

Championship



BUILDING FUTURES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Champion Centre  
TAMARIKI TOIORA

The cause we fight  
for is very **ordinary**



### June 2017

Welcome to our mid-year newsletter. As the winter starts to bite, we are very glad that we are able to provide a warm and cosy environment for our fragile babies and young children when they visit us at the Champion Centre. With the new Burwood Hospital building complete, we now have reliable heat again and our families are able to park close to us in our parking area or in the new hospital parking. We are very grateful to the CDHB for making it possible for us to continue to occupy this building.

Our fundraising continues to be an uphill battle, as we struggle to close the \$700,000+ per year gap between our government income and what it costs to run our programmes. However, we do have support from some wonderful people and organisations and we are so grateful to our long-term funders who stick with us over the years. These people understand that all the money we receive goes to ensure our programmes are offered by highly-skilled and highly-experienced staff who not only 'know their stuff' but can build supportive relationships with families and whānau so they, in turn, are able to support their children to reach their full potential throughout their lives.

In this newsletter, you will read about three children who all find making sense of their world difficult. The first two involve two 12-year-old young men who have gone on to make their parents and their respective schools proud. Guy, with sensory processing disorder and dyspraxia, has risen to be deputy head boy in Year 8 at his primary school. And Frazer, with autism, now competes in swimming and makes everyone smile with his infectious sense of humour. You will also read about Grace who is still attending the programme and finding her place in the world through music. I hope you enjoy these stories and will support us to tell more.

*Susan H. Foster-Cohen*

Susan Foster-Cohen, PhD. Director.

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## Guy's Story

Guy's story is told first by his mother in a letter she sent to the Centre and then by Guy himself.

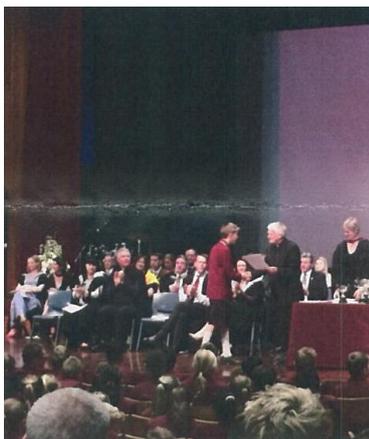
Guy's mother says [edited]: "We came to the Champion Centre when Guy was 3 years old. He was a little boy who was not coping with his life. He did not cope with loud noises, changes in routine, large groups, the list goes on. We could not take him to supermarkets, malls, parties etc. This went on for years.

After a hugely successful time at the Champion Centre, we were transitioned to school where all went well for several years. After a while, however, in a new school he started not being able to cope with the many changes of teacher and rooms that it required. He became a very stressed and depressed boy. We wondered how we were going to cope.

However, with the support from the school and his great teachers and me going back to what I learnt from the Champion Centre when he was 3 – 5yrs, we survived. We went back to lists and timetables in the car, on the fridge, in school bags (See note below). No extra activities, quiet nights and setting up individual plans and routines with each of his teachers, colour coding his books, etc.

So, here we are today. Guy is a tall, beautiful, kind boy, with buckets of empathy. He is well-liked amongst his peers and his teachers all seem to only have positive things to say. To receive the role as Deputy Head Boy is an honour. I, of course, remember the time when I didn't know how I would get through each day. We owe so much of his success to all of you at the Champion Centre. With your endless help, support and guidance I was able to learn and teach Guy the skills he will need to take him through his life. We will forever be so very thankful and grateful to every single one of you."

And here's Guy in his own words:



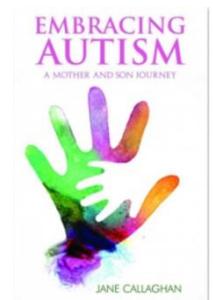
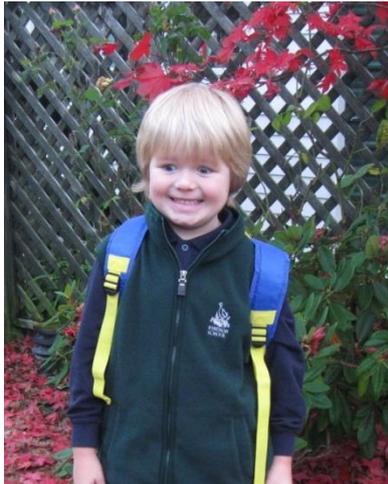
*"Dear Champion Centre, I would like to thank you for your fun opportunities and kind caring people. At [my primary school] I struggled with loud noise and bright light and mathematics. As school continued I became more aware of my surroundings and friends. At [my new school] my skills socially and academically had a massive increase and I was starting to get the hang of maths. I am now moving into year eight as the deputy head boy and would like to say a big thank you for everything that you have done for me."*

