



Sparkle Impact Report 2023

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Charity number: 1093690

Bethan Collins MSc
Sparkle Research
and Development
Officer



sparkle
helpu plant arbennig i ddisgleirio
helping special children shine

Executive Summary

Sparkle supports children and young people with disabilities, and their families, living in Gwent.

In 2023:

Over **2,000** individuals received information and support from Sparkle

175 children and young people accessed weekly specialist leisure activities

MediCinema screenings, family swim sessions and parent-toddler stay-and-play sessions were regularly attended



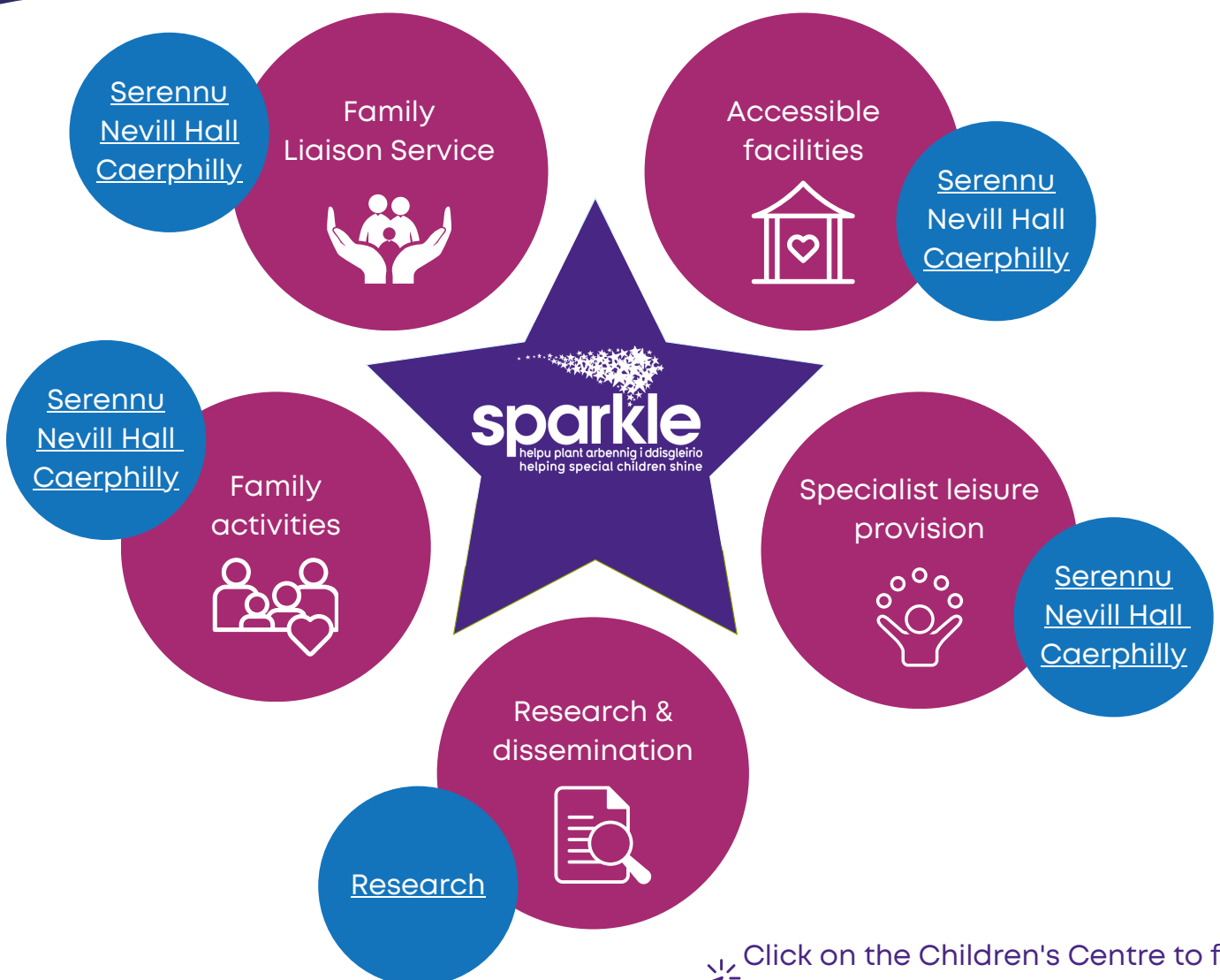
Over **1,500** people attended 10 fun events tailored to the needs of children with disabilities and their families

