



# Our Kids Won't Wait

Building a more inclusive Scotland

“ The Yard is a very special place... completely designed to meet my child's individual needs, not just making adjustments for him to be there. ”



# Building Thriving Communities of Support

Welcome to The Yard's strategic plan. This plan sets out our goals for the next five years alongside the actions we will take towards achieving them, and the measures we will use to keep ourselves on track and accountable.

We have worked hard to make this a plan that will give families what they need and give all of our stakeholders – families, staff, volunteers, and partners – the confidence and a shared sense of pride in the life-changing work we do.

The Yard is a charity with one simple aim; to build thriving communities of support that enrich the lives of disabled children, young people and their families. Over the next five years, we want to reach as many families as possible; offering play, respite and family support from our adventure play centres in Edinburgh, Dundee and Fife, with an additional centre opening in Glasgow in 2025. Our approach is rooted in learning from lived experience and our team are skilled, patient, understanding, and invested in each and every child and family.







Families are  
at the heart  
of everything  
we do

Research shows that it costs three times as much to raise a disabled child<sup>1</sup> and we know that families with disabled children are at increased risk of poverty, isolation and inequality. Many of our families tell us that they often feel isolated and at sea when they learn their child is on a different developmental path. They often experience long waiting lists for diagnosis and support. Families have difficulties accessing suitable early year's provision and out of school care and childcare, as well as accessible play and leisure provision for their child. In addition to lacking access to specialist trained staff and mainstream facilities, families often experience judgement from others and have fewer opportunities to spend quality time as a family. All of this impacts the resilience and wellbeing of the whole family.

Families are at the heart of everything we do, so they are also at the heart of this strategy. At The Yard, families will find a warm welcome and a dynamic play space alongside a one-stop-shop for information and guidance to support whole-family resilience and wellbeing. We will continue building empowering communities where families support each other, learn from each other and walk alongside each other on a journey that can often be complex and challenging. We provide support from birth to adulthood and address some of the challenges families experience through the emotional and practical support we offer.

Across Scotland, The Yard is supporting a growing number of families, and as we begin this five-year journey, we already reach over 2600 disabled children and young people across Scotland. Our strategic ambition is informed and inspired by their stories and experiences, and we commit to continuing to offer innovative solutions that meet the needs of the increasing numbers of disabled children and families through our unique adventure play environments. Our plan for growth is ambitious, and our communities are impassioned – **Our Kids Won't Wait.**




Celine Sinclair, CEO



1 Counting the Costs 2021. Contact





All children have the right to engage in play and leisure activities.

Article 31, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## Our Story So Far

**All children have the right to play. It is essential for health, wellbeing and happiness. It is enshrined in law, but in reality, there are very few truly inclusive and accessible play spaces for disabled children in Scotland.**

It is almost four decades since The Yard threw open its big yellow doors and presented a small scale response to this challenge. Over the past ten years, the humble parent-led community initiative has grown up to become an effective, respected and resilient charity offering wrap around support for disabled children and their families. Our innovative Board, drawn from diverse professional backgrounds, has driven a fourfold increase in income and service and laid down plans

for ambitious growth in the depth and breadth of our support over the decade to come.

The drive to grow and increase our reach is inspired and directly informed by the lived experience of families with disabled children.

On average, eight new children come to our service every week, and we witness increasingly complex family need as well as more complex behaviour from children and young people, particularly post-pandemic. The Yard's can-do responsive culture makes us ideally placed to help local authorities tackle challenges in complex care, and our loyal and experienced team offers trusted support and solutions for families.

The Yard is one-of-a-kind. The Scottish Government recognises our family support service as a model of excellence, and it's £2 million pound investment in 2023 underpins our growth. Our Dundee centre, which opened in 2015, will be fully renovated next year, and in 2025, we will open our first centre in Glasgow for families in the West of Scotland.

