



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



### **June 2016**

As I write this, the year is just about to tick over the winter solstice, on a day so warm for the shortest day that it is set to break records. Certainly, the weather has been as unsettled as any I can remember. Unfortunately, equally unsettled is the financial picture at the Champion Centre. We continue to be supported by government grants, but they have not increased, even by inflation, for years. We continue to be supported by generous donations from individuals, trusts and grants, but never enough to actually get ahead and lock in sustainable funding. The Champion Foundation Trust is working hard to build a financial base that can provide some income from interest, but with interest rates so low and so many calls on those with deep pockets at the moment it is an uphill battle. The fact remains that this year we need to find almost \$700,000 to keep our services at their current level (and that doesn't provide even small increases to the depressed salaries we are able to offer our highly skilled staff). So, I have a few questions for you:

- **Could you make a donation through direct deposit, payroll giving or a donation through our Give a Little page?**
- **Could you contribute to the Champion Foundation Trust?**
- **Could you hold a fundraising event?**
- **Could you buy an Entertainment Book through us?**
- **Could you help raise our profile by talking to your friends and relatives about the world-class service we offer?**

All the details are on our website:

<http://www.championcentre.org.nz/uncategorized/ways-to-help>

We want all our children to have the same chance to achieve their potential as any other child. That's why the cause we fight for is 'ordinary'. What is needed to make that happen is, however, quite extraordinary.

## News from some of our programmes...

The year before last we received a large donation from Lesley Nesbitt towards the **Learning Through Musical Play** programme at the Champion Centre. Together with ongoing funding from SJ Charitable Trust, this has sustained this programme over recent months. Now, however, Lesley's money is now running low and so we need to find renewed support for this vital part of what makes the Champion Centre so successful.



Started by Julie Wylie some 20 years ago, the music programme has developed a way of working with children that is truly unique. The specialists who deliver the programme need to be consummate musical improvisers so that they can follow the child and mould the child's contributions into

developmentally useful play activities. This might be helping a child name the colours of the chime bars they are striking with a soft hammer; encouraging conversation between child and parent through a roll-the-ball to each other activity; supporting a child to climb by singing them up a musical scale step by step; or encouraging their understanding of simple stories through singing them together at the keyboard. There is no wrong way to play in the music room! And all activities can be made musical!

This year, using some of Lesley Nesbitt's donation, we have been filming Julie and some of the other therapists working musically with children. The goal is to produce a professional training video with accompanying CD of key songs for use by the Champion Centre for training purposes to ensure that Julie's legacy will continue far into the future. We are close to being able to hand the sections of video that best illustrate the work to a professional film-maker who will edit the final product for us. I have been privileged to have done much of the filming myself and to have seen the impact first hand.

I've seen a boy whose autism can make the world very confusing and very scary reduce his anxiety markedly through simple but predictable and familiar musical activities so that he is able to engage calmly with his parent, back and forth. I've seen a little girl with Down syndrome who really did not understand the give and take of engaging with others learn how to do it by rolling a huge swiss ball back and forth with her mother. I've seen a boy who has had so many medical interventions that he almost cannot bear to be touched snuggle into his mother surrounded by a calming, predictable musical commentary. These are game-changing developments for children and their families. I am so pleased we will be able to share them more widely.

Another key programme at the Champion Centre that receives no government funding is the **Computer Supported Learning Programme**. This programme has had significant funding over the last two years from the Dublin Street Trust and the Burrows Trust. Again, these funds are now running low and we need to find more support to continue the amazing work of the specialists who run this programme.

An example of the work of this programme: Ben<sup>1</sup> has a syndrome that means his development is extremely compromised. At almost three years old, he cannot yet sit unsupported, move or communicate, and it is unclear how much he can see. But this little boy is just beginning to show us that he can understand and engage with the world. The speech and language therapist and the computer supported learning specialist in his team have recently been able to teach him how to make choices by using simple 'switches' (large coloured button-like devices activated by a simple tap). He is now beginning to choose between books he would like to have read, choose between songs he would like to hear, and to show that he knows how a song goes by tapping a switch that generates a missing word. And as he begins to understand cause-and-effect through these simple activities, he is making more sense of his world, something he is showing by starting to pay attention to his little brother and following him as he crawls across the floor. Can you imagine how powerful these changes are for his family?



