



Virtual Classes Evaluation Report 2020

Key Successes

100,000

views achieved in 3 months

77%

of children learnt something new

91%

of children reported an improvement in mood after taking part

93%

of parents/carers felt calmer after their child/ren took part; with an average 66% improvement in sense of calm

watch time equivalent of delivering

45

online classes a day!

71%

of parents felt more motivated and able to cope



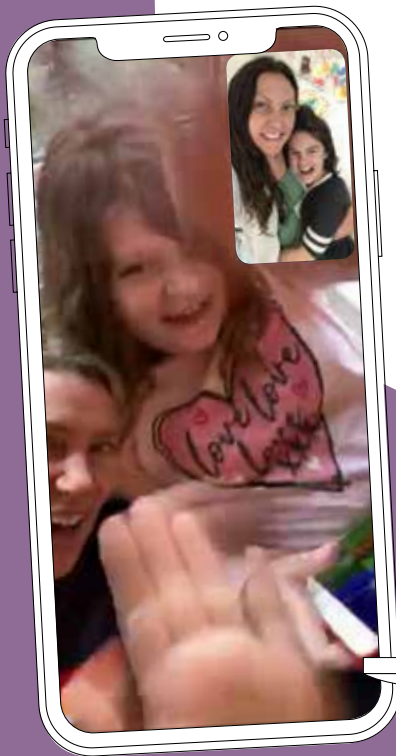
lightyear
foundation

Flamingo Chicks and Lightyear
Foundation joined forces to deliver new
active learning virtual dance classes, the
first of their kind:

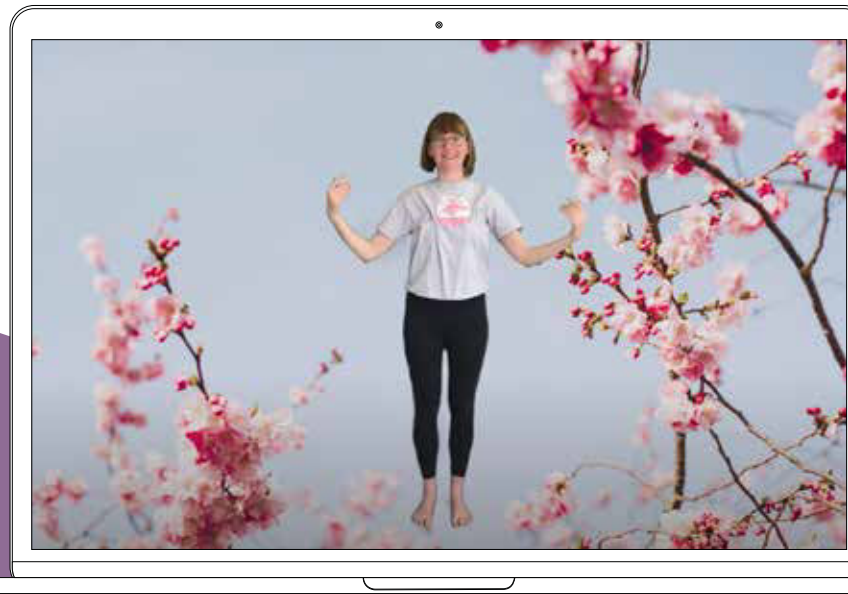
- * Adapted for a wide range of **physical abilities**
- * Featuring **Makaton**: a language programme widely used by the learning disability community
- * **STEM** sub-theme: linked to the National Curriculum
- * Spin-off **science and craft** activities for extended learning

Additionally, we offered:

- ✧ **Relaxation sessions** for parents and carers
- ✧ One-to-one **'smile' calls** delivered via Zoom for children finding lockdown especially tricky
- ✧ **Inclusive stories**, written by our volunteers and read by celebrities



'Smile' calls



Parents/carers relaxation sessions



Inclusive stories

The Collaboration

At the beginning of the pandemic we surveyed our families asking them what support they would most like to see. Families told us that getting their disabled child to exercise and also home-schooling were big challenges during the Covid-19 lockdown. By bringing together dance and science, we were able to directly respond with these unique, weekly active learning workshops which spanned lockdown.