Partnerships are also key to growth. Over the past year, we have worked closely with partners from the statutory and third sector to launch a multi agency neurodiversity and disability hub. The Edinburgh Disability and Neurodiversity Hub (EDAN) will support children

and families regardless of diagnosis and offer emotional and practical support from birth to adulthood across our joined-up services.

So much has happened since The Yard began, and we owe so much to the dedication and vision of so many people over the years, but what has never changed is our commitment to bringing joy and adventure to lives of disabled children, young people and their families.

**It is time to write the next chapter of our story...**

**“We can come and relax for an hour or so which is more respite than we get with other services.”**



# Our Strategic Approach 2024-29

## Our Purpose

To build thriving communities of support for disabled children, young people and their families, creating a happier life for all of the family.

## Strategic Objectives

Over the next three years, The Yard will experience accelerated growth, followed by two years of consolidated growth. Our focus will be on four central priorities:



### Our Growth

Extend our reach whilst always providing a trusted, high-quality personalised service to our children and families.



### Our People

Attract and retain people who are inspired by our purpose and values and provide opportunities for learning and development to ensure we are an employer of choice.



### Our Influence and Value

Provide value and positively influence our families, communities, funders and other supporters to achieve positive outcomes for children with disabilities.



### Our Sustainability

Deliver a sustainable funding model that provides value for money and business growth to become a national charity.

The Yard is a highly effective, low-cost model of excellence that is successful because everything we do is rooted in our culture and values.



# Our Culture

We are passionate about

Inspiring confidence  
and capability

We are brilliant at

Creating fun  
and friendship  
and a place to  
play and belong





# Our Values

## **Adventurous and inspiring**

Taking creative approaches that allow risk taking and new experiences.

## **Deeply respectful and kind**

Knowledge and lived experience bringing next level understanding and active acceptance.

## **Connection and community**

Being somewhere that feels like your own, where you can connect with people and spaces.





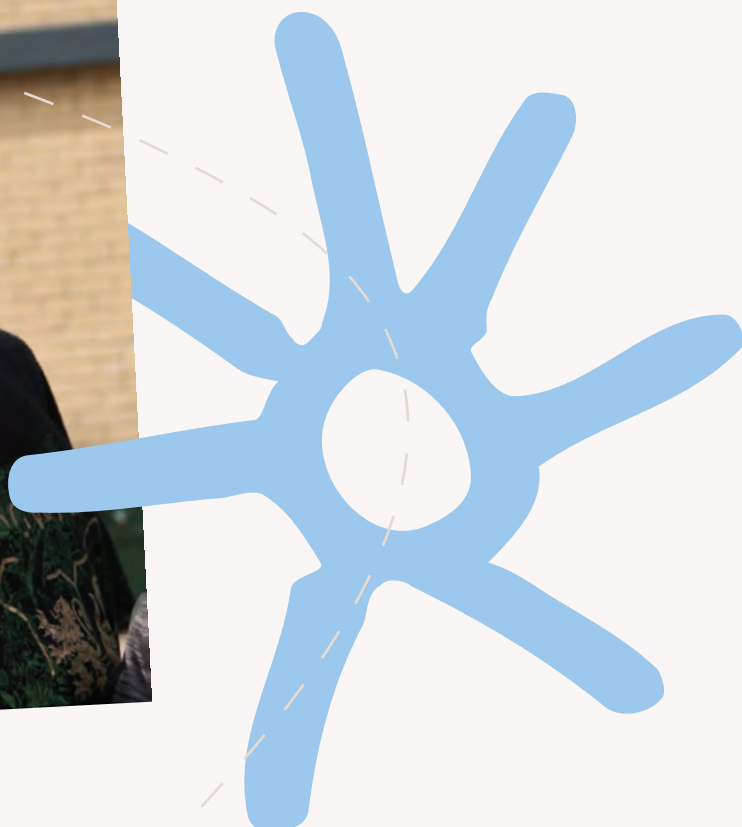
# Jack's Story

Ten-year-old Jack, diagnosed with autism at five and ADHD this year, thrives on routine but finds new experiences overwhelming. Mum, Gillian explains that his happy shouts and ways of expressing himself are sometimes misunderstood, drawing unwanted stares.

