



## Summer 2025 Newsletter

### CALENDAR DATES

Thu 26 Jun [DSPL8 Information Fair](#)  
Warners End Community Centre, Northridge  
Way, Hemel Hempstead HP1 3QG 9.30am-  
12.30pm

Sun 6 Jul [Day Out to Gulliver's Land Theme Park](#)  
Livingstone Drive, Milton Keynes MK15 0DT  
10.00 am

Sat 12 Jul & 9 Aug [Family Support Meeting](#)  
Hitchin Youth Trust, 111 Walsworth  
Rd, Hitchin SG4 9SP 2.00-4.00pm

Thu 17 Jul [New Parent Meeting at SEND chat and play](#)  
Longmeadow Primary School, Oaks Cross,  
Stevenage SG2 8LT 10.00 am

Summer Tues [Up on Downs Book Club](#)  
St Albans Library, Level 2, Maltings  
Shopping Centre AL1 3JQ 6.00-7.00pm

Sat 9 Aug [Mum's Night Out](#)  
The White Horse, 1 White Horse Lane,  
Burnham Green, Welwyn AL6 0HA 7.00pm

Thu 28 Aug [Teen / Young Adult Get-together](#)  
Save the date—exact details to follow, our  
young people will be choosing the activity

Sat 27 Sep [Hitchin Youth Showcase](#)  
Market Square, Hitchin Town Centre SG5  
1DR 10.00am-3.00pm Performance time TBC

Saturdays [Speech Development Group Meetings](#)  
Continues weekly for enrolled children



Up  
On Downs

*If you have any questions  
or  
suggestions please  
contact Jan or Gemma  
at:*

[enquiries.nhdowns  
@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk)

*call:  
07738 470634*

*Or visit:  
[www.upondowns.co.uk](http://www.upondowns.co.uk)*



Up on Downs is 20!

# Family Support Meetings

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July and 9<sup>th</sup> August 2.00-4.00pm**  
**Hitchin Youth Trust, 111 Walsworth Road SG4 9SP**

Our family meetings are the perfect way to meet new families and share news and experiences whilst the children socialise and play together. We had great fun with doing a spot of yoga and celebrating Father's day at our June meeting. In July we will be building a sensory circuit and making some sensory shakers among other activities. We will also be joined by qualified councillor Judith Russell, who will be happy to answer any questions from parents—please see the following page for more information.



Our meetings are always on the second Saturday of the month, including school holidays. The meetings are run in a drop in format so just come along if you are free. If you'd like to let us know you'll be coming or have any questions please email us at: [enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk)



# Judith Russell

Thanks for letting me introduce myself through your newsletter!

My name is Judith, and I am qualified pluralistic counsellor and a coach. I work with young people and adults often those with neurodivergent conditions or with other disabilities in the family. I am the counsellor for parents at the pre-school pan-disability charity, Daisychains in Hitchin and also work with parents as a Specialist Parent Support Worker for a local charity, Angels Support Group. I have experience working with a range of difficulties including depression, anxiety, family stresses, loss and bereavement.



If you think I can be of help to you or members of your family please do contact me on [jsrcounselling@outlook.com](mailto:jsrcounselling@outlook.com) and/or follow me on <https://www.facebook.com/judith.russell.counselling/>  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/judithsrussell/>

## World Down Syndrome Day 2025



It was lovely to see what everyone got up to this year for WDSD back in March. Thanks to everyone who shared their news on our [Up on Downs Community page](#). It was lovely to be asked to return to Bernards Heath Junior School to give their WDSD assembly and thanks to them and also Knutsford Primary Academy for running lots of socks fundraisers. If your school would like help to hold an assembly around the theme of Down's syndrome for WDSD, or indeed at any time of year, please get in touch at [enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk)



## Julie and Mark Evens

In this, Up on Downs' 20th year, one of our founder members Julie Evens talks about the very early days of the charity and her son Mark, his life and interests.



Back in 2005, Mark was just 8 years old when Sande, Frances, myself and a couple of other parents decided that it was time that North Herts had some sort of Down Syndrome support group. It was amazing to be involved from the start and to see the organisation grow over the years. We very quickly realised that the need was county-wide and before long, Up on Downs was born.

We started small with just a few family get-togethers and then, once we'd secured some initial funding from Three Valleys Water, we arranged our first outing to Woodside Animal Farm and our first Christmas Party. There were music, dance and drama workshops and of course, the speech development groups which Mark benefitted from for several years.



