The Children's Trust
For children with brain injury

Achieving our goals together

Our strategy from 2025 to 2030



Introduction from Mike Thiedke, Chief Executive

Every child deserves the chance to play, learn, grow and thrive. The Children's Trust is proud to have supported thousands of children and young people with brain injury and neurodisability. For over forty years, we have provided expert care, rehabilitation and education so that children can live their best life possible. But we need to do more.

Every year, 40,000 children across the UK experience a brain injury and about 350 sustain a severe brain injury, many with devastating consequences. Some children lose the ability to walk, talk, learn or communicate. Their lives – and the lives of their families – are turned upside down. Their chances to thrive in childhood and beyond are put at risk.

For the children who need it, swift access to the kind of specialist neurorehabilitation we provide is crucial. Right now, this need is urgent and growing. Only a fraction of the 350 children, receive the specialist support they need, when they need it.

That's why, at the heart of our new five-year strategy, is a bold vision to be the UK's leading provider of neurorehabilitation for children with brain injury and neurodisability. Striving for excellence in neurorehabilitation to transform outcomes for children and young people.

We know that for children with brain injury, timely intervention is vital to protect a child's long-term wellbeing and participation in everyday life. Research shows that childhood brain injury can shape a person's entire life – influencing educational outcomes, emotional wellbeing, mental health, employment opportunities and the ability to live independently. The consequences of missing out on the right support at the right time are simply too great to ignore.

Thanks to the dedication of our staff, volunteers and supporters, we already deliver highly specialist services every day. Our team enable children to achieve goals that once felt out of reach. We are fortunate to bring together an exceptional concentration of paediatric neurorehabilitation and special education expertise, shaped by decades of experience and collaboration.

Over the next five years, we will go further: growing our services and investing in areas such as neurotechnology – life-changing equipment that can help children rebuild the neural pathways they need to walk, communicate, play and connect again. We will secure the future of our unique, leading school – ensuring it remains strong, sustainable and able to provide outstanding education to children with neurodisability for years to come.

By 2030, we want to look back with pride at how far we have come. We want to see how many more children and families we have helped to achieve their goals, whether that's future career aspirations, learning to walk again, being able to speak, or playing with siblings.

We also want to recognise the progress we have helped to drive across the wider system by sharing our evidence, knowledge and expertise to enhance our wider impact for children with acquired brain injury.

With the need growing and families facing increasing pressures, the time to act is now. We invite you to join with our staff, supporters, partners, and the children and families who are on this journey with us. Together we can make our vision a reality and achieve a better brighter future.

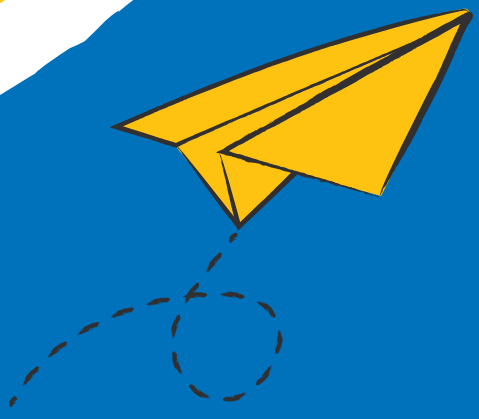


Mike Thiedke
Chief Executive



“This strategy is a bold step forward and reflects our deep commitment to the children and families we serve. It’s driven by compassion, shaped by innovation, and built on decades of expertise. It reflects our determination to respond to growing needs, increase our impact and create lasting change for the children and families who need us most.”

Steve Flanagan, Chair of Trustees





Children at the centre of everything

From a future filled with uncertainty to re-imagining the possible

Our overall aim is to help more children access the support they need to achieve their goals and reach their full potential. Our strategic goals are ultimately about enabling children to realise their goals – from dreams of the future to the life-changing milestones along the way – from being able to "have a pet lion" to "being able to walk".