The Yard provides a space for the whole family to be themselves. "The moment we walk in, a staff member greets us by name and with a warm smile. I can finally relax," says Gillian.

Jack attends the Fun & Friendship group every other Tuesday, a highlight of his week. He looks forward to catching up with friends and enjoying activities he loves. "Jack can stim and scream as much as he wants, and no one bats an eyelid."

“ The last five years, there have been some really happy times, but also some devastating times in my family's life. My Yard family have hugged me, been a listening ear, and carried me through until I regained my strength. ”







# The Yard Model

“The Yard has brought happiness back into my family. Words can’t describe how nice it is to go somewhere and to not have anyone stare at you or your child. It gives me a real sense of achievement when I visit the Yard, as I feel my child’s needs have been met.”

**The key to delivering support that works for our children and families is firmly rooted in our culture and values. We focus on Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and recognise that every child and family has their own story.**

We create an environment that allows families to build relationships of trust with our team, as well as with each other. We believe that it is the quality of relationships that families experience at The Yard that enable them to be effectively included, build their confidence and find a sense of belonging.

Many of our families will come to us when their children are very young and will remain with us until adulthood. This helps build real confidence and trust and gives our team the opportunity to really understand both the child and family, whose needs will change in time. Our approach also ensures families do not experience difficult transitions between services and people that lead to them repeating their story time and time again. Our welcoming culture is pivotal to the way in which families build confidence and openness with our team, which allows us to better equip them for the journey.

We currently offer early years sessions, a play service for specialist and mainstream schools, holiday provision for children with medically complex needs, respite, friendship clubs, training and family support.

The Yard model removes any barriers to accessing services and invests in a truly inclusive culture. Families come to us through a number of routes. The majority of the children are referred by schools, health visitors, GPs or social work, and others will learn about us from friends and family and simply self-refer. A child does not need to have any formal diagnosis to benefit from our support, and no assessment is needed. This means that families don't have to wait for a service, they come to us when they recognise they need support. They can then begin to build their own skills, resilience, and a network that can help them focus on raising their child and family.

Our team are drawn from all walks of life as the families who benefit from our support come from a

diverse demographic. Through actively recruiting on attitude and aptitude, as well as skills, we continue to build an experienced team that can connect with differing family need.

Our values are woven through our daily practice and underpin the way our staff and volunteers interact with each other and our families. They determine our beliefs and our actions. This creates a wonderful warmth in our shared play spaces and a high degree of team engagement and self-determination. Our practice is reflective and allows us to build an organisation that is continually learning. This reflective approach is pivotal to our strategic plans for growth and we want, in the longer term, to effectively capture and share the practice that families have told us they cherish. The benefits of our model are not only economic, but social, too. Community-based support serves to empower people, allowing them to build a better, brighter future for themselves and their families.





# Our Operating Context



**There are increasing political, economic and social challenges and risks ahead that directly impact our children and families and will continue to affect what the Yard can provide.**

The funding climate across all income streams has been more challenging since the pandemic than at any other time. The Yard will continue to be proactive in the face of this, and wider economic challenges affecting statutory children and health services as well as our own service. We recognise the need to increase our unrestricted income and reduce our reliance upon grant funding. This will require innovation, collaboration and robust forward planning. Building on the success of The Yard's 'Our Kids Won't Wait' campaign, we have created an income generation strategy to support and sustain our plans.

The demand and needs for our services continue to increase significantly; there are currently 250,000 children living in poverty in Scotland, and schools are faced with the challenge of up to 25% of pupils now having Additional Support Needs (ASN). These growing numbers are compounded by the increasing pressures, trauma, exhaustion and complexities for families. This impacts directly on the extent and range of support they need, including mental health support. Waiting times for essential services such as those provided by Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) continue to increase post-pandemic. It has never been more essential to focus on what

**"The Yard is a place with no judgement and you can really relax and feel part of a community. They walk the walk."**

we do best and ensure we create the right partnerships and relationships, collaborating effectively to make a broader contribution to the challenges that children and families face.

