

Growing Together: Stories from Ade Adepitan Short Break

February
2025
Issue 1

Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre, Grove Park London NW9 0JY 020 8937 6701

A New Name for a Growing Story



Since 2013, we have shared regular printed updates under the name "Newsletter", capturing the experiences, challenges, and successes of Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre. This time we are excited to introduce our new name: "Growing Together: Stories from Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre."

This new title reflects the heart of what we do—helping children grow, learn, and thrive while strengthening the connections between families, staff, and the wider

A Year of Growth and Learning

In 2024, we had two Ofsted inspections—one in March and another in November.

Both inspections reaffirmed that our service provides good quality care. The inspectors praised the dedication and hard work of our staff, who build strong, trusting relationships with the children and their families. Our personalised approach to care was highlighted, ensuring that children feel safe, valued, and supported during their stays.

Children at the centre enjoy a wide range of activities, from local outings to exciting cultural experiences. These activities help expand their world, build confidence, and develop independence. Inspectors also noted how well our staff communicate with children using various methods, including visual aids, sign language, and symbols, ensuring that every child has a voice in their own care. Families provided positive feedback about the care their children receive, emphasizing the importance of the centre in their lives.

While the inspections recognised our strengths, they also identified areas where we need to make changes. A key focus was on improving the environment of the centre—some areas required refurbishment, equipment needed repairs. We have already started addressing these concerns, ensuring that every child has a comfortable, homely, and accessible space.

Another area for improvement was leadership and management oversight, particularly in monitoring maintenance issues promptly.

The 2024 Ofsted inspections were an opportunity for reflection and growth.

Thank you to all our families for your ongoing support—we are always listening, learning, and striving to do better.

Meet Our Management Team

Strong leadership is key to providing the best care and support for our children. We are proud to introduce our new management team, led by Manager Zuzana Bajusova and Deputy Manager Sandra Sebbie—two dedicated professionals bringing experience, passion, and a deep commitment to the children we serve.

Zuzana was born in Slovakia. She first joined the Centre in February 2022 as a Deputy Manager, bringing years of experience in care and domiciliary care management.

Outside of work, Zuzana is dedicated to her family and her son, who recently started university. Her love for cleanliness and organisation is reflected in the way she ensures the Centre runs efficiently, providing a structured and homely environment for the children.

Alongside Zuzana, Sandra has stepped into the role of Deputy Manager, bringing a warm, attentive, and hardworking approach. Originally from Ghana, Sandra has a wealth of experience in care, and her calm, knowledgeable, and supportive leadership has already made an impact. Her gentle yet effective leadership style helps maintain a nurturing and positive environment at the Centre.

Together, Zuzana and Sandra bring a powerful combination of structure, warmth, and expertise to the Centre.



Stronger Records, Safer Care

Over the past year, we have introduced several new documentation systems to improve record-keeping, safety, and providing a structured and consistent approach to safeguarding and care management.

For example, the Safeguarding Records Book ensures that all safeguarding concerns, incidents, and follow-ups are systematically documented. This enables staff to track patterns, respond promptly, and improve overall safeguarding procedures. Alongside this, the Body Chart Records Book allows staff to visually document and track any marks or injuries, ensuring that concerns are promptly recorded and addressed.

These new measures have helped enhance transparency, organisation, and responsiveness, reinforcing our commitment to delivering the highest standard of care.

Empowering The Team, Enriching Care

Well-trained and well-supported staff make all the difference in the lives of the children we care for. This past year, we have enhanced our training programme, ensuring our team has the skills, knowledge, and confidence to provide the best possible support.

One of the biggest steps we took was strengthening our medication training. Recognising the importance of accuracy, safety, and consistency, we returned to the original specialist training provider we had previously worked with. We invited them to deliver in-depth, face-to-face training sessions, allowing staff to gain hands-on experience and ask questions. To ensure ongoing learning and reinforcement, we also invested in their online training modules, giving staff the flexibility to refresh and expand their knowledge.

