

## **Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity is delighted to be working with Children's Alliance to support families with provision of our Swimming Together Project**

At Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity our early intervention services support young and vulnerable children with Cerebral Palsy, from birth to five years, giving them the best possible encouragement in a welcoming, friendly setting that helps each individual child on their unique learning pathway. Following the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the broad range of services we provide to motor impaired children are now more crucial than ever as many children became isolated during the lockdowns.

Our services include:

- Conductive Education
- Music Therapy
- Outreach and Family Support
- Swimming and Hydrotherapy
- Speech and Language therapy

The wide-ranging services we offer help to transform and enrich the lives of our special children. Our mission is to give pre-school children with cerebral palsy the very best start in life, opening the door to a brighter and more independent future.

### **Our Swimming Together Project and the difference it is making to children and their families:**

As our main objective is to improve mobility, swimming has proved to be an extremely effective therapy for our children and their families. It is an activity that the whole family can enjoy together but, for our parents, many feel anxious and apprehensive about taking their vulnerable child swimming. Our trained instructors work with each family, helping them to learn how to accomplish this, and in so doing, aim to build their confidence and general well-being so they are able to enjoy using their own local community swimming pools in the future which reduces the feelings of isolation.

The sessions we provide take place in a local hydrotherapy pool, the warm water providing buoyancy that makes aerobic and anaerobic exercises easier to perform effectively and safely, enabling the child's muscles to relax. The warm water has a massaging effect on muscles, joints and ligaments and whilst they feel supported by the water, the children are able to move more freely, increasing their strength and stamina. This encourages confidence in each child, develops and maintains physical control, improves mobility and psychological outlook, enhances self-esteem and increases independence and their quality of life.

The swimming sessions are a fun time for families. There are two swimming sessions per week in term-time. Sessions are 30 minutes duration in a hydrotherapy pool. We have private use of the facilities which means that we have complete privacy during sessions.

The feedback received has been really positive, with all families seeing marked improvements in their child's mobility, social skills and communication, with several families feeling sufficiently confident to access the swimming facilities in their local community.

The outcomes we aim to achieve for children participating in our Swimming Together project are:

1. Improved physical control
2. Improve psychological outlook and confidence
3. Increased independence and quality of life
4. Parents' and Carers' confidence

When talking to families about the benefits of swimming therapy; being able to spend quality-time together in a fun activity greatly improves the overall wellbeing of the family and, on reaching the end of their courses, they felt more confident to take their own child swimming in a safe and appropriate way, and many had made new friends which has helped to reduce feelings of isolation. Looking forward, they are hoping to be able to access their own local community facilities.

Current feedback from families demonstrates how swimming is making an impact:

*“Within a few moments of being in the heated water you could see the pure joy on Connie’s face. She was splashing about with her arms with the biggest smile on her face. The swimming has helped Connie to develop muscles and also enjoy and relax her body.”*

*“Annabella loves her swimming lessons and her confidence in the water is growing with each session. We have managed to encourage Annabella to hold onto the bar at the side of the pool with both hands, a great achievement for her. We are very proud of her.”*

*“Jacob loves the warm water and the ball games. Jacob’s mobility has definitely improved and he finds it very calming.”*

Our swimming and hydrotherapy sessions are popular with children and parents alike. Grant and community funding is helping us to run our weekly swimming sessions each year benefiting many of the 65 children who are attending our centre. As we aim to improve the physical, social and communication skills of the children, swimming is a highly beneficial therapy which is fun for both the children and their families and also encourages each family to have the confidence to use local community facilities in the future.

Hydrotherapy has proved particularly effective in helping children with cerebral palsy build muscle strength. Heated to 33.6 °C, the warm water helps the children’s muscles to relax, they’re buoyed up by the water and are able to move about freely, helping them to build up their strength and stamina. The children enjoy freedom of movement and expression in the heated pool

### **Seren's story illustrates the difference Swimming Together is making:**

*Seren has a rare genetic condition called DIAS-Logan Syndrome. This means that she has struggled with a number of activities that other children her age would find easy.*

*When she first came to our charity for her initial assessment she had found it hard to settle when she was a baby and cried a lot. At her first assessment Seren couldn't pull herself up and shuffled around on her bottom to get around.*

*Seren was introduced to our swimming sessions and absolutely loves them. She always has a smile on her face when she is playing in the warm water.*

*Seren's mum and dad say; 'Our world feels a lot bigger and brighter since we found Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity. The support and facilities available to Seren are allowing her to express herself and develop both her physical abilities and her character. The community of skilled staff and those we are now acquainted with through being part of the charity have had a massive and lasting positive impact on all of our lives.'*