The **Family Support Team** makes it possible for families to be in partnership with us in supporting their children's development. We are funded by MSD to deliver 50 pieces of work a year. We actually provide more than twice that because that's what our 165 families need in order to be able to support their children. Dublin Street Trust and The Todd Foundation are helping us close the gap between government funding and

family needs. Without their support we would not be able to be so successful. Whether it is helping families receive the government supports to which they are entitled, attending specialist appointments to make sure parents' voices are heard and doctor's information is understood, or helping families solve problems with children's behaviour or sleep patterns, it is all part of family support and means that when families visit the Centre they are ready and able to participate fully in their child's programme.

### **Sometimes it's the little changes that make all the difference....**

James<sup>2</sup> has Autism. He finds anywhere but home really stressful and often finds it impossible to calm himself when out and about. This has made it a challenge for his **Early Intervention Educator** to support him in kindergarten and at times she has had to work with him at home because kindy was just too stressful for him. But thanks to an understanding of his particular needs,

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<sup>1</sup> Not his real name

<sup>2</sup> Not his real name

patience on the part of all the adults in his life, and a clever use of photos, he is now able to wave his mother goodbye when she leaves him at kindy and engage calmly all morning until his mother returns. What are the photos? Well, they are a sequence that show him arriving at kindy, sitting with his mother, her waving goodbye, him crying to a bit because he's sad she's going, and then it shows him engaging in kindy activities followed by his mother returning to pick him up. The photos are bound together in a little book and each morning James and his mother 'rehearse' the sequence together so he understands what will happen, and now he's 'got it' and his life (and that of his family) is much more joyful.



### **Spreading the word....**

I recently travelled<sup>3</sup> to the UK and Sweden to present the work of the Champion Centre to a variety of audiences; to consult with other researchers and service providers; and to respond to requests for help in setting up multi-disciplinary services in the UK.

In London, I met with **Dr. Stella Acquarone**, Founder of the Parent-Infant Centre in Finchley to discuss how best to demonstrate the impact of our therapy on children diagnosed as on the autistic spectrum. Like us, Dr. Acquerone finds that many children diagnosed with autism probably do not need that diagnosis if they receive the right early intervention. We agreed to collaborate on this important work.

The **Early Intervention Foundation** in London is charged by the UK government with finding out what works in early intervention, and how best to invest public money to get the best outcomes. They asked to meet with me to learn from the experience of the Champion Centre in providing a service that is recognised as being among the best in the world. My input, based on the knowledge generated by the whole Champion Centre team, was much appreciated.

Sponsored by Dr. Carolyn Blackburn (who visited the Champion Centre last year on a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship), I have been appointed Visiting Fellow in Interdisciplinary Professional Practice and Research with Families, at **Birmingham City University**. In that role, I travelled to Birmingham to give a lecture on the development of children born prematurely and the services provided to premature infants and young children and their families at the Champion Centre. The large audience included a wide range of health and education professionals including NICU nurses, health visitors, early childhood teachers, and students. The lecture was very well received and resulted in an invitation to return to BCU next year to deliver a keynote address at a conference. Dr. Blackburn and I were also able to share aspects of our practice,

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<sup>3</sup> The Champion Centre paid for my accommodation in Stockholm and registration for the conference. The rest I funded personally.

to discuss our common research interests, and to develop some ideas for joint research to benefit families raising children with developmental delays and disabilities. You might be interested to know that Carolyn and I both have articles in the current issue of the international journal **Infants and Young Children**. Mine (in collaboration with Dr. Anne van Bysterveldt of the University of Canterbury) summarises the state of inclusion for children with disabilities attending early childhood settings in New Zealand, while Carolyn's does the same for England.