The Champion Centre teaches parents how to use the kinds of visual supports Guy's mother mentions here because, as you can see, they work! In 2010 a generous grant from the Wayne Francis Charitable Trust also made possible a multiple-year research study with Christchurch schools that demonstrated the value of these supports for a wide range of children. The Champion Centre led the research team and published the results in an international journal (Foster-Cohen & Mirfin-Veitch 2015).

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## Frazer's story

Frazer attended the Champion Centre from when he was almost three until he went to school at age five. His mother contacted the Centre recently because she has written a book called "Embracing Autism – A Mother and Son Journey" that has now been published <https://pegasuspublishers.com/authors/jane-callaghan>. Jane says in her email to me: "A huge part of where Frazer is today is due to the wonderful start he had at the Champion Centre and the fabulous staff there. I have dedicated a chapter in my book to the Champion Centre and the wonderful work everyone did from his early intervention through to helping with his transition to school."



The left-hand photo of Frazer above was from his first day at school back in 2010. The right-hand one was taken in November last year at the Trans-Tasman tournament for Special Olympics swimming. Jane says Frazer has the most wonderful sense of humour and is a natural comedian. He also plays the trombone.

Jane's book is a reminder that the Champion Centre is not just about the child, but about the relationships that support that child. Moreover, it is not just about the first five or six years of a child's life, it's about investment in that child for their future. We look forward to reading Jane's book about her and Frazer's journey.

### Spreading our influence overseas

A few years ago, School Principal Anne Thorne visited the Champion Centre from the UK to learn about our 'Relating and Communicating' programme for children on the autistic spectrum. She has since integrated what she learned into her school for children with ASD in Plymouth. In a soon to be published article on this programme, some visitors from London (whom we are supporting to develop something similar in an early childhood centre there) note that the Champion Centre model works so well because "It truly acknowledges the role of the parent as the first educator rather than just paying lip service to a well-worn phrase", that "working together parents and professionals can piece together a more holistic picture understanding the child in the context of their home life as well as their school life"; and that "parents become advocates for their child as they make sense of the world and this could reduce the likely involvement of social care as children get older and life becomes harder to navigate sensibly."

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## Grace's story



For Grace the world can be a frightening place. She becomes extremely distressed when routines are changed or unpredictable. She has a need for sameness, repetitive routine, structure and rituals. Through her Champion Centre programme, however, she has found a way to control her world and with it has come a sense of calmness and security. A key part of this success is the music programme. Julie Wylie takes up the story...

"When Grace first came into the music room for individual music with her mother, I watched, waited and gave her time to feel safe in this new music environment. Grace tentatively tapped the drum, waited and then picked up the beaters and started playing faster and louder. Her mother and I continued watching and listening and when Grace gave her mother a beautiful smile, I joined in her drumming, matching her fast play. She watched me intently and then nodded to her mother as if giving permission for her to join our drumming too. Grace held up her hand with a stop sign. We stopped playing. She waited and then started drumming rapidly and we joined in with her rapid, steady beating. She had a big smile on her face as she held both adults and conducted their drumming. By the end of the music session she was obviously enjoying every moment of being able to control every aspect of our musical play and stop game. She was able to slow down and play a steady predictable beat and intricate rhythmic patterning. She left the music room happily and other team members reported that Grace had remained calm and settled in each of their sessions.

Grace's mother reports that they now do everything through music at home. Use of sung instructions, calming songs and music routines help Grace to make sense of her world; keeping her more calm and regulated. At her recent birthday, Grace, dressed in black tutu and high heels, conducted everyone in joyful, hilarious musical play. She was every inch the conductor and star of the show!"



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