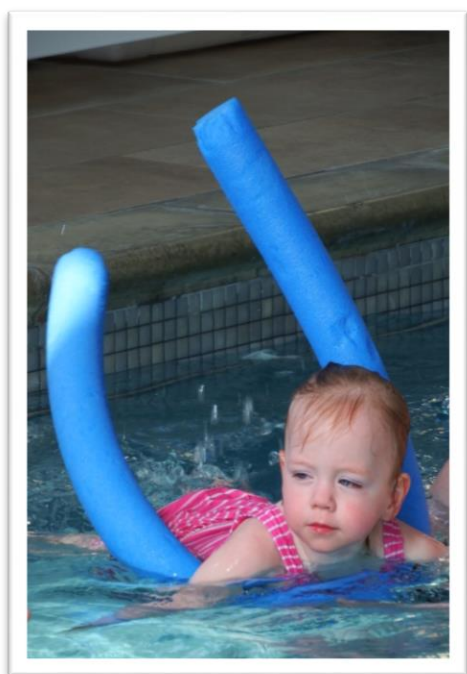


*Whilst she still finds some things a challenge, in the last few weeks Seren can now walk independently, although a recent setback when she broke her leg has set her back a bit. She has been working hard and making good progress, particularly when it comes to making choices and sorting colours.*

*Seren's mum and dad say; 'our world feels a lot bigger and brighter since we found Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity. The support and facilities available to Seren are allowing her to express herself and develop both her physical abilities and her character. The community of skilled staff and those we are now acquainted with through being part of the Charity have had a massive and lasting, positive impact on all of our lives.'*

Below is a quote from another mother whose child attended our weekly swimming sessions:

*'When Rowan gets into the water for his swimming lesson his face lights up and he doesn't stop smiling and laughing throughout the whole session. It brings him so much joy; and us, to see this! His swimming skills are also going from strength to strength and he has just been awarded his Level 1 swimming badge. Even though he is unable to verbalise it to us, we know his swimming class is the highlight of his week! Thank you all so much.'* Meredith, Rowan's mum.



For a child with cerebral palsy the water provides buoyancy making aerobic and anaerobic exercises easier to perform effectively and safely. Additionally, the warm water has a remedial effect on muscles, joints and ligaments that are often over-used and painful. Swimming also improves social skills as the children make friends which improves the child's confidence and self-esteem as they master a new skill.

Following the relaxation of Covid-19 regulations, sessions were able to restart. Many families had not been able to access swimming sessions for a very long time and therefore attending the sessions that we have provided has proved to be an enormous benefit for the children.

The Charity provides two swimming sessions a week during term time. The heated water helps the children's muscles to relax, they feel supported by the water and are able to move more freely enabling them to build up their strength and stamina. The children love splashing about in the warm water.

The swimming sessions are also a fun time for families, the Charity has private use of the facilities which means that they have complete privacy during the session. This can help parents to feel more relaxed as they know that the other families attending understand their child and it makes coping with any struggles slightly easier.

**Sustaining our Swimming Together Project for the future:**



Our Swimming Together Project will definitely continue as it has proved one of our most popular and beneficial activities for children with cerebral palsy. This is an ongoing project, year-on-year.

Our mission is to support our beneficiaries and we will continue fundraising proactively.

We have a reserves policy at DVLCC. The Charity is reliant on receiving funds from individuals, community groups, businesses and trusts and foundations. In order to protect against an unexpected drop in income, the Charity ensures that it has deposited funds that are set aside to meet our financial commitments for at least 6 months. Our Trustees' objective is to ensure the charity has adequate funding to safeguard its daily activities and meet its commitments to the children, parents and staff.



## Making a lasting difference to people's lives



The weekly half-hour sessions aim to:

- To help the child develop and maintain physical control and build stamina
- Improve the child's social skills, helping the child to play and make friends
- Enhance self-esteem and confidence as the child learns new skills
- Improve wellbeing and mental health for both parent and child
- Parents feel more confident in taking their child swimming and can eventually access local leisure facilities promoting inclusion
- A fun activity (whereas their normal sessions can be hard work) all the family can enjoy together

## Swimming Sessions for 2023-2024



**2 sessions each week**

**48 weeks per year**

**25 children take part**

**£18 per session**



*The swimming instructor works hard to ensure that children are not only kept safe in the water but that they are learning too. Each activity is planned to ensure that children can build on the skills they are learning. Using a range of different resources such as pool noodles or large floats the instructor can teach the children to “swim”. Each child is very different and therefore their needs are individual and unique.*







---

*Thank you to the Children's Alliance from the Staff, Trustees and Beneficiaries of Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity.*

---