Sparkle's work was shared in two academic journals and at three national conferences



Introduction

Sparkle (South Wales) directly supports children and young people with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties, and their families, across Gwent. Sparkle is the charity partner of Serennu, Nevill Hall and Caerphilly Children's Centres; services are provided from the centres and community venues within the catchment areas, which cover Newport, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Monmouthshire. The guiding principle for Sparkle is to ensure that children and young people with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties, and their families, are fully supported and able to participate in valued childhood experiences, with access to the same range of opportunities, life experiences, activities and community services as any other child and their family.



 Click on the Children's Centre to find out what is available in each area.

Family Liaison Service

The Family Liaison Service provides holistic support for families with a child with, or undergoing, a diagnosis of a disability or developmental difficulty. Family Liaison Officers act as a first point of contact for families, and provide informal emotional support, practical support, resources, signposting, peer support via groups and workshops, and liaison between families and health, social care and education services and professionals. Sparkle employs Family Liaison Officers based at Serennu and Nevill Hall Children's Centres; a Family Liaison Officer employed by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board is based at Caerphilly Children's Centre.

Family Liaison Officers send a weekly information bulletin and monthly newsletter, sharing information on the children's centres and services available to children with disabilities and their families in the local area. By the end of 2023, 2,450 parents/carers and professionals working with children with disabilities were receiving this information from the service. Monthly coffee mornings are offered in each children's centre catchment area, where parents and carers can access peer support and information. In 2023, on average 4 families attended each coffee morning every month.

If it wasn't for your support, I don't think I could have got through, for the first time I felt I was talking to someone who just got it.

Thank you for sitting with me today. It really means so much to me that you took the time to explain the process and just be with me whilst I was feeling very emotional and overwhelmed. Your kindness towards me reassured and helped me.



The service works closely with health services, and in 2023, 1,512 referrals to the Family Liaison Service were received from health professionals and the Integrated Service for Children with Additional Needs and Single Point of Access for Children's Emotional Neurodevelopment referral pathways. On average, 115 contacts with parents/carers and professionals were made every month.

You have been so helpful and really informative. Thank you for showing me there's a light at the end of the tunnel. This service is amazing, I feel so positive after talking to you.

More information about the Family Liaison Service can be found on the website: <https://www.sparkleappeal.org/support-services> 



Donate 

Did you know?

Sparkle must raise over £700,000 a year to fund our vital services. We are a registered charity and receive no statutory funding - we are only able to provide this much-needed support thanks to donations from the public and local companies and grants we apply for, such as from trusts and foundations.

Leisure Services

Sparkle delivers specialist leisure activities tailored to meet the complex needs of the children and young people the charity supports, providing them with a range of valuable childhood experiences that they would not otherwise be able to access. Mainstream leisure activities and clubs are often not equipped to support those with complex disabilities; many of the children and young people Sparkle supports require 1:1 or even 2:1 support, are non-verbal or have significant communication difficulties, experience challenging behaviour, and/or have medical conditions which require constant monitoring, medication and specialist equipment. The aim of Sparkle leisure clubs is to help children and young people develop important skills and increase their confidence, whilst also being fun and a safe space to interact with their peers.

In 2023, 10 Play Clubs for children aged 5-11 years and 4 Youth Clubs for young people aged 12-17 were offered every week during term time across Sparkle sites in Gwent. At Serennu Children's Centre, Afterschool Club, Skills Club and Technology Club were also offered, as well as a fortnightly club for children across Gwent with a Continuing Care package with the health board. Independent Living Skills sessions were offered for young people aged 12-17, and enrichment activities (including sport, music and dance, and animal experiences) provided by external organisations were delivered across all clubs.