We are constantly looking for new ways to support children and families across all our services and help them achieve the best possible outcomes. An important example of this has been the adoption of 'my Favourite-Words' involving children and families in goal setting. The framework, developed by CanChild and known as the 'F-Words', is that children are more motivated to achieve rehabilitation goals when what they're aiming for is meaningful to them. The six Favourite Words - Function, Family, Fitness, Fun, Friends and Future – prompt children and families to talk about what is most important to them.

Working closely with children and their families, we focus on what each child can do and what truly matters to them. This helps to make sure each child's goals are personal, meaningful and relevant to their everyday life. Our expert team then develop rehabilitation programmes for each child based on their goals.

This approach has changed the way we can measure impact, and the real difference rehabilitation is making to children's lives.



Real-Life Goals: Violet's Story

Eight-year-old Violet came to The Children's Trust after a stroke left her unable to walk, speak clearly, or use the right side of her body. During her nine-week rehabilitation, she helped set her own F-Words goals focusing on what mattered most to her. These included:
"To hold my baby cousin" (Family)
"To walk around soft play with a friend" (Friends)
"To brush my teeth and get dressed on my own" (Function)
"To be a Paralympic horse rider" (Future)

By the end of her stay, Violet was walking with a splint, using her right arm more confidently, and, most joyfully, riding her pony again – one of her biggest passions.

"The [rehabilitation] sessions were a revelation – the whole time she was there she was making really clear leaps," Violet's dad Rob said. "This is something I never thought I'd say, but she's able to canter again... She was so happy. We were all very emotional.

> "The Children's Trust gave Violet her future back.

Favourite-Words framework

The six F-Words help children and families decide what's important to them. They put their goals into their own words. Our expert team develops rehabilitation programmes based on these goals.

Below are examples of real goals set by children and their families when they begin their journey with us at The Children's Trust. We measure how children feel about goals at the start and end of their rehabilitation.

Function

Everyday skills at home, school or in the community
"Sit up with less support"
"To be more independent in my morning routine so that I can go to my wardrobe, choose my clothes and get dressed"
"Speak little sounds or words again"
"To be able to support her head and core to sit freely on the floor"
"To be able to use the toilet"

Family

Relationships and the support network around a child
"To be able to independently get in and out of the car so my grandparents don't need to lift me"
"To be able to play with my little sisters"
"To be able to video call family in India"
"To go to the park with my family and play on the playground"

Fitness

Being physically and mentally active and healthy
"To be able to move my body to music"
"To beat my 100m freestyle PB time"
"To be able to walk"

Fun

Doing the things that bring joy and meaning
"Join in songs with my voice and actions"
"To be able to talk, clearly show yes and no and have a choice in fun activities"
"To be able to skip ads and to the next video on Youtube"
"To be able to have some food each day for enjoyment"

Friends

Having opportunities to connect and build relationships
"Improve my walking and strength so that I can go out with my friends and be less reliant on my wheelchair"
"To be able to hang out with my friends"
"To enjoy and interact more in activities"
"To keep up with my friends to play sports and outdoors"

Future

Setting sights on goals and dreams, from school to long-term ambitions
"To be able to work as an actress"
"To return to school"
"To follow my aspirations of being a policeman"
"To be something in life and reach his full potential"

Our strategy sets out an audacious vision to help more children access the care they need and deserve to achieve their goals and reach their full potential.



Our Vision

To be the UK's leading provider of neurorehabilitation for children with brain injury and neurodisability, transforming outcomes for children, young people and their families through our innovative technology, compassion and expertise.

Our strategic goals to 2030

Our Goals:

Goal 1	**Delivering safe, effective and high-quality services**
Goal 2	**Enhancing and expanding our neurorehabilitation services**
Goal 3	**Future-proofing our education offer**
Goal 4	**Investing in our people**
Goal 5	**Strengthening our finances**

Goal 1

Delivering safe, effective and high-quality services

We care for some of the most vulnerable children and young people with complex clinical needs, and their safety and wellbeing are paramount. At The Children's Trust, we are committed to delivering high-quality support and experience through education, health, and therapy services that transform outcomes for children and young people with complex needs. We set the highest standards of care and continuously strive to raise the bar, placing their quality of life at the heart of what we do.



