust

The Hilton Hotel Reading

The John Sykes Foundation

The Plough on the Green, Newbury

The Stevenson Family Charitable Trust

The Syder Foundation

The Woodpecker, Newbury

Totalsurf

Waitrose Wokingham

West Berkshire Council

Wokingham Borough Council

Wokingham Rock Choir

Wokingham Town Council

Wokingham United Charities

Wooden Spoon

We are so grateful to everyone who supports our work in every way.



Dingley's Promise

Transforming the Early Years for children with SEND

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.