Finally, I travelled to Sweden to the **International Society on Early Intervention (ISEI)** conference in Stockholm where Robyn Ritchie (occupational therapist) and I presented a symposium on Champion Centre work. Robyn's presentation showcased the work that she and Clinical Practice Manager Jan Murphy are doing to adjust perceptions of children born prematurely who present with autistic symptoms in infancy. It showed how a careful exploration of the history of each child and the relationships they have within their families and communities can lead to a much more nuanced understanding of their challenges and hence of their potential for growth and development. My own presentation both showcased the model of early intervention at the Champion Centre and reported on my research work aimed at understanding how parents and therapists observe and understand each child's development.

And here's one more story from my trip...

### **Finding the best**

Some 16 years ago, Eunice Costello, living in London, gave birth to Isabella, who has Down syndrome. Eunice wanted the very best early intervention for her daughter, so she searched the world and found the Champion Centre. She moved her whole family to New Zealand specifically to access the Champion Centre and she credits the Centre with a daughter whose abilities, she told me, constantly surprise all who meet her. Eunice is now living back in the UK, and I met up with her at her request in a café in a large shopping centre in east London. She wanted to meet because she is working with a group of health and education professionals to try to build something like the Champion Centre in the London Borough of Newham. I met with her group, talked through a range of issues, and offered to provide support from afar. However, because of my connections with Birmingham City University (see above), I was also able to put them in touch with Dr. Carolyn Blackburn who could provide support closer to home. I so hope this dedicated group can make an impact in their part of the world; and I am so proud to play a role in their efforts.

### **Watch this space.....**

Last year, kind folks from Spanbild NZ Ltd funded research into the value of the Champion Centre programmes to the families who have used our services. This qualitative piece of work was carried out by Research First, a respected Christchurch social science research company, and involved seeking responses to a wide-ranging online questionnaire from parents (both past and present) of children who have gone through the Centre. This report will be launched very soon, but I can tell you that the results are a very strong endorsement of the Champion Centre programmes and their importance to Canterbury children and families.



**ALL OF THE THERAPIES AT THE CHAMPION CENTRE ARE DELIVERED BY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES.**

**EVERY CHILD'S PROGRAMME RECEIVES SOME GOVERNMENT FUNDING. NOT A SINGLE CHILD'S PROGRAMME IS FULLY FUNDED BY GOVERNMENT.**

**WE DELIVER WHAT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES NEED; WHAT GIVES EACH CHILD THE BEST CHANCE OF REACHING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. IF WE ONLY DELIVERED WHAT THE GOVERNMENT FUNDS WE WOULD NOT BE MEETING OUR OBLIGATIONS TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

### **Help from the 'hood.....**

We need help from everyone to keep the Champion Centre running, but we are particularly grateful when that support comes from our neighbours. The Palms Shopping Centre has made the Champion Centre its charity of choice this year and invited us to sell the Entertainment Book at their special Ladies Night. Our local community also raised \$1,700 for us through the Good in the Hood initiative of Z Energy service station at the Palms. And the lovely Ray Lucas ran a marathon for us. Go Ray!



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: A quote from Ban Ki-Moon's address at an event on Investing in Early Childhood Development as the Foundation for Sustainable Development (September 2015):**

***"This is a pivotal time. Far too many children are still being left behind. Our main thing is to leave nobody behind. Too many countries have yet to make early childhood development a priority. We need to invest more, not just in education, but in health and protection. We need to target our investments and interventions to reach children at greatest risk of being left behind."***

Thank you to all our supporters for your understanding of, and commitment to, the vital work of the Champion Centre.

*Susan H. Foster-Cohen.*

Susan Foster-Cohen, PhD  
Director

Please call us: (03) 383 6867, visit our website: [www.championcentre.org.nz](http://www.championcentre.org.nz) or make a direct donation to 12-3240-0034924-01