We are committed to offering timely intervention and personalised care for children like Isaac over the next five years.

Isaac

Isaac, aged 16 months stayed at The Children's Trust for an 8 week intensive neurorehabilitation placement following a stroke. Isaac's mum Nikki reflected on the care he received and his progress:

> The therapy teams are amazing, and the sessions are very individualised. With an older child you can say 'come on, you can try and pick that up, you can try and push that ball', but you can't do that with a 14-month-old, you've got to be a lot more creative.
>
> Last week he was able to walk from the rehab centre to his room and most of the way back again, holding our hands. We didn't think we would be there eight weeks ago when he was still toppling over sitting up, so that's a massive thing. That's down to the therapy and all the input that he has had, because it's been so swift. It's meant that he can get his best start in life to be able to progress and thrive.

Our focus for the future

- We will deliver **personalised, child-focused care** for every child and family and create seamless pathways that support families from hospital to home.
- We will **strive for clinical excellence** aligned with best practice and regulation. Continuous learning and improvement will remain central to everything we do.
- We will build strong partnerships to ensure our services **integrate with wider health and social care systems.**
- We will remain committed to investing in and improving ways in which we **actively listen and respond to families, children and young people.** This includes how we demonstrate the changes we have made thanks to their feedback.

92%

of families would recommend us to their friends, family and other parents if they needed similar care or treatment

Goal 2

Enhancing and expanding our neurorehabilitation services

Advances in emergency and acute medical care mean more children now survive serious brain injuries, creating an urgent and growing need for fair access to specialist neurorehabilitation. We need a joined-up national action plan on acquired brain injury to address this as many young people face long waits for support. To help meet this need and ease pressure across the wider healthcare system, we plan to grow and strengthen our neurorehabilitation services. With our unique, specialist expertise and environment, we can help children and young people, achieve outcomes that go beyond what hospital or community-only services can offer, and support the transition from hospital to home.



Our Community Rehabilitation Service will support more children like Marnie to return to school.

Marnie

Marnie, was 6 when she experienced a stroke. After the initial crisis passed, her family turned to The Children's Trust community rehabilitation for support in returning to daily life.

> The therapy at The Children's Trust has been very much tailored to her goals and needs. The team just know how to deal with children with brain injuries – it's so specialised – having therapists and doctors that deal with brain injuries every day has been fantastic.
>
> Alexis, Marnie's Mum

Marnie has returned to school full time, with support from her parents and teachers.

Marnie's Dad Gareth tells us: "we weren't sure if she was going to be able to go back and stay in her year group, but she's done really well."

Our focus for the future

We will **increase the number of places available at the National Specialist Neurorehabilitation Centre** so children and young people are able to leave hospital sooner and receive timely access to specialist rehabilitation that will transform outcomes for them.

We will **support young people currently aged 14 and over living in our residential care service to make a timely and successful transition to adult services within the next 5 years.** We will carefully manage our bed capacity to support the growing need for specialist neurorehabilitation.

We will **invest and innovate in paediatric neurotechnology, and we will explore and develop new services** leveraging our expertise and engaging proactively with the wider healthcare system.

We will **strengthen our community-based rehabilitation** and support more children to transition from hospital to home and back to school.

88%

of children who come to The Children's Trust are able to return to their previous school or education setting

Goal 3



Future-proofing our education provision

The Children's Trust School is a non-maintained special school for children and young people aged 2-19 with a wide range of needs including complex education, health, therapy and care requirements. We want to ensure the school rated by Ofsted Education as 'Outstanding' can flourish in the future. Our aim is to create a sustainable model that allows the school to establish stronger links with the wider education sector. We strive to enable the school to continue delivering a curriculum which is meaningful and individualised for learners with the most complex needs.



We are proud of this unique leading school and we want to support it to thrive long into the future.

