Compared to 2021, in 2022 we had...

94% more family services activities and events

61% more children using our health play services
Play is an essential building block for a happy, healthy and resilient childhood. As Protectors of Play for seriously ill children, Starlight wants play to be recognised as essential as any medicine, treatment or test.

Cathy Gilman
Chief Executive

This year, we have continued to explore new ways to ensure children’s right to play is protected and provided for whether in a healthcare setting or at home. We’ve trialled virtual reality, hosted our first Gaming Day and rolled out our services as part of a Covid vaccine project.

While 2022 has been a year of innovation, we’ve continued to build on our vast experience, doing what we know works well.

Our work is firmly rooted in insight and impact. From our hospital services to events and experiences, everything we do has to make a lasting difference to all the children and their families.

The impact of our work makes the experience of illness and treatment better for children in the here and now, and will also have long term positive affects for their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Our policy work has also gained momentum as we’ve forged a partnership with NHS England to increase awareness of the value of play and the role of play professionals, and improve the quality and reach of play services in the NHS.

Behind everything we do, your continued and generous support has quite simply transformed the lives of thousands of children when they are ill, in healthcare and recovery.

Thank you.
MOMENTS
JANUARY – JUNE 2022

JANUARY
We kicked off the year with a trip to Toy Fair, which inspired new toys for our sensory boxes.

FEBRUARY
We hosted our first Gaming Day! Starlight Days connect children with similar interests.

“...It’s a chance for the whole family to do something together, away from day-to-day pressures of living with special needs.”

MARCH
Alton Towers was a hit with our families as they braved the epic rollercoasters!

“Not once did my daughter feel disabled, she felt included, empowered and confident. I really can’t overstate it – this was the most amazing weekend for our family.”
For the roll out of the North East London vaccine project, we provided playful distraction for around 5,000 children.

I didn’t even notice the vaccine!

170 children who were asked to rate their experience out of 10 gave an average score of 9.4.

We took our dancing shoes to the iconic Pineapple Dance Studios! 10 families learnt choreography to Hamilton and Frozen.

My daughter’s number one physio priority is to exercise more, so this was a brilliant way to do that.

NHS England announced a joint taskforce with us, to improve and extend the reach of health play services in the NHS. See p11.
MOMENTS
JULY – DECEMBER 2022

JULY
Over 110 children took part in our Virtual Reality (VR) trial, the largest study of its kind in the UK. We found VR can positively impact children’s treatment experience.

"We’ve shown that play specialists can lead on research and get the most out of VR for the benefit of the children we treat at Leeds Children’s Hospital."

Dr Alex Paes
Consultant Paediatrician

AUGUST
We took over Warwick Castle for our summer party, hosting over 70 guests.

"My children all had fun, they were able to look around the castle, have a dance, make a t-shirt, have a go at juggling and watch the entertainment"

SEPTEMBER
We met Whittington Hospital’s play team to see our services in action and learn more about how we can support them.
We held our annual Starlight Health Play Awards, celebrating play professionals who empower children in hospital.

I feel really honoured and privileged that the work I’ve done is appreciated. I can’t make the children on the cancer ward better, but I can make their time in hospital better.

Claire Pickett
Starlight Health Play Specialist of the Year 2022

11 families went to Brickhouse Farm Cottages. The families all have children with chronic and multiple conditions and rarely get the opportunity to have a break. 100% of families* agreed that they made special memories.

See p8.

* 7 out of 11 families gave feedback

We released a special festive edition of our Play Well box. 212 boxes went to healthcare settings and children, bringing Christmas magic!

You provide items that really aid the wellbeing of the patients during their stay with us on the ward.

Play Team Leader
Stoke Mandeville Hospital
We recently got told that Charlie’s condition will limit his life, we could have five years, or it could be ten, but there’s no cure. It’s obviously really impacted us as a family, but we want to use the time we have to make as many memories as we can, despite all the doctors’ appointments and stress.

It’s important to use this time to have fun while Charlie physically can, because next year he could lose some abilities. Being invited on this family break to Brickhouse Farm Cottages could not have come at a better time. Charlie has absolutely loved it; his face keeps lighting up. We’ve been able to relax in a safe space that caters to his needs. We went to the hydrotherapy pool where we had fun splashing about, there’s a sensory room and we did a drumming workshop.

Seeing the families relax, socialise and enjoy quality time with their children at Brickhouse was so amazing. For Charlie’s family, in particular, the last few months had been so full of sadness, stress, and challenges. Facilitating time for them to be a family and focus on making memories with their boys really highlighted the importance of Starlight’s work.

