



Impact Report

2024-2025

Changing children's
lives for the better

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Welcome to Children's Links



Introduction

Children's Links is a Lincolnshire-based charity that works with children, families and communities to change children's lives for the better.



Childcare

We enable the children in our care to learn through play, flourish and reach their full potential. We do this through nurseries, after school and holiday clubs, and a Play Scheme for children with complex needs.



Support for Families

We support families to strengthen their relationships and to create positive environments where everyone can thrive.



Play

We run play sessions for children of all ages and abilities that provide them with opportunities to try new things, develop their physical, social and emotional skills, increase their confidence, and – above all – to have fun.



Community and Workforce

We work with partners to strengthen the sector and support the growth and development of those who work within it. Through our training programmes, we help adults build confidence and improve essential skills. Our social enterprise, Linking Up Limited (LUL) provides childcare voucher services nationally.

Welcome!



Vision, Mission and Values



Our Vision

To change children's lives for the better

Our Mission

In order to achieve this,
we work together to:



- Help children reach their potential
- Build confidence and resilience
- Have a lasting impact



Our Values

Learning

Innovation

Nurturing

Kindness

Striving for Success



Did You Know?

Over the past year, we've supported
3032 children and 1696 adults!

Rachel Aylmer – Chief Executive Officer

“2024-2025 was a year of growth and development for Children’s Links. We welcomed 4 new settings into our family, 3 of which serve RAF children. It has been a great opportunity to develop new partnerships and gain a deeper understanding of their needs. Alongside this, we have continued to grow and develop our existing services to serve even more children, families and communities.

At a time where many have been impacted by the rising cost of living and the demand for support services has increased, our amazing staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly to meet their needs.

Despite the difficulties the sector is facing, I consider myself lucky to be the Chief Executive of an organisation where trustees, staff and volunteers work hard to deliver a high standard of quality and care. The support of our funders, partners and infrastructure organisations is also invaluable.

Hopefully, the stories in this report give you a flavour of the impact that hard work has on the lives of children and families.”



“Alone we can
do so little;
together we can
do so much.”
– Helen Keller

Our Values in Action

This report highlights some of the meaningful work carried out by Children's Links during 2024-2025.

Throughout the year, we've had a hugely positive impact on the lives of children, young people, families, and communities across the country.

At the heart of everything we do are our values. They guide our decisions, shape our services, and inspire the way we work with others. In the pages ahead, we share how these values come to life through real stories, partnerships and achievements.

Our Values

Learning

Innovation

Nurturing

Kindness

Striving for Success



"Kindness is a language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see."
- Mark Twain





Learning

Spreading Happiness Through Learning

At Children's Links, we believe learning should be empowering, inclusive and accessible. This case study reflects our commitment to supporting adult learners not just with qualifications, but with personal growth, wellbeing and connection.

A learner with vision and hearing impairments joined one of our women's wellbeing groups, hoping to improve her mental health. After speaking with our tutor, she also enrolled on 'The Science of Happiness' – a four-week course funded through the Adult Skills and Family Learning programme. The course explored emotional literacy and everyday strategies to boost wellbeing. Our team made thoughtful adaptations to ensure she could fully participate, including tailored seating arrangements to support her hearing and vision needs.

The learner fully embraced the course, and over the four weeks, her confidence and self-assessed knowledge in the course topics grew from just 2 out of 10 to a full 10 out of 10! As her understanding of wellbeing deepened, so did her confidence and belief in herself. The course allowed her to explore complex emotions in a comfortable and empowering way. Practical resources and simple, meaningful strategies helped her not only to boost her own wellbeing, but also to feel equipped to support others.

Since completing the course, she has begun volunteering at a community café, increased her working hours, and continues attending the women's group where her learning journey first began. To support her further, we've gently introduced numeracy into group activities, helping her build confidence in maths through games and crafts.

"I had felt very low before this course and struggled with getting out of the house and mixing with others. The tutor was excellent at making me feel very welcome and involved." – Learner.

This story brings our value of Learning to life – showcasing how inclusive, supportive spaces can spark meaningful and positive change for individuals and their communities.