Each class had a science sub-theme AND exercises adapted for a range of mobility, meaning all children could participate – both those able to freely move and those with profound and multiple learning disabilities.



Sensory Science



Disappearing Chromatography



Each theme came with spin-off accessible activities, using cheap, easy to find things around the home.

There was a weekly science experiment hosted by Dr Sarah Bearchell, an award-winning science communicator who specialises in designing science experiments for children with additional needs.

Sarah presented directly to the children, giving them their independence as they followed along. They were also supported with a familiar Makaton opening from Sarah. From space rockets using milk cartons to stethoscopes – the experiments covered the STEM spectrum!

Exploding Potion



Creative Crafts



Each week also featured an art/craft activity with Designer and Flamingo Chicks' Mum, Sam Williams. These arts and crafts videos were a brilliant tool for children to improve their fine motor skills, and a lovely opportunity to work alongside siblings. Favourites included Squishy Planets, Dancing Skeletons and Talking Flowers.



The Themes

“The videos work wonders and I’m seeing improvement in Tyger’s focus and listening, both with the videos but also general instructions at home.”

Lauren Hustler (mum of Tyger, age 4, who has autism)



Week 1: Space (Astronomy)



Our Space class had the biggest organic reach of 36,074

Week 2: Cinderella (Chemistry)



Week 5: Alice In Wonderland (Maths)



Week 3: Carnival Of The Animals (Zoology)



Week 4: Le Corsiare 'Pirates' (Physics)



Week 6: Madame Butterfly (Flight)



Week 7: Human Body (Biology)

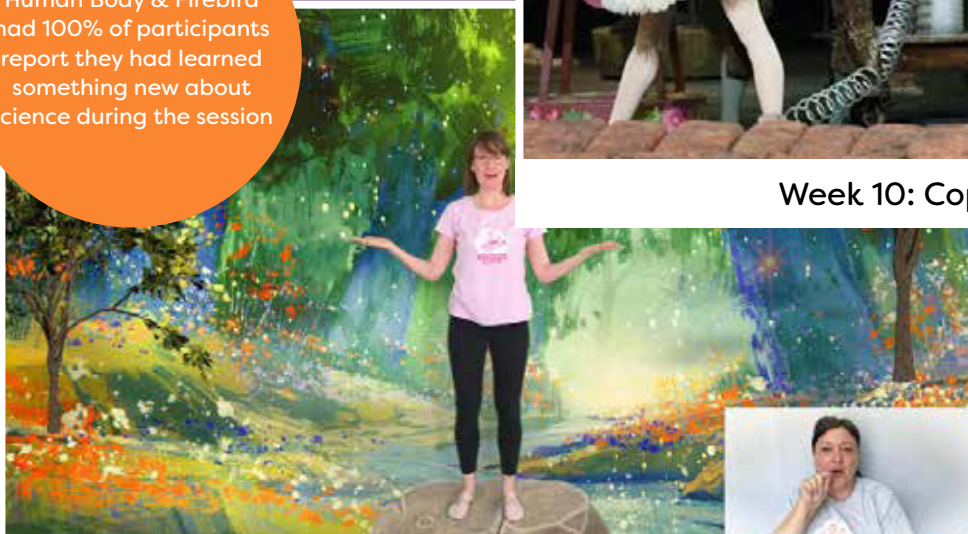


also covered
handwashing and
de-sensitisation of
mask wearing

Human Body & Firebird
had 100% of participants
report they had learned
something new about
science during the session



Week 10: Coppélia (Inventing)



Week 8: Firebird (Nature)



Week 9: Alien Worlds - Mars Missions (Space)

The Need

“Utter abandonment’ of special needs families during lockdown”

BBC News

Little had been said by government or the national media about the complex needs of disabled children and their families during the Coronavirus pandemic yet “Covid-19 is disproportionately affecting disabled people” [ONSsurvey]. Lockdown took its toll, with families telling us they are on the brink of collapse, buckling under 24-hour care with no outside help. We heard children were significantly regressing with challenging behaviour being magnified.

Whilst some disabled children were able to return to school from 01.06, many have been risk assessed and are not, leaving families facing 7 months at home. Either way, access to respite care is still a huge barrier and summer holidays will be an additional strain.