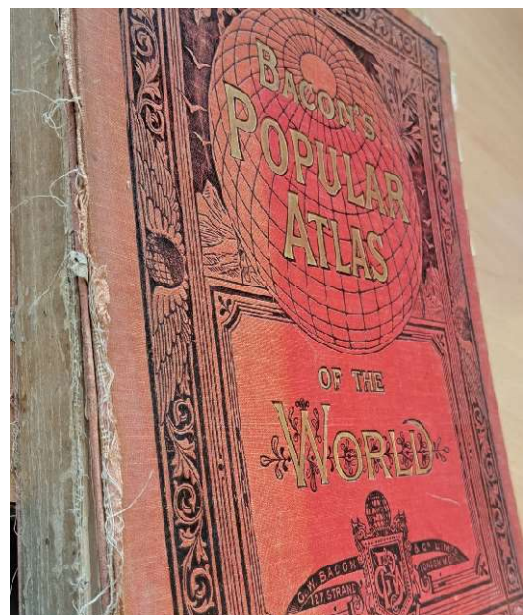
Beyond medication, we have placed a greater emphasis on staff mental health and wellbeing. We recognise that caring for others starts with taking care of ourselves, and we want our team to feel supported, valued, and resilient. This year, Brent Making Every Contact Count Officer, Sandy Youngson, delivered a mental wellbeing session for our staff, introducing valuable strategies for stress management, self-care, and emotional resilience. He also provided a range of training options for us to choose from, ensuring our staff have access to ongoing mental health and wellbeing resources.

Alongside these developments, our staff have continued their training in safeguarding, behaviour management, autism awareness, Makaton sign language, and complex medical care. We are incredibly proud of our team's commitment to growth and professional development, and we will continue to prioritise both their learning and their wellbeing – because a strong, supported team means better care for every child.

A Community That Reads Together

Last year, we introduced a Community Library Box, and we are delighted to see it thriving! With the support of Brent Library Services and the generosity of the wider community, the library has continued to grow. The concept is simple—people passing by take a book and leave a book in return, keeping the collection fresh and ever-changing.

One unexpected surprise came when we discovered a Bacon's Popular Atlas of the World (1912) among the donated books. This beautifully illustrated antique edition was too valuable to keep on the shelf, so we decided to sell it on eBay. The funds raised from this will go directly towards new activities and experiences for the children,



ensuring that the community's generosity continues to benefit them in exciting ways. By sharing books, stories, and unexpected treasures, we are not only fostering a love of reading but also strengthening connections between our Centre and the wider community.

Children and Families Shaping Our Team

At Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre, we believe that the voices of children and their families matter, especially when selecting the right staff to support them. This year, two young people, SSR and MG, played a key role in the recruitment of a Residential Child Care Officer.

SSR, who has attended the Centre for nine years, brought a unique perspective, understanding firsthand what kind of support young people need. With guidance from his keyworker, he carefully prepared thoughtful questions to ask the candidates.

MG also participated in the interview process, demonstrating confidence and keen insight into the type of staff that would best support her and her peers.

What made this process even more invaluable was the involvement of MG's

mother, who joined the panel. Her parental perspective and deep understanding of the challenges and needs of children with disabilities helped ensure that we selected staff who are not just qualified, but compassionate and dedicated.



Listening and Improving

The Centre continues to be highly valued by the families and professionals. Last survey reflected overwhelmingly positive feedback. Communication was particularly praised, with most respondents feeling informed, listened to, and valued through regular updates from key workers, link books, and emails.

The survey highlighted the Centre's commitment to promoting choice and independence for children and young people, with over 90% of respondents stating that young people are supported in expressing their preferences and participating in activities. Families appreciated the variety of different activities but expressed a desire for more outings to enhance social interactions.

Staff were praised for their professionalism, warmth, and deep understanding of children's health needs.

While the environment was generally rated positively, some respondents noted that the building and décor need updating to create a more welcoming space.

As we look ahead to this year's survey, we hope for even greater participation from more parents and professionals.

Making Children's Voices Heard

At Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre, we are committed to ensuring that every child's wishes, feelings, and experiences are heard and valued. Over the past year, we have introduced several key changes to make our centre even more child-centred and responsive to their needs.

We have developed a structured feedback book, which is now kept in each child's file. This allows us to track their experiences over time, ensuring their preferences, emotions, and requests are continuously acknowledged. Staff carefully record observations, including non-verbal communication, so that even children who cannot express themselves with words still have their voices heard.

Understanding that children communicate in different ways, we have invested in a new set of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) to support children who use visual communication. We also purchased a modern version of the InPrint programme to create clearer, more engaging social stories that help children understand situations, transitions, and expectations, reducing anxiety.

We have completely revamped our menu, ensuring it reflects both parents' insights and staff knowledge of children's preferences. Every day the cook receives daily updates to adjust meals based on children's real-time feedback. We have also introduced new child-friendly dinnerware to make mealtimes more inviting and visually appealing.

By actively listening, adapting, and improving, we continue to make Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre a place where children feel safe, understood, and valued.