"Your job is amazing, you can really see how it is building confidence." – Learner



Innovation and Inclusion

Inclusion: Scampton Case Study

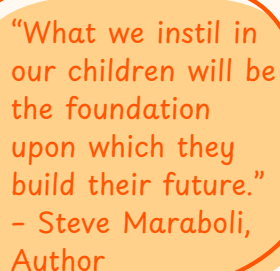
At Children's Links, we believe every child deserves to feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. Across our childcare settings, we create safe, nurturing environments where children can learn through play and grow in confidence – regardless of their individual needs or starting point.

This story from our RAF Scampton Nursery shows our inclusive approach in action, as staff went above and beyond to support a child with additional needs. A cheerful and adventurous little boy joined our setting after being turned away from five others unable to meet his needs. When his parents visited, our SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) and Manager met him at his existing Kids Club to observe him in a familiar environment and assess how best to support him.

He started straight away in the Toddler Room, chosen for its calm atmosphere. Our practitioners adapted activities and routines to suit his needs, helping him settle in quickly and feel at ease. Our SENCO and Senior Management team worked to secure inclusion funding while his Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was being processed. Over the past year, we've worked closely with professionals and his family – including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, an educational psychologist, and the Early Years Specialist Teacher (EYST) – to provide tailored support.

Through ongoing collaboration, we secured specialist equipment to support his mobility and arranged dedicated one-to-one staffing, which has had a hugely positive impact on his development. Thanks to this combined effort, he has made significant progress and has now been offered places at two local specialist schools!

This story is a shining example of our values in action – particularly Inclusion, Nurturing and Kindness. From the moment this child joined us, our team showed empathy and commitment to ensure he felt welcomed and supported. Every step – from adapting his environment, to working in close partnership with specialists and his family – reflects our inclusive and personalised approach to care.

A light orange speech bubble with a dark orange outline, containing a quote and attribution.

"What we instil in our children will be the foundation upon which they build their future."
– Steve Maraboli,
Author



Innovation and Inclusion

Innovation: Our Office Move

This year has been marked by exciting changes and fresh opportunities to improve how we work. At the heart of these developments is our commitment to creating a more collaborative, efficient, and innovative environment for our team and partners.

One of the biggest steps towards this goal was our Head Office relocation to 7 Bull Ring, right in the heart of Horncastle, Lincolnshire. We now proudly share this space with Shine Lincolnshire, which has strengthened our partnership and working relationship.

Comment from Head Office

“It has been a very busy year for the team based at our Head Office. During the year, the team have helped us move our Head Office to the new location in Horncastle. This has given us the opportunity to work closely with one of our partners, Shine Lincolnshire. The move allowed us to reassess our working methods and to also have a thorough decluttering!

The Head Office team are continually looking for ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our systems, so in this year we have switched to a new cloud-based finance software package which has helped us to improve our finance function and become one step closer to paper free. We have also moved to a cloud-based server, giving us increased security, and our staff benefit from a more stable access.”





Nurturing

Rebuilding Trust: A Family Support Journey

This story reflects our value of Nurturing, highlighting how Children's Links staff provided sensitive, structured, and child-centred support to help children safely rebuild a relationship with a parent.

Sisters 'A' (13) and 'L' (11) had been living with their mother since their parents separated and had not had contact with their father for over 2 years. The relationship between the children's parents was extremely strained due to their history, and overcoming this to make steps forward was always going to be challenging. The parents had very different views as to why the contact had broken down. While the children remembered enjoying time with their father, they were worried about whether he would be able to look after them properly, and nervous about seeing him on their own.

Our Improving Child and Family Arrangements (ICFA) staff worked with the children at their pace. They discussed their concerns and supported them to spend time with their father, supervised by a member of staff. During this time, A and L began to reconnect with their father, sharing that they enjoyed the time spent together and would be happy to continue, as long as sessions remained supervised.

To help the children rebuild their relationship with their father safely, our staff worked with the parents, children, and other professionals to propose a step-by-step plan that moved from short, supervised visits, through longer sessions and supervised handovers to unsupervised sessions. Systems of review were agreed at each stage to ensure the children always felt comfortable, with the aim of getting to overnight stays.

