



Skylarks (formerly Me too & Co) VSC report for Marble Hill Playcentres

Skylarks

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Introduction

The proposed concept for Marble Hill Playcentres provides an opportunity to allow Skylarks (formerly Me too & Co) and other vital local organisations the ability to deliver and expand the ever-growing need for children's services within the local area.

The development of new facilities will enable Skylarks to extend its current provision and allow specialised support to those in need. In the notes set out below we will explain who we are, what we do and the outcomes that we deliver to the most disadvantaged members of our local community. This document will also set out clearly how our current needs cannot be sustained at other venues within the borough and how our organisation desperately requires a facility suited to the needs of our members.

The proposal will also lay out clearly why the provision put forward to the council is suited to our needs, how we have had many unsuccessful attempts at finding suitable facilities over the last few years and that, without the new proposed provision from Marble Hill Playcentres, Skylarks may not be able to continue our work in the local community.

What is Skylarks?

In 2006 local resident Anne-Marie Asgari, with the support of other local parents, set up a group that was to become known as Me too & Co. With the purpose of filling a gap in the borough of Richmond-upon-Thames where there was a lack of support, the organisation started out as a volunteer-run play group for children with additional needs and disabilities. Its popularity quickly grew within the community and its operations expanded organically. In 2019, due to confusion with the #metoo movement and following consultations and a rebranding exercise, we changed our name to Skylarks. The themes that had emerged in our focus groups centred around thriving, nesting and soaring: skylarks are a bird found in Richmond Park which soar into the air and sing beautifully.

Anne-Marie Asgari states:

I had many families who I had worked with come to me and asked me for help and where else they could go to find support. They felt there was nowhere for them in the community. At our first session we were completely overwhelmed, we couldn't believe how many families were looking for the environment and support we were offering. After that first play session, we had a meeting with all the other parent volunteers and decided we would set up a charity to continue this service, to meet the huge demand we saw.

Skylarks would not exist without the vision, determination and hard work of Anne-Marie which shaped our charity into the vital and supportive service it is today.



Over the years the charity has grown substantially and our mission is now to be a one-stop shop (or hub) providing therapies, support and activities for children and young people (CYP) and practical and emotional support for parents and carers. We were originally set up to support CYP and their families in Richmond-upon-Thames, but since adopted an open door policy: anyone, from anywhere, is welcome. The majority of our families come from the local area - see table below.

Children do not need an EHC Plan or even a formal diagnosis to access our services and families do not need to be referred by a professional. Families now come to us from many locations because of the unique way we provide the 360 degree support that we offer; supporting children and parents/carers at the same time, under one roof. We provide most services free of charge, or for a small donation. We now have over 2500 families on register, many of whom attend our sessions regularly. We have recently seen a rapid growth in the number of families contacting us in dire need of support and we wish to grow to meet this demand. We do not believe in applying for or using statutory funding to provide our services; we feel our independence as a charity means we are able to develop our programming in line with the needs of our families and to react quickly to changing needs and opportunities - something that has been and remains important to us.

As you can see from the chart below, Skylarks has been growing in membership, but has been unable to deliver a significant difference in service delivery over the last few years due to the restrictions with our current premises. This means many families are looking for support and advice, but have been unable to access our face-to-face services. Most of the time our projects are full with waiting lists. We are looking to develop new projects that service users, frontline staff and research have identified as being needed, along with increasing the number and range of therapeutic and engaging activities offered to and adapted for children with additional needs.

Numbers of children supported:

2015/16 - individual children 270 supported - Children Membership 955

2016/17 - individual children 390 supported - Children Membership 1455

2017/18 - individual children 293 supported - Children Membership 1911

2018/19 - individual children 387 supported - Children Membership 2356

2019/20 - individual children 482 supported - Children Membership 2641

This Information has been put together using statistics from the last 5 years of annual reports.