Sharing and supporting

At Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre, our Parents' Coffee Mornings have become a key opportunity for parents and staff to connect, share experiences, and shape the service together. Over the past year, these meetings have covered important discussions on communication, children's activities, transitions to adulthood, and recruitment. Parents consistently express their appreciation for the Centre's commitment to listening and acting on their feedback.

Topics have ranged from practical parenting support, such as the Cygnet programme for families of autistic children, to discussions on how to better support children's independence and social skills. Parents have suggested more community outings, peer pairing, and improved collaboration with schools—ideas that are now being explored. Additionally, guest speakers, have provided parents with valuable insights.

The parents have also shared their thoughts on creating a more inviting environment at the Centre, offering suggestions for décor, activities, and meal planning.

These meetings are more than just discussions; they are a testament to the strong partnerships between parents, staff, and the wider community.

Roots of Connection

Last year, our sensory garden received a beautiful transformation, thanks to the initiative of one of our dedicated parents. She invited her church group, the PIWC - Church of Pentecost, Wembley Women's Ministry, to "adopt" our Centre as part of their community outreach. With warmth and dedication, the group arrived ready to dig, plant, and transform the garden into a vibrant, sensory-rich space for the children.

Though they weren't professional gardeners, their hard work, enthusiasm, and generosity made all the difference. Children, parents, and staff worked alongside them, turning the day into a joyful and meaningful experience.

Since then, the garden has thrived under the continued care of our children and

staff, who take pride in watering the plants and keeping the space beautiful. This project was about more than just gardening—it was about connection, kindness, and making a lasting impact.



Expanding Opportunities

Our vision is focused on expanding children's independence, enriching experiences, and strengthening transitions as they move to adulthood.

One of our key priorities is enhancing their life skills. This will guide young people through everyday tasks—learning how to prepare meals safely, understanding household routines, and developing practical skills that will support them as they grow. We want every child to build confidence in their independence, ensuring they are better prepared for their future.

We are also committed to broadening experiences beyond traditional disability focused activities. Believing that every young person should be able to explore the world freely, we aim to introduce new cultural and social outings - theatre visits, concerts, museum trips, and more, so they can discover their own interests without unnecessary limitations.

Another key focus is supporting transitions into adulthood. We are aware that many of our young people and their families face challenges in securing appropriate placements after leaving our service. We are working closely with local authorities to ensure better planning, advocacy and options for our young people.

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We also aim to help our young people grow into confident, responsible citizens, embracing their place in a respectful and engaged society.



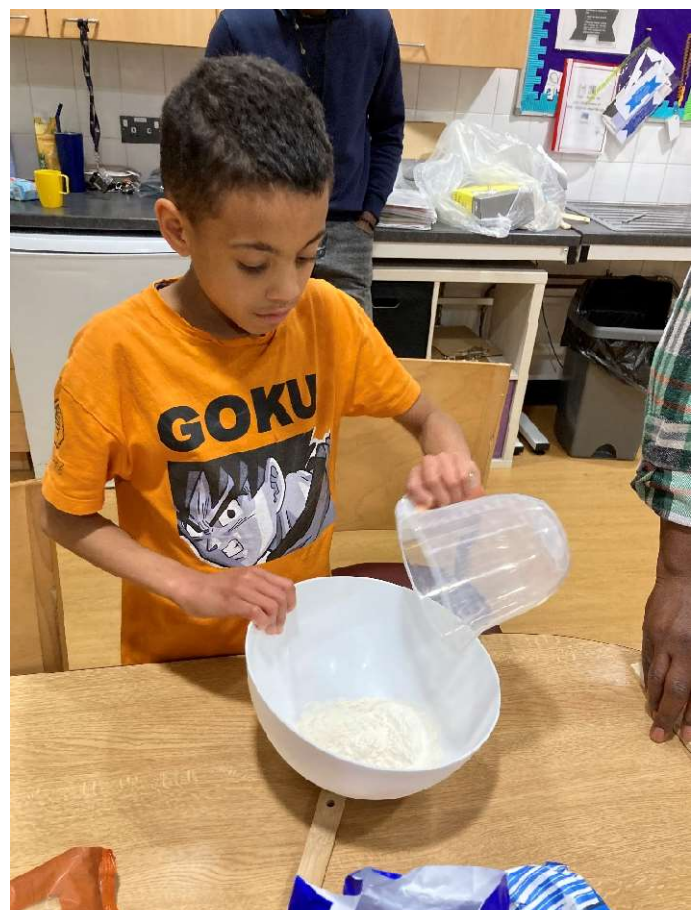
Encouraging Growth, One Step at a Time

Every child's journey is unique, and our staff are dedicated to helping them progress in their own way. Each time a child attends the Centre, we follow their personal targets, supporting them in developing new skills, independence, and confidence. These targets are carefully monitored and discussed at team meetings, ensuring that progress is tracked and staff can adjust their approach based on each child's needs.