Leisure clubs, which are accessed by children and young people independently of their parents/carers, were attended by 175 children and young people a week. Over 50% of these children and young people required 1:1 or 2:1 support from specially trained Leisure Support Workers to safely and positively engage in activities.

Leisure Staff Training

Sparkle Supervisors and Leisure Support Workers complete the following training courses during their employment (relevant to role):

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| ★ Team Teach | Safer Manual Handling of Children | ★ |
| ★ Sign-along | Epilepsy Training | ★ |
| ★ Paediatric First Aid | Administration of Medication | ★ |
| ★ Rebound Training | Bouldering Training | ★ |
| ★ Food Safety | Specialist Feeding | ★ |
| ★ Aquatic Helper Training | Pool Water Training | ★ |

We found that within 1 year of joining a Sparkle club:



9 out of **10** families found their child to be happier



9 out of **10** children made friends or played with others



8 out of **10** children tried new things



9 out of **10** parents/carers also experienced benefits



7 out of **10** families felt their home lives improved



Sparkle also delivered weekly swimming lessons during 2023. Lessons were led by CB Training and took place in the hydrotherapy pools at Serennu Children's Centre and Crownbridge School. Sparkle Aquatic Helpers provided 1:1 support in the pool to ensure children with disabilities could safely access and engage in the lessons. Lessons were accessed by 84 children and young people a week across the two sites; in November 2023, those accessing at Serennu Children's Centre completed swim assessments and were awarded badges. Sparkle lessons follow the Rockhopper Series* for learners with disabilities, as well as Swim Wales Learn to Swim** stages.

Rockhopper 1 – 4 badges

Rockhopper 2 – 2 badges

Rockhopper 3 – 4 badges

Rockhopper 4 – 10 badges

Rockhopper 5 – 10 badges

Rockhopper 6 – 6 badges

Learn to Swim stage 1 – 10 badges

Learn to Swim stage 2 – 3 badges

Learn to Swim stage 3 – 6 badges

Learn to Swim stage 4 – 4 badges



<https://www.sta.co.uk/international-learn-to-swim-programme/additional-programmes/rockhopper-series/> 

<https://www.swimwales.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Wave-Outcome-Posters-2020-1.pdf> 

Family Activities

As well as independently accessed leisure activities, Sparkle offers family activities for children with disabilities and their parents, siblings, grandparents and other family members.

Serennu Children's Centre benefits from a specially designed MediCinema on site. Weekly cinema screenings are accessible from the MediCinema for all Sparkle families in Gwent, funded jointly by MediCinema and Sparkle. In 2023, 148 screenings were offered, with on average 29 people attending each one. Cinema screenings are free for families; however, families are encouraged to donate to Sparkle if possible, to help the charity fund the screenings.

I love that MediCinema has given back my family the enjoyment of going to the cinema, without fear of my child causing a disturbance. I get to relax and enjoy the film too – priceless!



Family Swim sessions are also offered in the hydrotherapy pool at Serennu Children's Centre; 92 sessions were offered in 2023, with 12 people accessing an average session.

Little Stars is a stay-and-play provision for parents/carers with a 0–4-year-old with, or undergoing a diagnosis of, a disability, where parents/carers can spend quality time with their child, meet other parents/carers with similar aged children, and children can develop their play and social skills with their peers. Little Stars is offered weekly during term time at Serennu Children's Centre and Caerphilly Children's Centre – on average, 6 families attend sessions at Serennu and 3 families attend sessions at Caerphilly.



Little Stars has helped me so much; it's giving us the play setting I was finding difficult to find in the community.