Although we have a growing membership and provide many key essential services to CYP and their families, at Skylarks we have very minimal staff. All but one of our staff members works part time and we could not manage the sheer amount of work involved without the fantastic support of our trustees and volunteers. We have approximately 40 active volunteers offering a range of skills, from looking after children in our creche while their parents receive benefits advice or attend workshops; to offering their professional skills such as osteopathy, massage and other therapies; to accompanying families on trips out such as on nature trails at Holly Lodge or to see Father Christmas. Our volunteers are from a wide range of backgrounds and are of all ages, from local school children as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award scheme to retirees in their 80's!

In 2019/20 we directly engaged with: 378 different CYP with disabilities and also engaged with 104 siblings of children with disabilities whose quality of life is often impacted by their caring role (total 482). We have also directly supported 577 families including parent/carers with a range of support including SEN Education Advice, information talks, workshops and counselling. Together they have accessed 5352 session bookings. Over 40% of our CYP and their families have accessed services more than five times this year. These statistics are shown as each individual being counted only once regardless of how often they have attended our sessions.

Our aims remain the same as they were when we were founded 15 years ago:

- We want to reduce the impact disability and additional needs can have on accessing activities and wider life experiences.
- We want to remove the exclusion that can develop from being unable to access mainstream nurseries, playgroups and classes due to a lack of understanding, facilities or knowledge.
- We want to support parents and carers to empower them as advocates for their children and to improve their quality of life.



Over the last few years we have been awarded many honours for our continued hard work and dedication within the local community. We were fortunate to have been chosen by the Mayor of Richmond as one of her charities during the year 2017-18. We have been the chosen charity of the Richmond May Ball. We were delighted that our volunteers received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. Some of our volunteers have received the Richmond Community Awards and our Chair of Trustees, Jennifer Peters, was shortlisted for the BAPS Awards run by the national charity My Family Our Needs. Skylarks was also a finalist in 2020 for the same award. Skylarks is also a finalist for the National Diversity Awards which have been postponed till September 2021.

We receive funding from the National Lottery, BBC Children in Need, Richmond Parish Lands Charity, Hampton Fund, The Barnes Fund, Harlequins, The Childhood Trust and many more. We also have many supportive families who believe in the work we do and support us by fundraising at many local fairs, schools/PTA's and events. We are also the chosen charity of several local independent and state schools, a golf club and local businesses. We are also currently supported by Global's Make Some Noise and as a result of this we have appeared on Capital FM, Heart and LBC Radio and been featured at the Capital FM Summertime Ball.

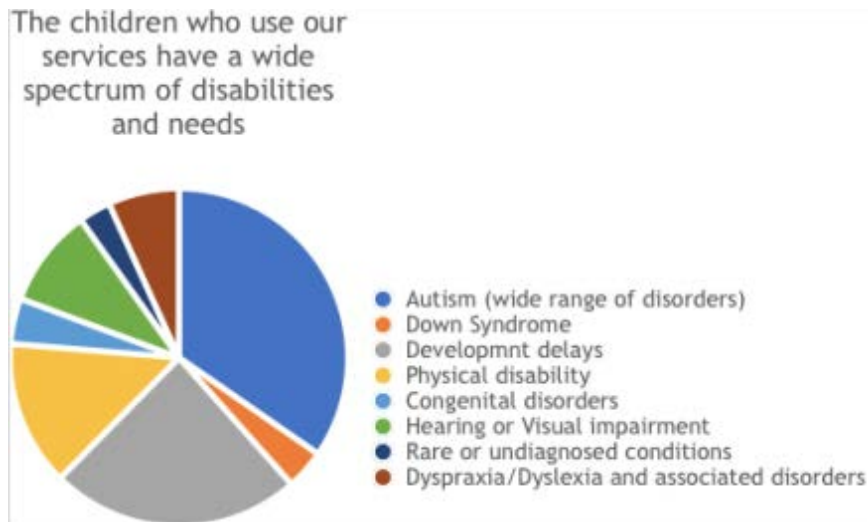
The actor Sally Philips joined us as a parent in 2007 and we are fortunate that she became our Patron in 2008, starring in our videos and hosting many fundraising events for us, including in conjunction with the Mayor of Richmond. She also nominates us as her chosen charity when she takes part in television quiz shows such as when she recently won Pointless Celebrities.