The Yard has a critical role over the life of this plan to support and complement statutory service provision, address gaps in provision, reduce overall costs and upskill and train key statutory service providers. Our agility and speed will help us achieve this, and we will continue to support and seek funding that addresses key Scottish Government priorities, including family support, early years and childcare provision.

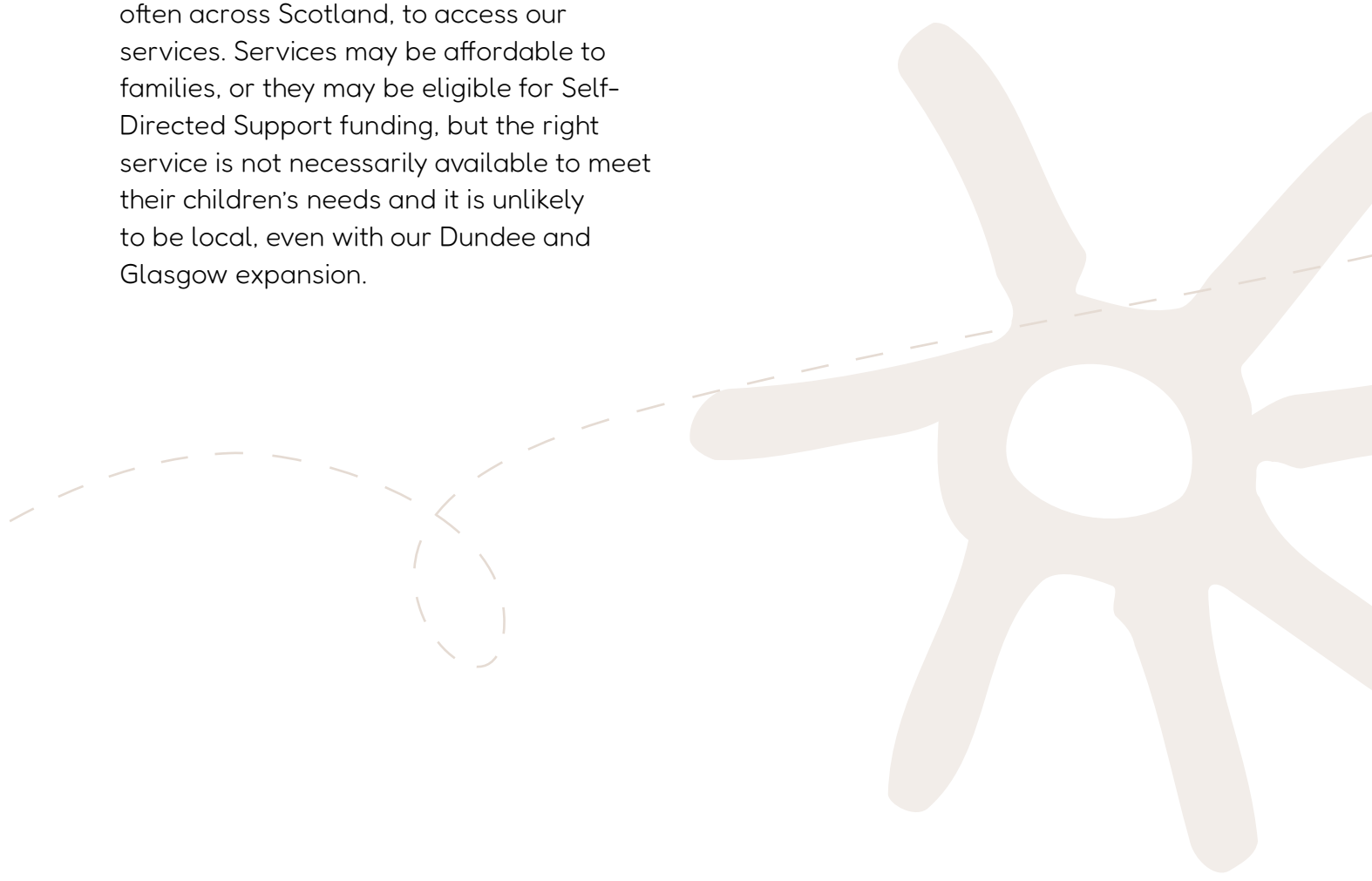


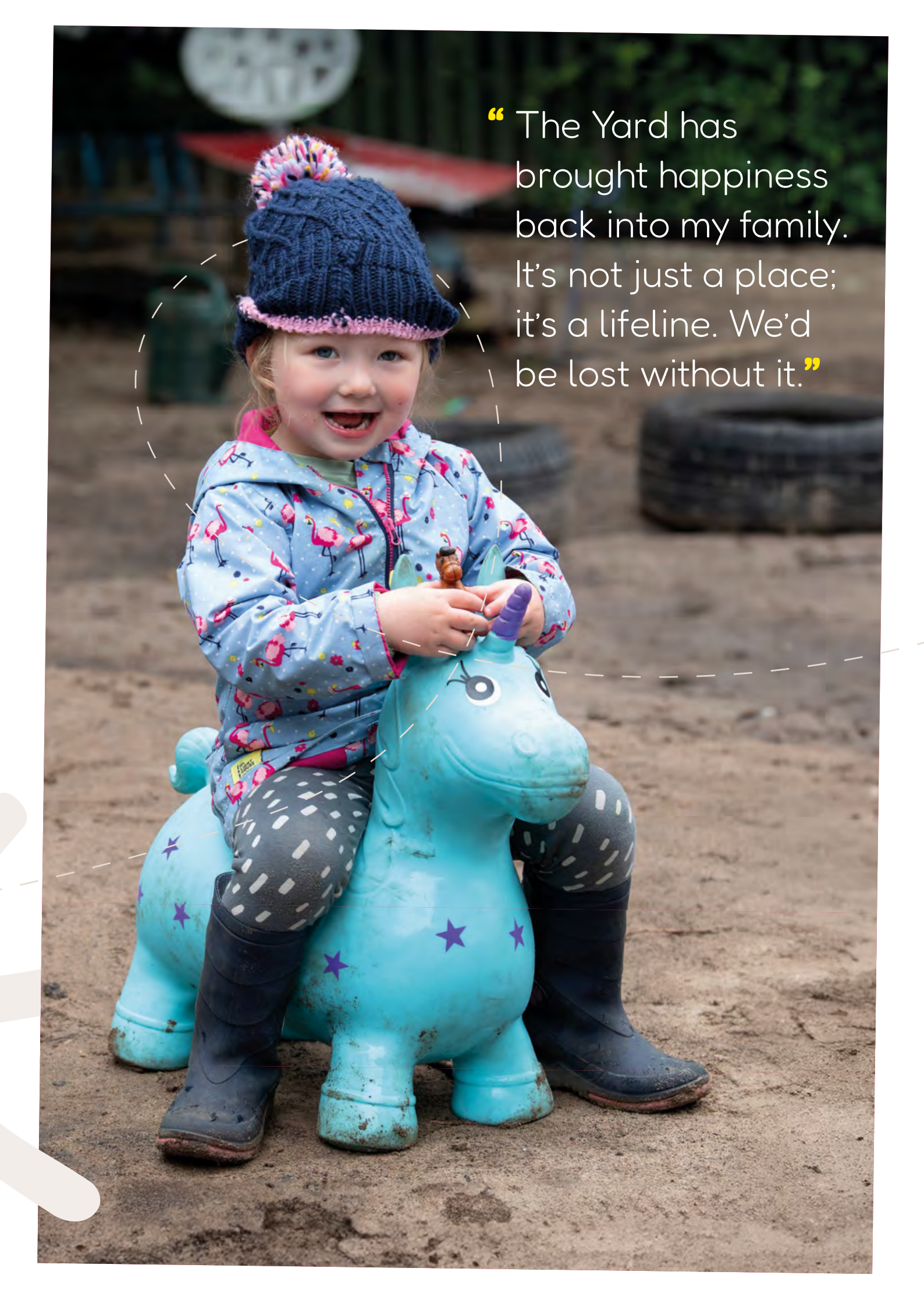
Ongoing cross-party political support for our plan is essential, and we will continue to build relationships with policy makers to ensure our families experiences inform national decision-making. We will influence the Programme for Government, particularly working towards the 2026 Holyrood election, as we grow and develop our strength and position as a national charity.