“My husband and I have to look after her 24 hours a day with no help because the local authority carers have been furloughed, while no thought has gone into giving direct support,” she said. “It has put a huge emotional and physical strain on an army of unseen parent-carers. We’re all worn out, constantly anxious, overwhelmed and desperate.”

Jean Wilson, the mother of 17-year-old Emily, who is autistic with severe learning disabilities.

“We’re all at our wits end, mentally and physically. We’re the forgotten families on the brink of collapse.”

Katie Clarke

“We have had support from school, as best as they can, but obviously have not been given any sort of ‘childcare’ [...] I’m sure every parent is struggling, but when you have kids with additional needs, the struggle becomes extremely intense and can be so difficult at times. These videos are basically our only form of support during the pandemic, as a source of relaxation and therapy.”

Lauren Hustler (mum of Tyger, age 4, who has Autism)

“The hard thing is just keeping Emily amused because she is full on from the moment she wakes up in the morning until the moment she goes to bed. [...] Of course 6 hours of the day, 5 days a week, she’s at school and they work her hard and she gets very tired because of her school day. Whereas now its 24/7.”

Sarah Campbell (mum of Emily, age 11, who has a rare chromosome disorder)

A study by the Disabled Children’s Partnership showed 71% say disabled child’s emotional and mental health is worse, 67% say a non-disabled sibling’s is worse and 79% say their own is worse.

The impact on physical health is less marked but still nearly half (45%) say their disabled children’s physical health has declined and just half say the same about their own (54%).

Measuring Success

To ensure we could complete a comprehensive evaluation, we had dedicated a member of staff in the role of Evaluation Manager. This has provided a point of contact throughout the week to help support the families with completing the forms and answering any queries. Evaluating data was collected on a weekly basis through forms, photos and videos. Quantitative data was converted into average weekly percentages for ease of comparison.

- Focus group of 10 families completing weekly detailed evaluation
- Written using widgit software to aid participants to be able to complete for themselves
 - Online survey open to all
- Obtaining feedback from education, health and social care professionals



Outputs

- ✧ 100,000 views in 3 months
- ✧ National TV coverage including; Good Morning Britain, This Morning, Sky News & Channel 4
- ✧ Recommended by health, education & social care professionals
- ✧ Families saying: "A life-line in these difficult times"
- ✧ Total reach of 190,810 people over the Facebook & YouTube Channels. Of this, there were a total of 119,891 non-fans on Facebook and 59,943 non-subscribers on YouTube. That's an estimated total reach of 179,834 new people seeing/engaging with Flamingo Chicks and Lightyear Foundation
- ✧ Facebook classes attracted an average engagement rate of 4.18% and YouTube, a Click Through rate of 5.2%
- ✧ Facebook kindly donated advertising tokens to boost our views – this made a big difference with our pirate class for example seeing an 14 x increase in reach

- ✧ Our Week 1 Space class had the biggest organic reach of 36,074
- ✧ Across lockdown we had a total watch time of 508.3hrs on YouTube. This is the equivalent of delivering 14 full online classes a day, or 442 full online classes a month. If we were to apply this same ratio (total watch time:estimated reach) to our Facebook figures that's another 31 full online classes a day or 973 full online classes a month. That makes a potential YouTube & Facebook combined total of 45 online classes a day or 1,395 a month!
- ✧ Our most popular themes (by total views) were: Space, Cinderella, Animals, Alice in Wonderland & Pirates
- ✧ Top visits came from: London, Bristol and Cardiff (which is a reflection of where our usual classes take place)

We also saw visits from around the globe, from Ghana to Greece!



sky news



this morning

Outcomes

10 X Focus Group Families

Improved Physical Competencies:

Parents reported improved concentration, better balance, bigger movements and saw their children gaining more enjoyment as we progressed through the 10 weeks of classes.

Increased Confidence or Resilience:

- Week 7 Human Body and Week 9 Alien Worlds received our highest participant enjoyment levels with 83% of participants rating their enjoyment in these classes as 8/10 or above
- Week 6 Madame Butterfly saw our highest 'shift' in participant mood by 43%
- Week 5 Alice in Wonderland saw our highest % increase in participant mood: a reported 79% increase in participant mood following the dance class.