"The worker was amazing, I found her to be very observant and picked up on things that were needed, and was able to raise issues with parents in a positive way and contact is progressing thanks to her input." – Comment from Family Court Adviser.

This case reflects the challenges of restoring family connections after a long period of separation. Thanks to a carefully structured and nurturing approach, A and L were able to begin re-establishing trust with their father in a safe and supported environment. With ongoing guidance, their family journey is now progressing at a pace that respects the children's voices, needs, and emotional safety.

Names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

Kindness

Small Moments, Big Impact: A Story of Kindness at the Toy Library

At Children's Links, we know that small interactions can make a huge difference – and this story from our Toy Library in Lincoln is a perfect example of that.

Our Toy Library provides a safe, affordable space for families with young children to play and learn. With an extensive range of toys available for hire, it supports children's development and offers opportunities for community engagement. Recently, it expanded to include a sensory room and specialised equipment.

During the summer holidays, a mother and her young son, who has complex needs, visited the Toy Library. Her son, who uses a wheelchair and is non-verbal, often finds it difficult to access spaces that truly meet his needs – especially during school holidays. But at the Toy Library, things were different.

The pair spent a joyful hour in the ball pit together. Other children were naturally respectful of his space, and parents and carers welcomed the mother into conversation. She was able to talk to people she'd never met before and felt, in her own words, "overwhelmed" by the friendliness of the environment.

It was a simple visit, but one that left a lasting impression. Both mum and son benefitted – not only from the inclusive facilities, but also from the kindness shown by the Toy Library staff and visitors.

This story beautifully reflects the heart of what we do: creating safe, welcoming spaces where every family feels they belong. Kindness doesn't always have to be a grand gesture – sometimes just feeling seen, supported, and included is enough to change someone's day.

"It was such a great opportunity to meet other families in similar situations. Being a SEN parent feels less lonely now" – Mother attending session for children with disabilities at the Toy Library



Striving for Success



A Year of Growth and Improvement Listening, Responding, Improving

In late 2024, we invited our staff to take part in our annual staff survey to share their thoughts, experiences, and suggestions. With 53 responses received, the feedback was largely positive, but just as importantly, it highlighted areas for improvement. We've responded by making meaningful, lasting changes to strengthen our culture, improve staff experience, and support long-term job retention and growth.

One key development has been the introduction of 'Each Person', a staff recognition platform that celebrates achievements, anniversaries, and long service. It makes nominations easy, boosts morale, and offers wellbeing-focused rewards.

We've responded to feedback in several key areas:

- **Feeling valued and appreciated:** We have revised our review process to include greater accountability and consistency, and introduced 'Each Person' to better recognise the everyday contributions of staff.
- **Training and development:** We have increased promotion of training opportunities and encouraged training such as Mental Health First Aid Courses and internal marketing workshops.
- **Support at work:** We have improved staff reviews to better identify individual support needs and promote open communication.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion:** We've taken steps to improve accessibility in our recruitment process, and are planning website improvements, including a translation feature. Our entire website is also currently undergoing a full update, making it easier for users to find the information they need and ensuring all content is more accessible and user-friendly.
- **Retention and long-term roles:** 'Each Person' helps support a sustainable culture by recognising staff contributions and creating a stronger sense of belonging and motivation to stay.
- **Wellbeing and safety:** Based on feedback, we've implemented pay rises above national averages, invested in lone worker safety technology, and introduced wellbeing content into our monthly newsletter.

These changes are not just quick fixes – they're part of a longer-term commitment to building a better workplace for everyone. By listening to staff feedback and responding thoughtfully, we're creating an environment where people feel heard, valued, and motivated to grow within Children's Links.

Striving for Success

Staff Survey Feedback

We strive to make Children's Links a great and supportive place to work – and our staff survey feedback shows the impact of those efforts. In our 2024 survey, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback, reflecting the dedication of our teams and the positive culture we work hard to maintain.

Here's what some of our team members had to say:

"The job is rewarding and my line manager is one of the best!"