We currently have a long-term corporate partnership with the local (and globally reaching) company Haymarket Media Group, which is based in Twickenham. The company supports our organisation both financially and with their professional skills and were involved in our rebranding. The Chair of Haymarket Media Group, Rupert Heseltine, is personally very involved in our organisation and very supportive of our aims and ambitions.

For more information regarding our reach, please view our annual report via our website: <https://www.skylarks.charity/impact>



Who do we provide services for?



Our total current reach (Jan 2021)

1684 adults who have children with disabilities (i.e. families)

1995 children with disabilities

2971 children in total including siblings

36 children/young people who are wheelchair users

The CYP at Skylarks have a range of learning, physical, emotional or behavioural difficulties. They may have Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, hearing or visual impairment, cerebral palsy, developmental delay, rare or undiagnosed syndromes; they may have a temporary illness or be adopted. The CYP are disadvantaged by their health problems or disability which restrict their access to activities and by communication difficulties which delay their development. Many are isolated and unable to attend mainstream playgroups and activities due to lack of specialist facilities or have been excluded or made to feel unwelcome due to lack of understanding and so are denied opportunities for play and development.



What services do we currently provide?

Skylarks has a small team of staff and a large team of volunteers to ensure that the charity caters for the unmet needs of some of the most vulnerable children in south-west London and beyond. We currently employ 1 full time and 7 part-time staff who are all parents of children with additional needs and have various different experiences which we can use to support families along similar journeys.

We see our role of supporting families along their journey as parents walking along a path different from the one they were expecting to take; and as collaborating with a range of other organisations to provide the best support possible for families.

Skylarks provides a wide range of varied support for the whole family, including CYP with disabilities and additional needs, adult carers, and sibling carers. Our services are ever expanding to meet the needs of local residents. We currently run drop-in sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays during term time at our "pop up" centre in Twickenham, along with many external activities. At these sessions we provide therapies and activities, both for the children who have additional needs, for their siblings and for their parents. Some of these activities need to be booked in advance, most do not. We always have a play room with a wide range of toys for children of different ages and we provide tea, coffee and a listening ear to parents.

We work with a wide range of other local organisations and charities, to deliver their services under our roof, allowing us to provide creche facilities for children while their parents attend training and advice clinics and allowing us to provide several different activities simultaneously with the professional skills of local charities such as RUILS, KIDS, Welcare, Off the Record, the National Autistic Society etc.



Currently our provisions offer the following services both at our main venue and at other locations across the borough:

Regular services offered to children:

- Weekly Play Sessions including Art and Crafts
- Pop Up Sensory Room
- Drama Workshop (Knots Arts)
- Developmental Yoga (Integral Harmony)
- Karate classes (Busen Academy)
- Music and story time sessions
- Music and Makaton signing with Singing Hands
- Sensory Haircuts for Children
- Cookery Sessions with the Kids Cookery School
- Pedal Project - learn to ride a bicycle
- All Aboard Club - special interest playing with trains group
- Coding and IT courses for children with Fire Tech
- Riding with Park Lane Stables RDA (also hippotherapy and Wellies and Well-Being project)

Regular services offered to parents:

- Relax and Recharge Mornings
- National Autistic Society Coffee Mornings
- SEND Education Information and Advice Service
- Girls Connect Coffee Mornings for Parents of Girls with ASD
- Information and Event sessions
- Family Matters advice clinics (with RUILS)
- Benefits advice clinics (with KIDS)
- EHCP support with RUILS and KIDS SENDIASS service
- Social care advice clinics (with Welcare)
- Home education support group
- Phyz support group
- Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities parenting course (Welcare) Post 16 Maze support group

Children Therapies:

- Hydrotherapy
- Music Therapy (Otakar Kraus Music Trust)
- Developmental Yoga sessions
- Osteopathy Clinic
- Counselling Service for children with disabilities (Off the Record)

Offsite Events and Activities:

- Trips to Kew Gardens
- Bushcraft at Holly Lodge in Richmond Park
- Local nature and nurture days
- Marble Hill Playcentres sessions



During the Coronavirus pandemic we have remained open in a Covid-compliant manner as much as possible, in order to support our families who have found this time particularly challenging, but have also brought forward our planned development of online offerings. Our virtual services now include:

Online activities and services:

- Weekly Zoom groups for music, drama, yoga, music therapy and Singing Hands
- Online life skills training for children in resilience, leadership and creative problem solving with Role Models
- Interactive online plays such as Shrek, the Gruffalo, Toy Story, Wizard of Oz and Harry Potter
- Online training webinars and support groups for adults
- Online meditative support groups
- Online counselling for young people

We also moved many of our activities outdoors, using the Kitchen Gardens at Marble Hill Park in conjunction with English Heritage. Our outdoor activities included playtime and haircutting!



We provide 360 degree support, where any child or young person, their siblings and parents are all supported and given opportunities to develop, reduce isolation and increase well-being all under the same roof.

Families come to us at many points during their journey; pre diagnosis, support after diagnosis or when there is no diagnosis at all.

We help parents develop their knowledge and confidence with introductions to therapies and services, as well as access to support groups. One of our main selling points is the organic service of just being there, so that parents realise they are not alone, knowing they are not being judged, that someone else understands what they are going through from personal experience and can offer a comforting word over a cup of coffee or a shoulder to cry on.

Most of our services are free of charge for parents. We suggest a voluntary donation for many of our services, but we do not want anyone to ever feel they cannot access our services, so all donations are voluntary and full bursary places are available for those in need.



How does having a child with a disability affect families?

According to a survey completed by Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity (now Hampton Fund) and Richmond Parish Lands Charity (RPLC), Richmond has a relatively high number of residents with a disability. Nearly one in every five households contain someone that lives with a long-term health condition or disability.

Richmond is seen as an affluent borough but the polarisation between disadvantage and wealth is becoming greater. Families who have children with additional needs are at much greater risk of poverty and social isolation.

The report found that people's disability dictates what they can or cannot do, leaving them feeling isolated and lonely.

CYP with a disability or additional need are more likely to suffer with poor mental health due to their conditions giving them a heightened sense of being emotionally overwhelmed. The most frequent mental health problems in CYP include anxiety and depression, eating disorders, conduct disorder (serious anti-social behaviour), and self-harm. In 2014/15, there were 71 hospital admissions from the borough of Richmond as a result of self-harm in those aged 10-24 years, which equates to the 4th highest rate in London.

Parents and carers are also at risk of poor health, loneliness and isolation. Almost half of the carers who responded to the Carers Survey in 2016 by Richmond Council suggested that the person they care for has mental health issues; almost a third specified a long-term health condition and over a fifth mentioned a physical disability.

Parents and carers often have difficulty themselves, sometimes having their own health issues, but due to their CYP needing additional support, they do feel they have the time to deal with them. For many parents and carers their life revolves around providing care, attending appointments and a constant challenge in accessing the services needed for their child.

According to On The Edge report from HFA and RPLC, people experiencing some form of crisis have a universal need for peer support. Just having an appreciation of the challenges through a lived experience can provide the help and reassurance people need. Peer support also helps to build up networks and reduce isolation. This feeling was particularly noted to be prevalent among parents whose children had special needs, often before diagnosis or when they needed support or advice at various points along their journey.

Many parents feel the information they need can be hard to access or overwhelming when they do find it. Keeping on top of the information about service provision is a challenge, even for support workers. Skylarks supports families through this ever growing jungle of information and helps them to find the appropriate information and support for their family.

Around 15,800 people provide some level of unpaid care in the borough of Richmond.