Harvey

Harvey, aged 18 is a member of the Sixth Form's Platinum class. Since joining the school in 2014, Harvey has made a great deal of progress and developed a growing ability to make choices for himself and to enjoy the world around him.

> At The Children's Trust School, we focus on what matters most: quality of life. Harvey has taken our offer and flourished. He's not just part of the community, he's an inspiration within it.
>
> Launa, Headteacher

100%

of children meet or exceed goals in communication and cognitive development within the ImPacts curriculum

Our focus for the future

We will ensure the **school flourishes in the future** by exploring options for the most sustainable, future-proof model including independence from the charity.

We will forge strategic partnerships to design a sustainable business model that integrates the school into the broader education system and will **position it for long-term growth.**

We will **grow day pupil numbers and maintain high standards of education quality and care** for children and young people throughout.

Goal 4

Investing in our people

Our people make the difference and our ability to deliver exceptional rehabilitation, care and education depends on the strength and commitment of our team. We will prioritise colleagues' mental health and wellbeing, expand leadership development and create clear opportunities for learning and progression, fostering a culture of openness, inclusion and ambition across the organisation.



Dr Jenny Jim

"Being supported to take part in the development of the new national NICE guidance has been one of the highlights of my career. I felt proud to bring paediatric expertise to the committee and to ensure the needs and experiences of children with brain injury were properly represented. It also reaffirmed why the work we do every day is so important, and why early, specialist support can change the course of a child's life. I'm grateful to The Children's Trust for recognising the value of this work and supporting me to contribute. It's really nice to be part of an organisation that is forward thinking and that really does want to make a long-lasting change for children and families.

Dr Jenny Jim, Head of Psychological Therapies/Consultant Clinical Psychologist at The Children's Trust

Over **90%** of staff from across the organisation feel that their role makes a difference to children and families.

Our focus for the future

We will **attract, retain, and develop a skilled, agile workforce** by investing in staff development, building the expertise we need for the future model and improving the value we offer our staff team.

We will **improve workplace culture and engagement** by putting in place a comprehensive Workforce Strategy, with a strong focus on supporting the mental health and overall wellbeing of our people.

We will **empower our teams by investing in developing the digital skills, systems and technologies** that support collaboration, enable innovation and improve the way we deliver services, helping us work in a smarter and more connected way.

Goal 5

Strengthening our finances

Over the next five years, we'll strengthen our finances so we can sustain and grow the services that make the biggest difference to children, young people and families. We'll build our income by developing our specialist neurorehabilitation offer, expanding successful services and exploring new ones.

We'll invest in our buildings and spaces to make sure every child and young person has a safe, supportive environment where they can thrive. To help us grow, we'll secure the investment we need and work towards operating with a healthy financial surplus by 2030. We'll also increase our profile and fundraising, including launching a major appeal to advance neurotechnology that will help more children move, communicate and connect in new ways



Strengthening our finances means we will be here long into the future so that more children have the opportunity to make incredible progress like Leo.

Leo

Leo was left unable to move or breathe independently after undergoing life-saving surgery to remove a brain tumour at 12. Sixteen months later, after an initial 12-week placement, seven months of community support, and now halfway through another 20-week placement Leo has made incredible progress.

> When he was originally here, he needed full support just to be able to sit up. His chair was doing all the work to keep him upright. Now he's sitting himself up. He's bringing himself forwards. He changes his top half when he's sitting on the edge of the bed… and he's walking with a pulpit frame.
>
> Laura, Highly Specialist Occupational Therapist, The Children's Trust

Our focus for the future

- Grow our income through business development of health-funded, specialist neurorehabilitation placements, **growing existing services and testing and developing new services.**
- **Secure strategic funding through high value philanthropy and fundraising appeals,** and support our ambition around neurotechnology to transform outcomes for children and young people.
- **Ensure services are financially sustainable** by understanding cost drivers and securing fees that accurately reflect service delivery.