As a play specialist, I know how limited these opportunities can be for families with a seriously unwell child, so it’s incredibly special to make such a difference.

Ellie
Starlight-funded play worker
Of the families* that gave feedback...

100%

- felt supported and less isolated
- felt their children could feel like their normal selves
- agreed that the trip was very accessible
- gave 5/5 for their overall experience

*7 out of 11 families
We are a small team making a big impact. Meet two of our experts talking about how their roles contribute to creating high quality services and extending the reach of our work.

**DR SANDRA GULYURTLU**

Head of Impact and Insight

Sandra holds a BSc in Psychology and Physiology, MSc in Childhood Studies, PhD in Social Policy and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She has worked extensively in the voluntary sector and academia, conducting research into rights, welfare, safeguarding and well-being to create better outcomes for children and young people.

Why is the work of your team important?

“We build the evidence base on the ‘why, what, how’. Why there is a need for what Starlight does. What makes our services important. How we can improve the lives of seriously ill children, their families and carers.

We take learning into practice and practice into learning. By capturing the opinions of the people we work with, we have a solid evidence base for reviewing existing services or developing new ones.

We want to hold ourselves to account and ensure we’re spending resources to achieve maximum impact for children.”

What is your team’s proudest achievement in 2022?

“We have almost completed a much-needed mapping exercise of the state of play in healthcare across the UK. Nothing like this has ever been done before for health play. It’s been a significant undertaking and we will finish the work in 2023.

It’s already informing us of huge gaps in resources and our understanding of play services across the NHS in all four nations. Being able to map where we’re needed most informs our service delivery, fundraising and policy work at a national and local level.”

Mapping exercise includes Freedom of Information data from...

- Health Boards in Scotland: 14
- Health & Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland: 5
- Health Boards in Wales: 3
- NHS Trusts in England: 219

*At the time of print, 92% of responses have been received
Why is it important to influence health service policy?

“The importance of children’s play in their healthcare isn’t widely enough recognised or supported, but evidence tells us it is vital.

Hospital can be a scary place for children. Playing helps to normalise their experience and relax. This has profound benefits for their mental health, which are often overlooked.

Health play professionals provide opportunities for children to play and feel less anxious about their treatment. They also use play to distract and comfort children during difficult procedures. However, they’re often considered less important than other children’s health professionals. Many settings have none. We want to change that.

Starlight co-chairs a taskforce with NHS England. What’s the overarching aim?

“The taskforce is driving systemic change in the role of play in children’s healthcare: national standards and guidance for the NHS and, ultimately more funding and a larger workforce for health play services. We want all children to enjoy their right to play when they are sick.
99% agreed that children’s play is important to their health and wellbeing, and should be provided for within the healthcare system*

89% believed that play is not given the priority it deserves within the NHS*

*Of 102 people who responded to our public survey
87% of healthcare settings* that disclosed their play budget, had no funding for play

£500

The majority of healthcare settings that did have funding for play* had a budget of under £500

*455 surveyed in Financial Year 21/22

*37 disclosed the value of their budget from the last two financial years

I’m a nurse in paediatric day surgery and one of the main purposes of my role is to make the children’s experience the best it can possibly be.

Coming into a strange hospital environment can make children feel disempowered, but play can put them at ease.

Most children know how to play, so I help them have ownership again and create a fun space with toys and games consoles provided by Starlight.

Play certainly makes my job easier too! If a child is happy, calm and co-operative, then procedures can go smoothly and quickly. If I can help make a child’s hospital experience a positive one, then I know I can go home having done a good job.

Chris Harrison, paediatric nurse

At our recent hospital visit, Chris was so welcoming and really helped to reassure Reece (and me too!). When we went down to theatre, Chris got a box of toys out for him to play with.

Reece was so calm and didn’t even think twice about the fact he was going in for surgery. Chris was one of the most enthusiastic people I’ve ever met, he was so caring and helped to make it a really quick and easy hospital trip.

Reece isn’t scared of hospitals at all now, in fact he had quite a nice time!

Leanne Williamson, mum to Reece
We estimate our health play services were used almost 2.4 million times.

- 616 healthcare settings reached
- 78% decrease in children feeling afraid
- 77% increase in children feeling happy
- 95% of health professionals* agreed our health play services helped children have a more positive experience in healthcare

*365 surveyed
Of families asked about our events...

92% agreed they created special memories and quality family time*
*Feedback from 195 families

87% felt supported and less isolated*
*Feedback from 193 families

86% felt like they had a break from illness and treatment*
*Feedback from 194 families