

Dreamflight Impact Assessment **UK activity trip, 21-25 March 2024**

Need

Many children and young people with a serious illness or disability do not have the physical ability or financial means to go on a holiday independent of their family. Some other common issues and needs of our nominated children are:

- 1) Loss or lack of independence – many young people with a serious illness or disability need a lot of physical support to be able to undertake everyday tasks, often relying on their parents, family and medical professional.
- 2) Some children are not able to or are not allowed to undertake tasks or activities on their own. This may diminish their self-confidence, self-esteem and overall wellbeing.
- 3) Children and their families may become socially isolated as much of their time may be spent in hospitals and away from school. There is little opportunity to form friendships and enjoy social interactions.
- 4) All of the above can lead to children and young people becoming insular and protected. Their life experiences and outlook can be limited, making them vulnerable.

What we did

Since 1987 Dreamflight has organised an annual 10-day holiday to Orlando for children with a serious illness or disability, chartering a British Airways aircraft and taking up to 200 children on each trip. In recent years Dreamflight has diversified and also organised a shorter UK activity trip each Spring, aiming to support children with more complex needs, or for whom travel to the US is not possible.

Between 21-25 March 2024 we took almost 20 children on a 4-night all inclusive, fully accessible activity holiday to the Calvert Trust in the Lake District. The children came from across the UK, including from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to Manchester, before we all travelled by coach to the Lake District. All of the children had complex medical and physical needs and were supported by volunteers, including a number of medical volunteers (doctors, nurses and physiotherapists) as well as the Calvert Trust's own specialist team.

Despite their significant needs, all the children were able to take part in a range of indoor and outdoor activities including accessible cycling, abseiling, zip-wiring and a visit to a local wildlife centre. The whole group were able to swim at least once a day, including hydrotherapy sessions in the adapted indoor pool. The children were also able to use a specialist sensory suite and fully accessible games room. (Please see photos below).

This was Dreamflight's third UK activity trip. Thanks to the fantastic support of the BA Better World Community Fund Dreamflight was able to raise c£28,000 - enough to cover approximately two-thirds of the total cost of the holiday.

Aim

Dreamflight gives these young people the chance to experience independence, grow self-esteem and have some fun.

The Impact of Dreamflight

Every year Dreamflight sees the impact of our holidays on young people:

- 1) This experience is often the first independent trip a young person may take from their parents and family members. They realise they can experience life on their own terms – **This builds greater independence**
- 2) The experience of being part of a group of young people with similar everyday issues such as requiring help to move or to undertake physical activities, or requiring medications or physiotherapy to live, enables the young person to feel normalised, for once they are not different to everybody else. - **This can help build self-confidence, self-esteem and improve their overall wellbeing**
- 3) Sharing a room with another young person and building a relationship with them and other young people and volunteers on the trip may be the first time they are accepted for just being them, rather than the disability or illness they are attached to. - **Improved communication, relationship building and social skills**
- 4) The challenge of overcoming the fear of heights (by abseiling/zip wiring); water (by going swimming) or other challenges they may face, including activities with animals or climbing. – **Can give the young person new outlook and open mind to try new things and how to experience life**
- 5) Overcoming the fear of being with new people, making friends, playing games in the games room in a group, and enjoying the thrill and excitement of the activities can be a life changing moment. – **Learning how to have fun!**

The children all had a fantastic time and were able to build their confidence, challenge themselves and build friendships, all in a fully inclusive environment. Due to their conditions, most had never had the opportunity to attend school trips or had time away from parents before.

A medical professional who nominated one of our children said: ‘Child C has been telling me how amazing the trip was and how much she has benefited. She is going to sign up for an accessible climbing course as a result!’

The trip was a huge success, and we are now building this trip into our annual provision, alongside our main trip to Florida. In 2025 our aim is to take two separate groups to UK activity centres; doubling the number of children who will benefit from this special trip.

We cannot thank the BA Better World Community Fund enough, for bringing joy to children who would otherwise miss out on the chance to experience the Dreamflight magic via our Orlando trip.

Special thanks to Mary, Laura and the fabulous Community Team for all your help and support.