Leo's story

After undergoing life-saving surgery to remove a brain tumour, Leo was left unable to move or breathe independently. His mum, Asuka, and Highly Specialist Occupational Therapist, Laura, tell us the remarkable story of his recovery – and explain how the cutting-edge neurotechnology at The Children's Trust has been instrumental in his rehabilitation. Today Leo is not just moving by himself – he is learning to walk again.

The first sign that 14-year-old Leo was unwell came in March 2021 when he developed a squint in his left eye. Leo was referred to Great Ormond Street Hospital, but it wasn't until September 2023, after numerous investigations that they discovered he had a brain tumour. Leo needed an operation to remove it immediately.

On the night after the surgery, Leo stopped breathing and became unresponsive. The operation had caused his cerebellum to swell and it was compressing on his brainstem.

Leo needed another operation to cut away the bottom part of his cerebellum to allow his brainstem some space. This was such major surgery, there was no way of knowing if he would recover.

A long road to recovery

After his second operation, Leo could only blink – he couldn't move or breathe on his own. He spent over four months in intensive care, during which his heart stopped twice.

Gradually, he improved: his speech returned – quietly, he could swallow, and began to regain a little movement in his limbs – first his thumb, then his right arm.

Tests had confirmed Leo's tumour was medulloblastoma, requiring chemotherapy and radiotherapy. After ten months of gruelling treatment, Leo was finally ready for the next stage: rehabilitation at The Children's Trust in July 2024.

Leo made incredible progress

When Leo first arrived at The Children's Trust, Highly Specialist Occupational Therapist Laura Buttimer was coordinating his rehabilitation. Sixteen months later, after an initial 12-week placement, seven months of community support, and now halfway through another 20-week placement, Laura has witnessed Leo make incredible progress.



"When he was originally here, he needed full support just to be able to sit up," explains Laura. Now he's sitting himself up. He's bringing himself forwards. He changes his top half when he's sitting on the edge of the bed… and he's walking with a pulpit frame."

"From an upper limb side of things, he didn't have any movement in any of his fingers on his left hand, his wrist or his elbow. And now, he's made a 100% increase in being able to grasp, release and use that hand with function."

Neurotechnology supports and speeds up Leo's recovery

It has taken extraordinary hard work, patience and determination from Leo to get to where he is today. In order to restore movement after a brain injury, children have to work on repeating the same movements again and again, pushing through pain, fatigue and frustration.

Thankfully, at The Children's Trust, Leo has had access to a range of neurotechnology that has encouraged this gentle repetition of movement in the most painless way – physically, mentally and emotionally.

For children like Leo, this innovative technology doesn't just offer physical support so that they can gradually build strength, it also makes the process more interesting, so that they can stick with it for longer, with expert support and guidance from our specialist therapy team.

While it's impossible to know where Leo's recovery would be without the neurotechnology, Laura is certain he wouldn't be where he is now. His progress slowed down considerably while he was at home in between his two placements at The Children's Trust – indicating just how much of an impact it has.

Looking to the future

At the time of writing Leo is set to head home at the end of the month. For the remainder of his time at The Children's Trust, one of his main goals is to keep strengthening his walk. He has come so far and his journey continues – but Laura believes he'll live independently one day.

"I honestly think that boy will work, he'll contribute to society, he'll go to university if he wants to go to university. What's really important is, I think he's beginning to see that he can."

For Asuka, all of this feels incredible, given what he has been through. She is extremely grateful to The Children's Trust for helping Leo make the progress he's made and is certain there is nowhere better for his rehabilitation.

Leo is one of thousands of children who have been supported by The Children's Trust. To learn more about our impact, visit www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk/brain-injury-information/real-stories"





Our Culture

At The Children's Trust we are committed to building a culture where equity, diversity and inclusion are integral to our strategy and how we work every day. We recognise that to support children and young people with brain injury and neurodisability effectively, our organisation must reflect and understand the diversity of the communities we serve. We are continually developing the way we actively listen to, involve and act on feedback from children, young people and their families. This includes improving the ways we show the difference their feedback makes and how it shapes the changes we implement.

