

About Footprints Conductive Education Centre



Footprints Conductive Education Centre (CEC) empowers families with disabled children. Our work enriches the lives of children with disabilities, develops their independence and prepares them for the future by teaching a range of skills. Parents learn alongside their child and are provided with information and practical and emotional support. More than 90% who attend our pre-school develop the skills and confidence they need to enter mainstream education.

Children attend Footprints from the age of six months to 11 years of age. They have a range of disabilities and challenges including cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, Rett syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy, Global Development Delay and genetic conditions. However, we always focus on what children can do, not labels, diagnoses or conditions.

Babies and children with disabilities need extra support to learn the life skills that consciously come more naturally to others. These skills include communicating, eating and drinking, problem-solving and playing; not just literacy and numeracy. We help them find a solution that works for them, such as eye-gaze or signing.

Parents have needs too. They require skills to help their child thrive, the time and support to get to know their child and the knowledge to get the best from other services.

"Life as a parent of a child with disabilities can be very isolating, and this is a great place to connect with others that are in a similar situation." Parent

Our distinctive service

Footprints is a Nottingham-based charity that meets these needs using the principles of Conductive Education, a holistic education approach. It is not a 'therapy' or 'treatment', but a method of teaching practical ways to manage the additional challenges that accompany a disability. It brings the professional structure and rigour of schooling (individual assessments and tailored learning plans), but in a setting that families describe as welcoming, encouraging and positive.

We run pre-school classes four days a week. Our 'graduates' can come back for extra support if they need it while at primary school, at our speech and language classes or our Saturday gym club. We worked with 81 children last year, and we are regularly at capacity with waiting lists.

- We provide educational support at a time when most other services are medical
- Family members attend all our sessions so they can learn the techniques to use at home

- We teach practical skills, incorporating daily activities into our sessions where appropriate (e.g. eating, drinking, going to the toilet, socialising)
- We teach in groups, matching children who can learn most from each other
- We see our children and families weekly
- We set individual aims for our children, broken down into small steps
- We have regular terms and short holidays to fit the learning styles of children and better ensure skills aren't forgotten

What we do contrasts with other services families encounter at this stage (which is mainly clinical), focused on what a child can't do, infrequent (physiotherapy is typically every six weeks, speech therapy every 2-3 months) and rarely in groups.

Our impact

We are immensely proud of the determination of the children and progress they make, gaining new skills or, for those with degenerative conditions, working incredibly hard to keep the skills they have.

Working side-by-side with parents, we help improve outcomes for children. A recent survey of parents of children in pre-school showed 91% felt their child had developed better movement and co-ordination skills. 86% considered their child had grown in self-confidence.

These skills grow their independence and personality. Better posture can help safe eating, so improves nutrition and enables them to be away from home longer, meaning that they can access more services and go to birthday parties. Finding a way to communicate non-verbally means a child can 'ask' for help, learn from classmates and show his or her personality.

Dr Anne Emerson (an expert in communication, disability and inclusive education at the University of Nottingham) conducted research that found Footprints CEC helps parents gain confidence and hope from seeing other children achieve and a greater understanding of their child.

"I was overwhelmed by grief. I couldn't cope with the realisation of the enormity of my daughter's lifelong needs. Footprints helped me from falling apart; they showed me how to understand her needs and how to love her. Looking back now, it was the one constant factor which held us together in the early days." Parent

We work with families and professionals to help children access other services by producing transition plans for nursery or school. We encourage teachers to see children in session (*for now, we have replaced onsite visits with Zoom*), and we provide information for Education, Care and Health Plans.

Our history

We became an independent registered charity in July 2002. Originally part of a larger charity, Scope. It ceased funding its local services, including our own, and parents formed a board of trustees. Each year we have to raise £200,000 to fund our services, supported by the fantastic efforts of families, ambassadors, partners, fundraisers and generous donors.

Conductive Education's origins date back to 1945 when the Peto Institute in Hungary established the method. It remains in practice to this day and is offered as a degree course

by Birmingham City University in conjunction with the National Institute of Conductive Education.

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