Austerity is affecting families who have children with disabilities particularly hard. Many live in fear of benefit cuts, changes to personal budgets and cuts in council provisions. Some have experienced hate crime and been called benefit scroungers in the streets. Others struggle to access transport when it is necessary. The challenge for many disabled people is that they are managing complex lives, their disability being just one of several issues they need to cope with. The additional costs of living with a disability are estimated at £570 per month - for many families, particularly those who have more than one child with a disability, this can be prohibitive. Skylarks helps promote integration between families from different socio-economic backgrounds, extending the idea of inclusiveness that we believe in.

A local charity which offers welfare grants to people on low incomes or benefits from the borough of Richmond has found that 76% of their applications come from families who have children with disabilities.

What difference does Skylarks make?

According to our members and the general public, our impact is hugely significant! Impact and Outcomes Our key goals and outcomes are listed below.

We regularly survey our members and recently asked them if they would agree we had enabled their child and them to:

- socialise, develop and to make friends – 86% agreed
- increase confidence – 82% agreed
- increase interaction – 79% agreed
- make the child more at ease in social settings – 70% agreed
- provide the opportunity to share experiences with other parents/carers – 79% agreed
- instigate a reduction in isolation – 81% agreed
- gain improved emotional well-being for parents and children – 85% agreed
- gain a better understanding of rights as a parent/carer – 71% agreed

We also surveyed parents and carers about how they felt Skylarks had supported them in their caring needs. In the chart below you are able to see the positive effect our services have on their ability to support their CYP:

Survey question	Answer
Sharing experiences and journeys with other parents and carers	90.91%
Reduction in isolation	90.91%
Improved emotional well-being	86.36%
Increased knowledge of rights as a parent/carer	95.45%
Improved ability to advocate for my child/ren	95.24%
Received health advice and information	71.43%
Received advice and support from staff and volunteers	100.00%
Felt included and welcomed at the sessions	100.00%
Gained skills and knowledge through courses and workshops	76.19%
Belonging to a community of people in similar situations	95.45%



Parents joining Skylarks become part of a community that offers mutual support and understanding. We help parents/carers to participate in play activities such as music, drama, karate with their CYP, enabling the child to excel despite the challenges imposed by the additional needs that affect them. By bringing the community together and providing them with professional support, along with a range of peer support services, we reduce the isolation for parents and carers. This has a huge impact on the children who come to Skylarks. When parents/carers feel better able to cope, the impact on family life for the children is great.

Parents value very highly our free advocacy service for help with SEN and Education, Health and Care Plans at schools. This is a unique service in the borough and one that has enabled hundreds of children to receive fuller, better support provision at school via an advocacy support team helping to negotiate with the local provision of SEN. We are currently building upon this service's success to enable more families the opportunity to receive this specialist service.

Signposting is an important part of our role: we make a difference to children and their families by helping them access services they may not know about. We are able to assess their needs and put them in touch with services, support organisations, grant making bodies etc that will help to enrich their family experience dealing with additional needs. The result is Skylarks is able to help facilitate an improved quality of life for disadvantaged young people.

What challenges do we face as an organisation?

Skylarks is an independent charity that applies for and receives no statutory funding, providing the charity the flexibility to be responsive to our families' needs, to listen and react quickly. This does however mean our ongoing work relies solely on the support and donations from Richmond residents and our members. We're able to continue our work through fundraising and generous support from BBC Children in Need, Richmond Parish Lands Charity, Hampton Fund, One Richmond, The Barnes Fund, Tommy Hollis Children's Fund and many other grant giving bodies, along with the guidance and expertise from businesses such as Haymarket Media Group.

Skylarks is currently at a stage where our current facilities can no longer sustain our increased level of membership needing the support of our services. Over the last 5 years the charity has seen our membership increase by 165%, even after a loss in membership due to the updated GDPR regulations. This increase in need cannot be sustained within the current facilities in which we are based. To help meet the growing local need, Skylarks has increased the number of staff on payroll by 50% in the last two years alone.