Through SPARK, our staff EDI network, we continue to strengthen our understanding, review our practices, learn from lived experience, and ensure colleagues have access to the adjustments, learning and support they need.

Our promises – **Child First, Aim High, Care Deeply, Be Open and Own It** guide the behaviour and culture we expect from ourselves and each other. These promises remind us that inclusion is created through everyday actions: listening with empathy, seeking out different perspectives, supporting colleagues with fairness and respect, and taking responsibility for the impact we have. By living these commitments consistently, we build a culture where people feel safe to speak up and raise concerns, share ideas, learning and progress. This means everyone can contribute fully, and we strengthen our ability to deliver the best outcomes for children and families.





Working together to achieve our goals

Your support powers our strategy

Our strategy sets out a bold vision to help more children reach their full potential, achieve their goals and live the best life possible. But we can't do it alone. Your support, expertise and collaboration are vital to turning ambition into reality.

Together, we can create a future where every child with brain injury or neurodisability receives the best possible care, rehabilitation, education and support. Whether you work in partnership with us, commission our services, refer children to us, collaborate on system improvement, fundraise, volunteer or donate - you are helping us deliver our vision.

Work with us to shape better outcomes

Get involved

External engagement is essential to this strategy. By involving children, young people, staff, partners, commissioners, funders and a wide range of stakeholders, we will ensure our work is shaped by meaningful insight, and shared expertise.

Your contribution helps us keep the focus on what matters most, refine our thinking, respond to new challenges and strengthen our work for the future.

Partner with us to improve systems and pathways

We are committed to collaborating with our regulators, ICBs, commissioners, local authorities, referrers, clinicians and education partners to design, improve and deliver high quality, evidence-informed services. By working together, we can build integrated pathways that meet the needs of children and families in a constantly changing landscape.

Collaborate to strengthen services

We welcome partnerships with charities, research bodies, advocacy groups and community organisations. Together, we can share expertise, expand reach and create stronger support for children and young people nationwide.

Join our staff team

Our people are central to delivering this strategy. We're always looking for dedicated, skilled professionals who want to make a difference. By joining us, you'll become part of a team that consistently acts with compassion, professionalism and integrity, working with each child's best interest at the heart of what they do.

Your support makes our work possible

However you choose to support us, you make the difference. Your belief in us means we can turn our vision into a reality and achieve our goals together.

Raise life-changing funds

Whether you're a marathon runner, a bake sale organiser, or someone with an inventive new idea, fundraising for The Children's Trust helps us deliver vital rehabilitation and care for children with brain injury and neurodisability. From sponsored events to community challenges, there's a way for everyone to make a difference.

Give your time

Volunteering with us is a powerful way to support children and families. Whether you're helping in our charity shops, supporting events, lending your professional skills, or learning new ones, your time can help change lives.

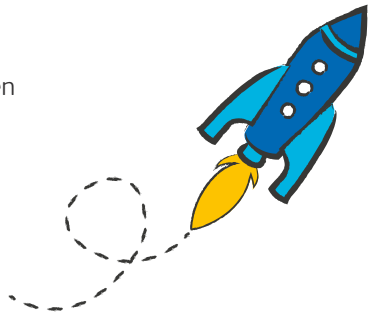
Donate to help us meet our goals faster

Every pound you give helps us provide expert care, specialist education and life-changing therapy. You can donate online, by post, or even leave a gift in your will. However you choose to give, your support makes what we do possible.

Together, we can achieve more

Together, we can deliver lasting, life-changing impact and improve outcomes for more children with brain injury and neurodisability

Thank you for being part of this journey.





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For children with brain injury

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Charity registration number: 288018
Company registration number: 1757875

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

Ofsted Good Provider

Ofsted Outstanding Provider

The Children's Trust is registered with the Fundraising Regulator, inspected and rated 'a Good Provider' by Ofsted Care (for residential houses).

The Children's Trust School is rated 'an Outstanding Provider' by Ofsted Education. TCT_2347 03/26