"I love working for Children's Links and the support I have been given over the years to develop professionally and personally."

"I absolutely love working for Children's Links! It's an amazing place with a positive and supportive environment, and I feel appreciated, respected and valued every day."

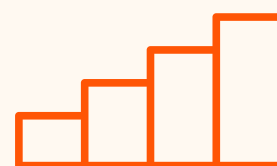
"I can honestly say that taking up this position has been the best decision I have made in my career."

"I have never felt isolated working from home, as I know there is always someone I can call if I need help or just a chat."

We're proud of the progress we've made—but even more proud of the people who make it possible.



Striving for Success



Improving Environments, Inspiring Children

At Children's Links, we're always looking for ways to improve our services and make our spaces even better for children and families. Since last year, we have expanded our provision with four new childcare settings, allowing us to deliver high-quality, inclusive childcare across more communities.

One inspiring example of this commitment is 'Project Maple' – a collaborative effort by our team at Maple Vue Nursery in Aldershot, alongside parents and families, to transform the setting into a safe, nurturing, fun and memorable environment for children to thrive in.

With creativity, dedication, and a shared vision, our team decorated the nursery, improved the outdoor environment, raised over £1,200 through a sponsored event, and invested in new furnishings and play resources. These changes have already had a positive impact on children's behaviour and wellbeing.

A member of staff from the setting stated: "With all of the work we have done in the nursery and the garden, we have already noticed a change in the feel of the nursery. With the more neutral and natural environment we have created for the children, we have noticed a positive change in the behaviour of our children. We have also had great feedback from our parents about the look of the nursery, and parents have even noticed that their children's behaviour has improved at home."

This case study is a powerful reflection of our values in action – especially Striving for Success and Nurturing – and shows what can be achieved when communities come together to create the best possible environment for children.



2024-2025 Insights

The Difference We're Making

Throughout the year, we've collected feedback and data from families, service users, and professionals to help us understand the difference we're making.

These insights demonstrate the positive outcomes of our work and the value of our services to communities:

100%

100% of Toy Library visitors said they enjoy visiting, and **83%** saw a direct impact on their child's development.

100%

100% of parents attending our Horncastle outreach Early Years sessions reported improvements in their children's social skills.

100%

100% of parents felt that our complex needs Play Schemes supported their children's social, play and development needs.



87% of completed ICFA (Improving Child and Family Arrangements) cases resulted in positive outcomes.



Members of the WTSL Network* identified the biggest benefit of the programme as "informing them about **new ideas and opportunities**".



We're proud to share that our funding bid success rate reached an impressive **90%**, helping to sustain and grow our impact for the communities we serve.

*The WTSL (Women in Third Sector Leadership) Network supports women in leadership roles across Lincolnshire's voluntary sector. Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and hosted by Children's Links, it offers opportunities to connect, share ideas, attend leadership events, and build peer support – helping women strive for success and resilience in their roles.

2024-2025 Insights

Real Voices, Real Impact

At Children's Links, we believe the best measure of our impact is the experiences of the people we support. Whether it's a parent rebuilding a relationship, or a child enjoying play, these words capture the heart of what we do.

One parent described that our ICFA service made them feel "happy, listened to, and thankful. I had already accepted that help would probably be necessary to reintroduce my child into my life, given her age when contact was stopped. The ICFA process was very helpful in that regard, in helping to facilitate a safe and supported environment to restart our relationship."

Voices of Children
at our RAF
Waddington and
RAF Scampton
settings:



"It is the
best place
on earth!"

"People are
nice and
there's
lots to do"

"The best
thing is having
time to play
with my
friends"

"I really like
the weekly
projects and
challenges"

"The best
thing is
the staff"





Want to Learn More or Get Involved?

We are always looking for Ambassadors to support our good work – could your company be a Children's Links Ambassador or Sponsor? We would love to hear from you – and next year you could see your logo featured in our Impact Report!



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lives for the better**

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Registered Charity Number: 1071058
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Thank you for
reading – and thank
you to our incredible
staff, partners and
supporters for
making this impact
possible.