Future challenges foreseen by Skylarks in the community

- Increasing numbers of children with SEND, due to better diagnosis
- Increasing pressure on schools – budgets and performance
- Reduced spending through local authorities

We do not see the future as all doom and gloom. We feel that as time moves on a greater understanding and better identification of needs of CYP with disabilities and additional needs will continue to increase and that there is a continued increase in awareness and acceptance of difference



We hope that each child will be treated as an individual and that services will provide support for the whole family in an all encompassing model. Skylarks supports the current shift away from statutory services and that this will continue to highlight the importance of the charity sector, specifically independent services like Skylarks that has the ability to support families to access the services their CYP need in order to fulfill their potential. We will continue to strive for parents from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds to have aspirations for their children with SEND and to feel more empowered in supporting their CYP's goals and aspirations.

Our search for a new home

Skylarks has scoured the borough for a suitable replacement facility to its current home at The Crossway Centre in Twickenham. The Charity has visited over 20 possible venues over the last 3-5 years and has not found anything which might be suitable. Due to the range of services we provide at Skylarks, finding a venue that can accommodate all our services is extremely difficult. Currently we provide most of our services simultaneously at the Crossway Centre and other services which cannot fit on site are held at satellite locations across the borough.

Although we have our main hub at The Crossway Centre, this is used for activities and workshops only. Skylarks does not have a physical office for its staff to work from, resulting in all staff having to work from home. Staff currently work virtually to reduce the organisational overheads, as it would not be economically possible to rent separate office space, along with multiple venues for its activities. Any venue would need space for staff to store information securely along with a hotdesk when needed.

The venues we have considered include:

- Council owned buildings that are currently underused
- Empty offices
- Industrial estates
- Community centres
- Church halls
- Residential properties

The charity has had advice and input from local estate agents to support its search of the borough's facilities. We have also sought advice from a property consultant. Skylarks does not currently own its own building, nor does it have a long-term lease with St Stephens Church which owns the Crossway Centre.

As this building is used by a multitude of different organisations, although we are the largest single user, we cannot store on-site much of the equipment needed for sessions, nor store material of a sensitive nature on site. This puts the charity at risk of being without a home should our lease end and the church not wish to renew it, for example if they were to consider running a nursery school from the building.



Our weekly sessions are already at capacity and, due to other organisations using the Crossway Centre on other days, we are unable to increase our current provision without the use of external venues. The use of additional venues increases the charity's overheads and puts pressure on staff to move the equipment needed to different locations in the borough. With additional space we would be able to provide additional projects and services to the whole family.

Many of our CYP and their families have a mixture of complex needs e.g. physical disabilities, autism, learning difficulties, which requires purpose-built facilities which cater to their needs and requirements. Our current building is not ideal for our purposes as it is not secure, meaning children with autism could escape from the premises. It does not have a fire escape from the first floor which is suitable for wheelchair users and does not have a fully accessible disabled toilet facility that allows parents to change their growing children.

Why is this space at Marble Hill Playcentres suitable for us while other options are not?

Marble Hill Playcentre is extremely well suited to the needs of Skylarks and our members as it will be a purpose-built facility that is made to meet the requirements of our members and the delivery of our services we provide. As explained in this report, we have explored a multitude of venues both in and out of the borough and found that none of the options presented to us was accessible for a variety of reasons, including affordability and practicality. Skylarks believes that the opportunity to develop facilities bespoke to our needs is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Over the last 10 years, Skylarks has been organically growing from deep within the community and we have used our connections to find suitable accommodation for our various services. We need a facility that has the ability to meet our needs now and in the foreseeable future. The average cost of renting a property in the area is around £50k per annum, but regardless of the cost we have struggled to find any property that would satisfactorily meet our needs because of the varied and complex conditions of many of our clients. Such a large increase in rent is not financially viable without passing the cost on to our members, which would make many of our vital services unaffordable to the families we serve.

What do we need?