Increased awareness of the world around them:

In Week 7 Human Body and Week 8 Firebird we had 100% of participants report they had learned something new about science during the session.

Parents/Carers:

- 79% improvement in ability to cope following the Week 8 Firebird class
- 82% improvement in sense of calm following the Week 7 Human Body class
- 83% improvement in motivation following the Week 3 Carnival of the Animals class.

Most successful theme:

Week 7 Human Body - highest participant enjoyment rating, highest % of participants learning something new about science, biggest increase in parent/carers sense of calm.

Online General Survey

The survey link appeared at the end of classes across all platforms.

- 100% of children felt happy after completing the class
- 66% felt inspired
- 56% felt calm
- 100% of children enjoyed learning about STEM subjects by dancing

- The majority of the children were aged between 4 and 10 years old, with some pre-school aged participants and older teenagers taking part too.

- 67% were considered to be disabled or have someone in their household who is disabled. We received some very encouraging feedback from parents and teachers too:

"I am the mum of a 6 year old disabled child and an able bodied 3 year old. It was great to find an activity they can both enjoy and the way the moves are adapted for all levels of ability is perfect. It is so rare to find something like this that is truly inclusive" - parent

"I'm a teacher who has been looking for an activity for a Y6 child with Down's Syndrome. This will be perfect , thank you."

"Really enjoyed doing it again since classes stopped. Hope that it will continue online even after the social isolation is over." - parent

Human Body and Alien Worlds received our highest participant enjoyment levels with 83% of participants rating their enjoyment in these classes as 8/10 or above

83% improvement in motivation following Carnival of the Animals class




What parents said:

“Exercise and fixed dance routines can be hard to follow and Gilby can disengage quickly for fear of failure. The videos are engaging but importantly, easy to follow. It doesn’t feel like exercise but it means he has 20 mins of movement during lockdown which is super important for his sensory regulation.” Camilla Rigby, mum

“There wasn’t anything that we’d come across before that Emily could do all of and have a sense of achievement at the end. It’s something to look forward to. It gives us as parents a topic, something that 2, 3, 4 days we might then add things around for her learning because they’re linked to the national curriculum.” Sarah Campbell (mum of Emily, age 11, who has a rare chromosome disorder)

“You are a life-line in these difficult times. Believe me.” Maria Marshall, mum

“I’m so happy I’ve found this page! My little girl has cerebral palsy and I’ve been struggling so so much with lockdown! Thank you for making it feel I’m not alone in this!” (via Instagram)



“There is so much online content out there BUT it is extremely hard to find physical activity resources for disabled children. I’m so pleased they now have this! I absolutely love this resource – what a fantastic way for children to get some activity and movement into their day, as well as being great fun.”

Stephanie Wheen, Paediatric Physiotherapist

What children said:

“I liked to try it because I could send photos to my school and tell my classmates about it. It was fun and something to look forward in the lockdown. I always wanted to know what the theme was going to be each week and my mum always had to remind me to wait till Friday to find out.” Sam Steiner Richards, age 15

“I liked how it helped me with small and big movements. I learned different things every week and it makes me laugh and happy.” Alfie Gilby, age 11

“I enjoyed it because it was different every week with fun things to do. I liked making things we learned with Alfie and mummy.” Leo Gilby, age 14

“I let my mummy help me do the movements. I really enjoyed making rainbows with my hands. I enjoyed the music too. The relaxing music made me slow down and the upbeat music made me happy and bouncy.” Tyger Hustler age 4, who has autism

“Please do this, it’s amazing, I love it! You must watch and join in – it is amazing.” Issy Smee, 13 who has Autism. Issy also recorded her own review of some of the classes which she posted on Facebook to encourage other children to take part.