Play is central to our service, and we will continue to build awareness in the communities, services, and schools in which our families live, enabling a sense of belonging for disabled children and families within a wider social context. This approach supports the current Scottish Government policy of 20-minute neighbourhoods, with an emphasis on planning and service provision that is accessible within localities. One of our key challenges is the limited current service provision, childcare and holiday support for disabled children and their families means that families require transport, often across Scotland, to access our services. Services may be affordable to families, or they may be eligible for Self-Directed Support funding, but the right service is not necessarily available to meet their children's needs and it is unlikely to be local, even with our Dundee and Glasgow expansion.

The Yard is acutely aware of the importance of legislative and policy frameworks relating to equality to help children achieve their potential, including those with a disability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), and keeping The Promise are central to our contribution. The UNCRC Child Rights Article 31 specifically recognises the right to access leisure and play.

The Yard recognises the challenges of changes in the world of work and employee expectations in terms of workplace culture, wellbeing and flexibility. Our salary and benefits package will remain competitive and attractive to retain and secure high quality people who share our values. We will focus on learning, skills development and retaining top talent to future proof our exceptional quality of service.





“The Yard has brought happiness back into my family. It's not just a place; it's a lifeline. We'd be lost without it.”



# Our Investment Plans

The Yard's year-on-year growth has led us to reach an annual turnover of over £2.5m. Our focus will be on a new three-year financial planning and income generation cycle and longer-term funding streams that are staggered to ensure our sustainability. This is essential as we grow and need to maximise income from more diverse and larger funding opportunities. The key to achieving this will be collaboration with partners who share our ambitions, values and energy to deliver more for disabled children and families. We intend to be increasingly ambitious in our approach, including building new partnerships and income-generation opportunities in the West of Scotland as we open The Yard Glasgow.

Over the past ten years, we've seen remarkable growth, increasing our income fourfold.

"It is an invaluable service and just as important for the siblings and family as the child with ASN."

## Our key areas for investment, financial growth and fundraising over the next three years are:

- ★ Enhanced play and family support centres and increased services in Dundee.
- ★ Launch of new services and The Yard in Glasgow.
- ★ Launch of the Edinburgh Disability and Neurodiversity Hub (EDAN Hub) at The Yard in Edinburgh.
- ★ Broader social impact through the launch of our new digital training partnership.
- ★ Fresh independent evaluation of our services, costs and impacts.

As we grow, our business and workforce planning will develop to meet the needs of the Yard, minimising overhead costs. We will introduce efficiencies, including making more use of digital technology, data and evidence of impact. We will invest in our infrastructure and maintain a solid foundation for growth in terms of quality and governance.

Our financial growth will be underpinned by our new 2024-29 Income Generation Strategy and our Strategic Comms Plan.