Below is a small list of some of the facilities Skylarks needs in order to continue providing our services, along with the tangible improvement our members would like in a new environment:

- A permanently set-up playroom (approximately 15-20 "man hours" per week are currently spent getting toys and equipment out of a shed, setting up and dismantling at the end of each session)
- Activity rooms for drama, karate, cookery etc
- Therapy rooms for osteopathy, yoga etc
- Meeting space for presentations and training

- Small rooms for advice sessions, counselling etc
- Enclosed outdoor play space/garden with full disability access
- 'Hotdesking' office space for staff to access when needed.
- Secure information storage
- Secure building with intercom access
- Parking or drop-off points for wheelchair users
- Disabled toilet with Changing Places facilities

An example of a service to meet our users' needs is the possibility to take their CYP to a disabled toilet with Changing Places facilities. Changing Places toilets are specialised accessible toilets that allow people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy, to use the toilets safely, comfortably and with dignity.

Some of our families need to change their child or young person on a changing table but they are too big for the baby-changing table that most disabled toilets provide.

This means that the CYP need to be changed on the floor. Our families need extra equipment and space that normal accessible toilets fail to offer.

These needs are met by Changing Places toilets.

Each Changing Places toilet provides



The right equipment

- a height adjustable adult-sized changing bench
- a tracking hoist system, or mobile hoist if this is not possible.



Enough space

- adequate space in the changing area for the disabled person and up to two carers
- a centrally placed toilet with room either side
- a screen or curtain to allow some privacy.



A safe and clean environment

- wide tear off paper roll to cover the bench -
- a large waste bin for disposable pads
- a non-slip floor.

There are currently Changing Places toilets available at:

- Kew Gardens
- Heathrow Airport
- Lyric Theatre Hammersmith
- Ealing Shopping Centre and Ealing College
- HFT Charity in New Malden (office hours only)

There are no Changing Places toilets available in Richmond or Kingston. Although there has been a campaign to request facilities be installed in the Bentall Shopping Centre Kingston, this has not happened yet.

Why is this proposal so compelling?

Marble Hill Playcentres is a specifically designed structure to meet everyone's needs, allowing it to become a HUB for the community and a beacon in the world of disability right here in the borough of Richmond. The proposed plans provide Skylarks with space and flexibility to provide our current activities and more. The custom designed space would enable our organisation to grow in size and to continue to support CYP and their families for years to come. The facility will provide the space for Skylarks to provide additional services along with better equipping existing ones. This new building will prove us with exceptional accessibility for our clients who are often forced into accepting sub-standard facilities that are put in as an afterthought and cannot meet their needs, meaning their dignity is compromised. The new space will provide the organisation with a much needed office and meeting space, provide waiting areas for parents and carers, and a communal space so families can interact with each other and gain vital peer support.

The location of the proposed facility is ideal for Skylarks as it is a stone's throw from our current site, allowing parents to easily find the new building. The park is a local landmark and visible from the main road, which means that families will be able to find our venue more easily, as many of our families are stressed and anxious when they come to us for the first time. Many parents already use the existing car parking facilities at Marble Hill park while they access our services. The location has excellent access to public transport links and parking for Blue Badge disabled users. The facility is in the borough of Richmond, meaning we continue to meet the requirements for many of our grant givers and is central within the borough meaning it is easy for everyone from both sides of the borough to attend.

All three charities involved in the application are very well matched in terms of our services, client bodies and outcomes and all three feel we have a significant overlap with clients to help better support our members. All three organisations have been running joint projects together over the years, with OKMT working with us to run a Music Therapy Club, funded by BBC Children in Need, for 13 years. The Music Therapy Club is a programme of small group sessions for children with disabilities and their siblings to help them interact with others, communicate and develop creativity. This activity would now take place at the new Centre without the need for transporting heavy djembe drums, keyboards and other instruments which OKMT currently has to move around between sessions, taking up time and valuable parking space.

The joint project is supported by the Deputy Lieutenants of Richmond and Greater London and the Lord Lieutenant of Greater London.