What professionals said:

“The online classes have been a life line for families. They have brought so much joy and happiness into this hard time. For the children to be able to do something familiar and continue to learn new skills whilst at home has been amazing!” Hattie Inglis Class Teacher Chellow Heights Special School (West), Bradford

“Flamingo Chicks videos are so great to recommend to parents because I know they are suitable for such a wide range of abilities. Exercise is important for maintaining mental health especially at a time when there is more stress and changes in daily routines. Being able to access this free, imaginative content can help to build their confidence in a really positive way.” Rachael Gooch, Mental Health Nurse

“They make a huge difference to families of children with SEND who aren’t able to access their usual routines and support structures during the Coronavirus crisis. Their videos are thoughtful and educational as well as being fun, and parents are able to easily adapt and personalise the activities for their children. We really like that they have considered the safety aspects of online classes.” Anna Perceval, JWeb - London

The importance of including Makaton

“Having Makaton signing was especially useful for us! Ariana can Makaton a few signs and when she could follow the signing in the sessions she felt such a sense of achievement! Having limited balance, when she couldn't follow the steps, she joined in with the signing!”

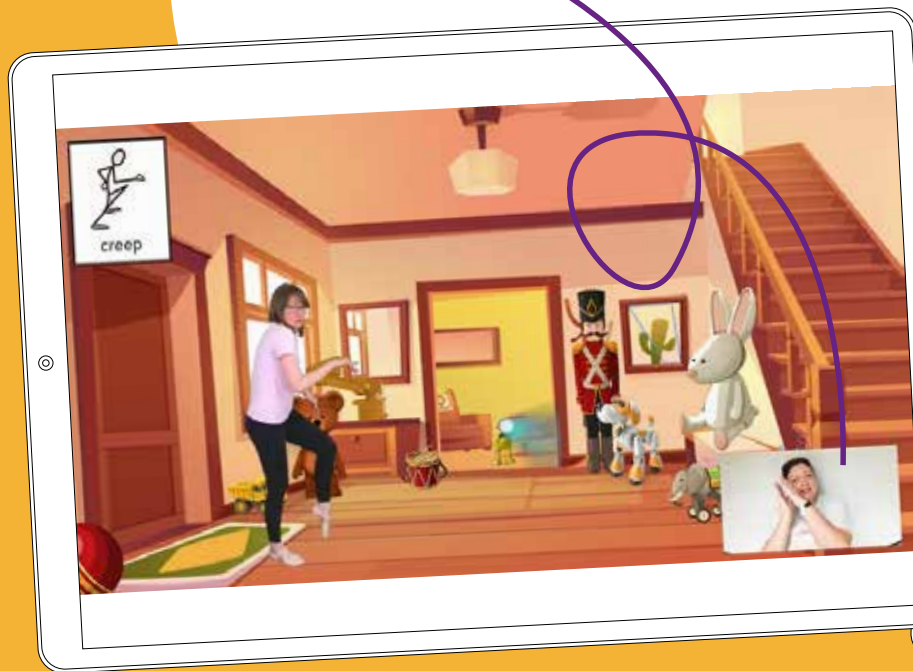
Sameerah Siddiqui (mum of Ariana, age 7, global development delay)

“The use of Makaton signing makes it accessible and it's so good to see this mode of communication being used and celebrated.”

Rachel Clark, Specialist Speech & Language Therapist in Early Years

makaton signing

widgit symbols



The sessions were also used in a range of settings including children's hospitals and hospices:

“The classes are invaluable for the families at Tŷ Hafan children's hospice. They give our families the chance to access something hugely therapeutic for their child that siblings can engage in also. In this very difficult time it is vital that we can continue to offer our families chances to be creative, express emotion, have fun and make precious memories in the comfort of their own home. The virtual dance classes facilitate just that. Thank you for sharing something so special with us!”

Emma Atkins Play coordinator at Tŷ Hafan Children's Hospice, South Wales

“The classes provide an opportunity for families to have an experience that they may not have considered possible in lockdown. With support on movement, families can take away ideas and enjoy this expressive medium at home.”

Kirsty Ormston, Noah's Ark Children's Hospice, London

“It's great to be able to share the virtual classes, not just on the wards with our inpatients but also with those who may be shielding at home as well as siblings who aren't able to visit at this time. They are enormous fun and a brilliant resource for disabled children.”