# James's Story

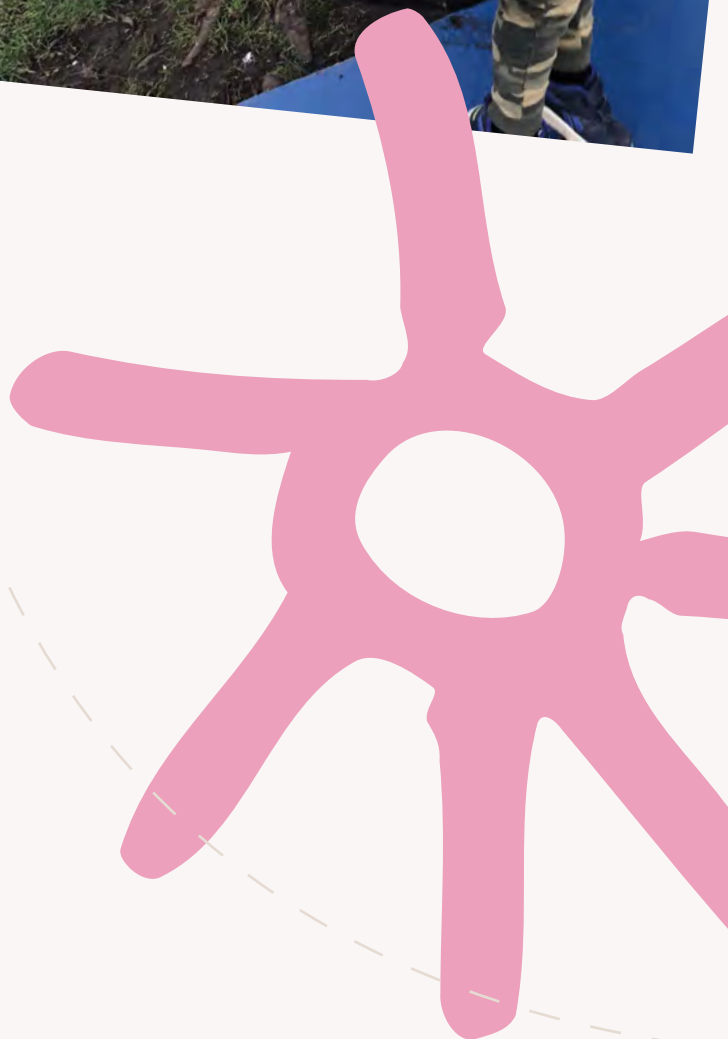
Nine-year-old James loves to explore, but navigating the world with autism can be challenging. Finding truly inclusive activities and spaces for James was difficult for his parents, Caroline and Peter.

"Going out wasn't always easy," Caroline explains. "We struggled to find places where James could just be himself and play freely, without judgement."

Discovering The Yard Dundee was a turning point for the family. James first attended a session with his school, and they decided to join as a family. Now, James thrives in the expansive outdoor space, racing around and making lots of noise. "It's fantastic," Caroline shares, "to see a place where James can just be himself, and no one cares a bit."

The Yard provides comfort and support for Caroline and Peter as well. "We can relax so much more at The Yard," Caroline explains. "Knowing there are services like The Yard to support us has given me a much more positive outlook on the future," she adds. "It's friendly, the kids have a blast, and it's honestly just a fantastic place to be."

**“ I feel more positive now than I've ever done knowing that there is services like The Yard to help us out. ”**





# Our Strategic Priorities 2024-29

1. Our Growth

2. Our People

3. Our Influence and Value

4. Our Sustainability



# Our Growth

We will extend our reach whilst always providing a trusted, high-quality personalised service to our children and families. We aim to meet the needs of more disabled children and their families and focus on early intervention to prevent crisis.

## Over the next 5 years we will:

- ★ Increase the scale of our service by improving our premises in Dundee to deliver a full service.
- ★ Invest in creating a play and family support centre in Glasgow, rolling out a phased delivery of our full service.
- ★ Develop, grow and sustain our exemplar model of support across Scotland through service design built on the lived experience of our families and successful partnerships.
- ★ Build our core family support in line with The Promise, supporting more kinship carers and care experienced children and young people.

## We will measure our success by:

- ★ Securing premises and core services in Glasgow.
- ★ Care Inspectorate registration in Dundee and Glasgow.
- ★ Partnerships delivering on the ground services.
- ★ Increase in funding for family support.