More information about the leisure and family activities available can be found on the website:

- ➡✳ <https://www.sparkleappeal.org/serennu/serennu-activities>
- ➡✳ <https://www.sparkleappeal.org/nevill-hall/nevill-hall-activities>
- ➡✳ <https://www.sparkleappeal.org/caerphilly/caerphilly-activities>

My son would like me to tell your team that last night he attended your MediCinema and he had the best night ever. He said he felt like a movie star, your staff made him feel amazing and he could relax and be himself while enjoying the film and it was the first time he had stayed for an entire film so thank you all for the amazing work you do.

I just wanted to say how much Little Stars means to my child and myself.

It's something that we both look forward to and really enjoy every week. My child has thrived so much since going there. I've never seen my child happier anywhere else.

Family Events

Sparkle runs specially tailored family events throughout the year, again providing opportunities for families with children with disabilities that any other family can access, such as summer fun days and Christmas grottos.

The following events were offered in 2023:

Family Events	Number of attendees
April Fun Day – South Gwent	283
April Fun Day – West Gwent	84
May Fun Day – North Gwent	122
Summer Fun Day – South Gwent	229
Halloween Disco – South Gwent	233
Halloween Soft Play – North Gwent	105
Halloween Soft Play – West Gwent	65
Christmas Grotto – South Gwent	247
Christmas Grotto – North Gwent	68
Christmas Grotto – West Gwent	67

(South Gwent is Serennu Children’s Centre’s catchment area and includes Newport, South Torfaen and South Monmouthshire; North Gwent is Nevill Hall Children’s Centre’s catchment area and includes North Monmouthshire, North Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent; West Gwent is Caerphilly Children’s Centre’s catchment area and includes Caerphilly)



It's great to be with others that understand your child's needs and don't judge you.

Thank you so much for putting on this event. My child absolutely loved it and it was a chance to chat to other families for me. The staff and your helpers were very polite and helpful. Without the events and clubs that Sparkle do, we would be at a loss in what we can do. Sparkle are amazing in providing these inclusive events for all disabled children and fully understand what our children need and also us parents.



Residential

Sparkle was able to offer the opportunity for 22 young people, aged 12+, to experience a one-night residential experience, with two trips taking place during August 2023. This was made possible thanks to funding from O2E. Out of the 22, 13 had never been on a Sparkle residential trip before, and five had never stayed overnight with non-family members.



Case Study A

Young person A, 15, has a diagnosis of Down Syndrome. This was their first residential experience with Sparkle, and they found the pre-trip meeting helpful. They enjoyed all of the activities, and really challenged themselves when completing the climbing platform. They persevered with the climb, and managed to reach the top of the platform! Once they completed the activity they burst out crying, overwhelmed by their achievements and said how proud they were! Young person A's parents said that they looked like they were having a great time in the photos, and that they were so grateful that that their young person had this opportunity.

Case Study B

Young person B is aged 12 and is a wheelchair user with complicated medical problems. Due to their personal care needs and complex medication, this young person received 2:1 support on the trip. Young person B is non-verbal, however they seemed to thoroughly enjoy the residential experience and showed signs of happiness when engaging with staff and their peers - laughing and giggling. They also liked watching the other young people, clapping with staff to cheer them on. The family reported they are so grateful to the staff for taking such good care of Young person B, and for the opportunity for him to take part in activities he wouldn't usually be able to do.



Case Study C

Young person C, 16, has a diagnosis of Autism. This was their first residential experience with Sparkle, and they were particularly anxious as they had not felt confident enough to attend their school residential trip, worrying they would not be able to complete the activities which were completely new to them. Throughout the trip, Young person C showed courage and determination to come out of their comfort zone and try new activities. There were times when they wanted to give up, but after a quick pep talk and encouragement from staff, they were motivated to continue and push themselves further. After the activities, Young person C reported that they were so pleased with themselves, and never thought they would be able to conquer their fears to do the activities. Mum reported that Young person C was so nervous before the trip, but from the photos she could tell they were having a fantastic time, and thanked the team for all their support.