Lisa Smith, Child and Family Support Services Joint Lead,
Bristol Royal Hospital for Children



Case Study

Tyger, Age 4 - Bradford

Mum Lauren said her son Tyger (who has Autism) was struggling in lockdown without his usual routine and exercise. "Tyger's bad week is due to lack of normal routine, coupled with not as much exercise and stimulus that he would get at school. The lockdown has been going on a while now, and I know how it's making me feel, so I can only imagine how tough it is for kids."

After 4 weeks of virtual lessons mum Lauren reported "I genuinely believe we have seen an improvement! As soon as we put the videos on, he starts to focus, and they really help calm him down. It helps as a part of his routine, it reminds him of school and they're helping in other small ways too."

Now the family are seeing improvements outside of the virtual classes: "I'm seeing improvement in Tyger's focus and listening, both with the videos but also generally at home [...] he seems to listen more to instructions, eye contact seems to be getting better and he's dancing a lot."



"I'm seeing improvement in Tyger's focus and listening, both with the videos but also generally at home".

Case Study

Sam, Age 15 - London

At the start of the process mum Kate said Sam (who is on the Autistic spectrum) and his sibling Beth don't always get along. "I've set it up as Beth being the evaluator/recorder and Sam doing the class - they don't get on well at the moment she is 'too cool for school' and Sam's perseverance is very hard going for her."

For the week 2 class the family united "Sam really enjoyed it and his dad watched as well as his sister recording so it got the family together." Beth wrote "I enjoyed watching my brother getting so involved in this activity, it's good for him to do something he enjoys [...] I felt calm being with my family and enjoying this small yet special bonding time."

The siblings have enjoyed working together "Beth never admits enjoying Sam's company so it's great for them to do things together and me to hear her write she enjoys it!" Taking part also connected them with extended family during lockdown "my niece is in the Bristol university dance club and is raising money for Flamingo Chicks. We didn't know the connection so it was lovely to have a family link."

Sam has become a Flamingo Chicks ambassador - sharing his experience outside of the family home and instilling the start of a lifelong passion for dance. "Sam looks forward to the classes so much. He asks me what the theme is going to be! [...] He's passing on Flamingo Chicks love to his friends too [...] I think we may need to take dance classes in the future."

"Sam really enjoyed it and his dad watched as well as his sister recording so it got the family together."



Learnings

Delivering virtually is very different from our face-to-face classes in so many ways. Here are our learnings:



Input from a range of professionals

Taking on feedback from a range of professionals from physiotherapists to speech therapists was essential. A particularly helpful piece of feedback was from Sam Capindale at Talk Speech Therapy in Bristol who suggested the use of key words related to the STEM information we were focusing on for each class. Sam suggested to use verbs as key words where possible, and to repeat them as much as possible in the classes, and so this led to the creation of our Widgeit key words glossary and consideration of how to use them in the sessions too.



Faster pace than face-to-face

Using key words and open language helped us streamline content and keep engagement.



Multiple communication modes

Creativity, and multiple methods of communication, such as Makaton, Widgeit symbols, music, animation and verbal communication is essential to be fully accessible.



Confidence in digital delivery

This grew as we moved through the creation process, and we were really motivated by the wonderful feedback from families.



Reflection is important for overall development

Helpful both in terms of learnings for this particular project, but also for what working digitally may offer us in the future.



STEM concepts and facts first

Building the creative content around these was a helpful approach when planning each session.



Open language is essential

Alongside the key words, this enabled children and families to focus on key themes and interpret the instructions in a way that is suitable for their needs.



Safeguarding differences

Working digitally has different safeguarding considerations, and so it was important for us to assess the risk of this particular way of working and provide specific safety information for families.



Increased views and engagement on Facebook

Streaming directly to Facebook was particularly successful in the number of views and in reaching as many children and families as possible – many people shared the videos too.



Widening their worlds

Covid-19 has dramatically shrunk the worlds of many disabled children. We used a range of backdrops to both charge their imagination but also to refamiliarize them with environments such as hospitals and cafes. We also linked with professional ballerina Tamara Rojo and English National Ballet to feature some of their production shots in our class that was themed around the ballet 'Coppélia'. Many of our children haven't seen or experienced a theatre atmosphere before, so this was important in opening this up for them and giving an exciting production-like feel.

Thank you so much
for supporting this project!



lightyear
foundation