# Our People

We will attract and retain people who are inspired by our purpose and values and provide opportunities for learning and development to ensure we are an employer of choice.

We aim to sustain the right culture and employer offer to attract and retain the best people to support our children and families.

## Over the next 5 years we will:

- ★ Plan and address our workforce requirements during key phases as we grow, including upskilling and capacity.
- ★ Attract, recruit and retain people with specialist skills, knowledge and experience to ensure we continue to deliver high-quality services.
- ★ Ensure our people feel valued, respected and engaged as part of one big motivated team.
- ★ Value and encourage more opportunities for training and development – including volunteering and structured student placements, which grow and nurture a learning culture.

## We will measure our success by:

- ★ Delivering and embedding our culture, values and objectives through a programme that engages and empowers our team to make the most of their skills, talents and innovative thinking.
- ★ Retaining quality feedback on our team as we grow; currently over 90% of our families describe our team as very good or excellent.
- ★ Increasing our net promoter score, which recommends The Yard as a place to work and adding health and wellbeing to employee survey results.
- ★ Increasing student placements, apprenticeship placements, and volunteers through relevant awards, accreditation and national recognition.

# Our Influence and Value

We will provide value and positively influence our families, communities, funders and other supporters to collectively achieve positive outcomes for children with disabilities.

We aim to use our influence and impact at a national level to develop a more sustainable funding model, increase access to skills and knowledge on disability support and inclusive play, and champion inclusion to achieve the best outcomes for disabled children and their families.

## Over the next 5 years we will:

- ★ Develop and implement a specialist digital training and skills model based on our own unique skills and experience to create more effective inclusion. This will upskill our team, parents and partners in working with disabled children, young people and their families across Scotland.
- ★ Lead our new Edinburgh Disability and Neurodiversity Hub Collaborative between 2024-2027, increasing our knowledge and impact.
- ★ Increase the number of partnerships, and inspire partners to obtain more funding, enhance support, and create new opportunities for disabled children and their families.
- ★ Build on the success of the 2023 'Our Kids Won't Wait' campaign; promoting our services, value and impact through our new communications strategy and service prospectus.

## We will measure our success by:

- ★ Securing a long-term increase in core revenue funding from the Scottish Government and developing The Yard's service delivery model of community play and family support for children and young people with ASN as a recognised national model.
- ★ Increasing in-sector skills and income generation as the result of our training and skills package being offered to external partners.
- ★ Ensuring accessible early years, childcare and wrap-around support for disabled children is a government priority.
- ★ Lobbying so that families will no longer need a diagnosis in our local authority areas to access services with other providers.



# Our Sustainability

We will deliver a sustainable funding model that provides value for money and grows our business model as a national charity.

We will build firm foundations to support our further growth, working with funders, donors, partners and our team members to ensure The Yard attracts and maximises long-term funding and robust financial viability to deliver its ambitions.

## Over the next 5 years we will:

- ★ Deliver a family support model which is based on lived experience, is replicable and provides value for money.
- ★ Deliver a planned, sustainable financial model that supports disabled children, young people and their families from birth to adulthood, including through key transitions in their lives.
- ★ Increase our grant funding and earned income as a recognised partner for NHS boards and local authorities in our areas of operation, and decreasing our dependency on fundraised income.
- ★ Ensure strong governance, efficiency of our operations and high standards of service quality supported by an evaluation framework that clearly evidences our impact on outcomes for disabled children, young people and their families.

## We will measure our success by:

- ★ Care Inspectorate ratings – standard of excellent.
- ★ External accreditation e.g. European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).
- ★ Our Annual Report and Impact statement.
- ★ Diversifying our income streams to be here for families in the long term.







“It’s taken me 9 years to find a place where our son can relax and enjoy a club. We are forever grateful.”



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[www.theyardscotland.org.uk](http://www.theyardscotland.org.uk)

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