Case Study D

Young person D is aged 16 and has a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. Not only was this Young person D's first residential experience with Sparkle, it was the first time they had spent a night away without family members. Young person D really enjoyed the trip, and engaged well with staff and their peers. On the first day of activities it was clear to see that they were up for taking on the challenges, and after showing their skills in archery, moved on to tackling the climb to the platform. This was a huge challenge for them to physically undertake, however, their determination meant they persevered all the way to the top! Their pride was evident and they enjoyed celebrating their achievement with the group. Parents reported that they were thrilled Young person D took part in the activities and they could tell how proud they were of their accomplishment. They thanked Sparkle for giving them the opportunity and mentioned they were so relieved that they were enjoying themselves, and had decided to go along.

Research

Sparkle's research and evaluation work is essential to the charity's strategic goals. Research findings support the development of Sparkle services, ensuring they are meeting the needs of children and families, helping to secure funding for services, and are disseminated to other providers to influence service provision for children with disabilities across the UK. Two research papers by Sparkle were published in academic journals in 2023:

★ **What can a Family Liaison Service offer families of children with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties?**

Published in Tizard Learning Disability Review, June 2023

<https://doi.org/10.1108/TLDR-11-2022-0024> ✨

★ **Care coordination for children with a disability or developmental difficulty: Empowers families and reduces the burden on staff supporting them.**

Published in Child: Care, Health and Development, August 2023

<https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.13158> ✨

Video abstract: <https://youtu.be/1SrXInd035c?feature=shared> ✨

Sparkle also presented very well received presentations at three national paediatric and psychology conferences in 2023, thanks to funding from The Waterloo Foundation:

★ **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Annual Conference Glasgow, 23rd May 2023**

Poster presentation: Specialist Leisure Provision for Improved Quality of Life among Children with Complex Disabilities (abstract published in Archives of Disease in Childhood -

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2023-rcpch.60>) ✨

Poster presentation: Holistic Support for Families with Children with Disabilities from Charity Services Co-Located with Health and Social Care (abstract published in Archives of Disease in Childhood - <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2023-rcpch.84>) ✨



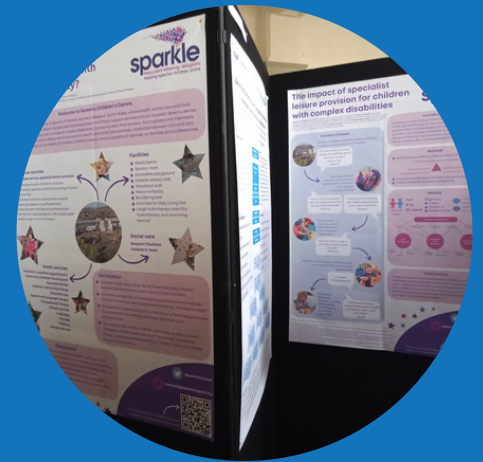
★ British Psychological Society Health Psychology Conference Sheffield, 14th June 2023

Oral presentation: The impact of holistic support for families with children with complex disabilities on family wellbeing.
Oral presentation: How to include the views of children with complex disabilities in evaluations of specialist leisure provision: building a picture of quality of life.



★ British Academy of Childhood Disability Annual Scientific Meeting Sheffield, 22nd June 2023

Poster presentation: The impact of specialist leisure provision for children with complex disabilities.
Poster presentation: What is a truly holistic centre for children with complex disability?



Sparkle's previous research reports and links to published papers can be found on the website:

<https://www.sparkleappeal.org/research/sparkle-reports> ✨

Conclusion

Sparkle continued to provide enhanced support services for children with complex disabilities in 2023. The charity experienced higher-than-ever demand for services, however spaces in weekly leisure clubs and swimming lessons are limited by financial constraints, physical space and availability of appropriately trained staff. Sparkle ensured as many families as possible were supported via family activities, events and the Family Liaison Service, as well as prioritising the children on waiting lists when allocating spaces in holiday activities. Sparkle continues to strive towards reaching the charity's strategic goals, and works closely with partner organisations and the local community to achieve this, despite a challenging financial environment.