APPENDIX

Case Studies from Skylarks:

Case Study 1

WP is a young boy with a diagnosis of Atypical ASD and ADHD. He lives with family in Richmond Upon Thames and is struggling at both school and home. He is very unsettled at school and is falling behind. There is more of an expectation of 'good' behaviour and he struggles to meet the schools expectations. WP kicks out regularly with a lot of built up anger due to his awareness of being different to others. When WP first came into contact with Me too & Co/Skylarks he was not accessing any external activities and was struggling with his own self worth. During our regular sessions we have been encouraging him to see Skylarks as a place where he CAN succeed. He takes part in our karate class and has recently achieved his first (red) karate belt. This is something his mother thought he would not be able to achieve a year ago. His mother wrote a detailed letter explaining what Skylarks has offered:

"I wanted to tell you about the fact WP participated in a mainstream Karate Grading and earned his Red Belt. ... It was inconceivable to me that he might be able to develop the concentration/attention and listening skills required in order for him to develop any real proficiency in Karate... WP himself is so happy and so proud. It is lovely to see him develop in confidence, and feel that there is something that he is actually good at. I do not think there is any chance WP would managed this achievement at a mainstream Karate Club without Skylarks. The environment at Skylarks, where he is able to relax and be himself, without fear of adverse judgement, has allowed him to gain confidence over a long period, without any pressure to progress, other than as a result of his own enthusiasm. He has made such amazing progress thanks to the caring, inclusive, supportive environment in which activities take place. Watching him now, with his commitment and enthusiasm and his concentration on what he is doing, often, you would have no idea that he has to deal with the challenges of ADHD."

Case Study 2

LM is a delightful 9 year old boy with a complex diagnosis. He has a chromosome disorder, brain condition and his difficulties include a hearing and visual impairment, learning difficulties, physical co-ordination issues, and social communication difficulties. LM has been attending Skylarks sessions regularly since he was 2 years old. He is affectionate and loving and enjoys being involved in the playroom and interacting with the other children. He is always supported well by the volunteers and his own keyworker. It is clear when working with LM that, although he has developmental delays, he is learning well and will continue to progress and develop over time, even if not at the same rate as other children. He is very aware of his surroundings and other people and can really engage with an activity when supported, although he can struggle to focus. He has a great capacity for enjoyment so he is a child who can really benefit from all the different activities that are on offer. He is able to interact with other children and when he sees a child whose company he particularly enjoys, he shows such delight (usually by throwing his arms round the child). He communicates using Makaton and repeatedly uses the same phrases, such as asking the time, so all the volunteers enjoy interacting with him and know how to respond to him. He responds well to the music sessions and participates fully but can get overwhelmed by sensory overload. He has progressed well in the play activities and is now able to focus on table top activities and is working on improving his fine motor skills which he struggles with. His confidence is growing generally. He enjoys the additional activities such as cooking which clearly gives him a great sense of achievement.

Case Study 3

P uses a wheelchair and cannot walk. She cannot independently transfer and needs some help with manoeuvring her wheelchair. She has some deformity in her hands and needs support developing fine motor skills -- or at least people to watch over her checking she can access the activity. She has no cognitive development issues and is talkative and relational. Before coming to Skylarks P was not connected to other children with special needs and disabilities. P was aware of her difference, but not regularly engaging or seeing other children with differences either. This means she didn't have a perspective of disability in the wider world (she attends mainstream school and is the only child with a physical disability there). P didn't have a fun, social, inclusive place that they could all go to together (i.e. enjoy with mum and little brother as well) The families were not connected to a regular, knowledgeable support network and so were isolated and needed to find everything out for themselves. The family were new to the area and it had taken them time to understand what was available and how the local system worked. Family time at home was stressful because of a very active little brother making suitable play for P hard to achieve.

Since coming to Skylarks P is able to be herself and relax. She has meaningful interaction with staff and volunteers and thrives from the interaction. She is helped to facilitate her imagination, and be creative, improving her fine motor skills. P benefits from so many extra experiences she can't access at home; for example cooking, drama, crafts. P being able to see she is not the only child with a special need and that special needs can look very different helps set her disability in a context that she can understand. There are also huge benefits for T (little brother) to experience different toys and activities and do his own thing without feeling constrained. The Music therapy and P's response to relaxing with music has become an additional part of her life now. She feels completely at home at Skylarks, a safe place to be each week.





The Queen's Award
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