This year, we introduced and improved the Achievements Book, a tool that helps document and celebrate each child's successes. Every achievement—big or small—is recognised, and children are awarded certificates to mark their progress. To make their successes even more visible, we introduced an Achievement Board in the Centre, where children can see their progress displayed, offering motivation and encouragement.

We follow each child's individual targets, set in collaboration with schools and families. We track progress during every stay, reinforcing skills like communication, self-care, and independence. Targets are discussed in team meetings, ensuring staff adapt support strategies to match each child's specific needs and development goals. We also work closely with parents. Whether it's learning self-care routines, improving social interactions, or developing communication skills, we are making sure that every child has the support they need to thrive.

Through this structured, personalised approach, we aim to ensure that each child's time with us is a meaningful step forward in their development.



Celebrating Together: A Year of Festivities

At Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre, we believe that every child should experience joy, culture, and togetherness, regardless of their background or abilities.

This year, we embraced Chinese New Year, Diwali, Halloween, Christmas and Black History Month, transforming our space with beautiful decorations and meaningful activities. Ahead of Diwali, we reached out to parents, seeking guidance on how to make the festival exciting and respectful.



Our Black History Month display was a standout feature, celebrating inspiring figures and their achievements.

Halloween brought excitement as the Centre was beautifully decorated, making the celebrations extra special.

To close the year, we once again partnered with the Salvation Army Christmas Present Appeal, ensuring that every child received a thoughtfully chosen gift. Seeing their smiles reminded us of how small gestures can create lasting memories.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to celebrating different cultures and making every moment at the Centre truly special.

Connecting with the Outdoors

We recognise the importance of outdoor experiences in helping children connect with nature, explore new environments, and engage their senses. Regular outings to parks, farms, and green spaces provide our children with the opportunity to experience the world beyond the Centre in a way that is engaging, relaxing, and meaningful.

Our visit to Kentish Town City Farm was a wonderful opportunity for children to see and interact with animals up close. IB was particularly engaged, reading out the names of animals and excitedly identifying the goats and chickens. GM, amazed by the experience, repeatedly said "Wow!" as he observed the animals and even took a special interest in the farm's small garden, filled with pumpkins and carrots. These experiences help children build confidence and curiosity in the natural world

At Golders Hill Park, children had the chance to explore an environment filled with wildlife and open spaces. YM was particularly delighted to spot kangaroos, wild cats, and rare birds, while other children found joy in the simple pleasure of sitting on the grass and taking in the fresh air. Some were more interested in the swings and play areas, demonstrating how nature outings can cater to a variety of sensory preferences and engagement level.

Beyond these specific outings, we regularly visit different parks and nature spaces, ensuring that children have consistent opportunities to explore the outdoors.

Whether it's a walk in a local park, or a visit to a farm, these experiences allow children to engage with their surroundings in a way that suits them. Outdoor activities provide valuable sensory input, opportunities for social interaction, and moments of discovery, helping children develop a deeper connection with nature and the world around them.

By offering a variety of activities that cater to different interests and abilities, we ensure that every child has the opportunity to explore, grow, and feel valued.



Broadening Perspectives

At Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre, we believe that every child deserves enriching experiences, and our cultural outings have provided them with opportunities to explore the world.

One of the year's most anticipated trips was to the Royal Opera House for a specially adapted performance of *The Mad Hatter's Tea Party*. This hip-hop reimagining was designed specifically for SEND audiences.

The adventure started before we even reached the theatre—our trusty minibus decided to take an unexpected break, leaving us to navigate the London transport system instead. What could have been a challenge turned into an exciting opportunity for independence. The children adapted beautifully, with P. taking charge of directions, confidently navigating the route, while D. charmed passengers along the way.

Once at the Opera House, the grandeur of the space left everyone in awe. The children were seated right on the stage, bringing them into the heart of the action. P., deeply engaged, later exclaimed, "For once, I thought the actors were incredible, and when they started singing and dancing, this was insane!".

Another highlight was our trip to see *Peter Pan* at the Harrow Arts Centre. This show welcomed a general audience, making it a truly inclusive experience. Our children sat alongside their peers without disabilities, engaging in the laughter, music, and excitement that define traditional British pantomime.

These outings are about more than just entertainment—they are about expanding horizons and embracing the world beyond the Centre, school and home.



Fun and Discovery