It's fantastic to see how the organisation has gone from strength to strength. I only wish it had been around when Mark was a baby.





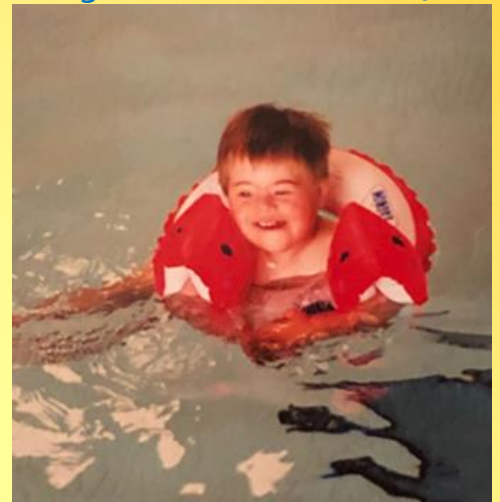
# Julie and Mark Evens



When Up on Downs started, Mark was at primary school. After school and college, Mark embarked on an apprenticeship in Facilities Services. Since then, he has had jobs as a Facilities Assistant / Caretaker in schools, a scientific establishment and an engineering factory. He also worked for four years as a machine operator in a precision engineering company.

In January 2025, now age 28, Mark began a new adventure, taking up a role as an Admin Assistant with an insurance company.

One thing that has never changed in the last 20 years is Mark's love of swimming. Mark is now a multiple medal winner and Captain of Down Syndrome Swimming Great Britain.



As Up on Downs prepares to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, apart from feeling rather old, I am incredibly proud to have been part of this amazing organisation. It is so satisfying to see the next generation of families receiving support, building friendships and encouraging their children to lead their own unique and fulfilling lives.

Here's to the next 20 years!

Julie Evens

## Help us celebrate

Is the young person in your life with DS in, or approaching, their twenties? Were you one of the families who first came across us all those years ago? If so, would you be willing to share a few lines and pictures with us about your story? We would love to collect '20 stories of those at 20' to share with our members and help celebrate our special anniversary.

**CELEBRATE  
UP ON DOWNS  
BIG 20TH BIRTHDAY!**

**SUNDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2025**

**GULLIVER'S Land**

We are looking forward to a fun trip to Gulliver's Land in Milton Keynes! The park will have a great mix of rides for all ages, from gentle adventures for little ones to more exciting attractions for thrill-seekers. I'll definitely check out the log flume and the dinosaur-themed area, which is said to be full of life-sized models and interactive exhibits. The atmosphere is expected to be very family-friendly.



We are really looking forward to our big birthday day out at Gulliver's Land theme park next month. We are afraid booking has now closed as the trip is full but do get in touch if you would be interested in a place if we get any cancellations.

**Dacorum Families SEND Information Fayre**  
DSPL8 are pleased to announce our forth Dacorum Families SEND Information Fayre!

**Thursday 26th June 2025  
9.30am-12.30pm at  
Warners End Community Centre  
Northridge Way,  
Hemel Hempstead HP1 3QG  
(there is plenty of parking if you need to drive)**

At the fayre we will have local provider information stands, activities for children & refreshments! Please register your attendance via the booking link below and you are welcome to drop in any time between 9.30am—12.30pm.

**And its FREE!**

**Walk-ins welcome or book tickets below**  
Booking link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/dspl8-information-fayre>  
(Registration closes on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025)

**Logos and Badges:**

- Children's Speech and Language Therapy
- Sunnyside Pure Trust
- DSPL8 Delivering Special Provision Locally
- Families In Focus CIC LOOKING FORWARD TOGETHER
- SEND 0-25 years Hertfordshire's Local Offer
- SPACE Autism (ASD) Neurodiverse Conditions
- DACORUM FAMILY SERVICES
- Hertfordshire
- ADD-vance
- reSEND
- The Box Moor Trust
- NHS Hertfordshire Community
- Outstanding services healthier communities
- Gade
- SEND





# Frances Gerber-Hawkins and Lydia Denning

One of our founder member Frances tells us about setting up the charity and the life and interests of her daughter Lydia.



One of our original flyers from 2004—delivered by post!

## Starting Up on Downs

After Lydia was born in 2000 there was not much in the way of support or finding out anything useful. The one thing that consistently helped me was talking with other parents; it was other families where I learnt about what was helpful and what the next steps may look like.

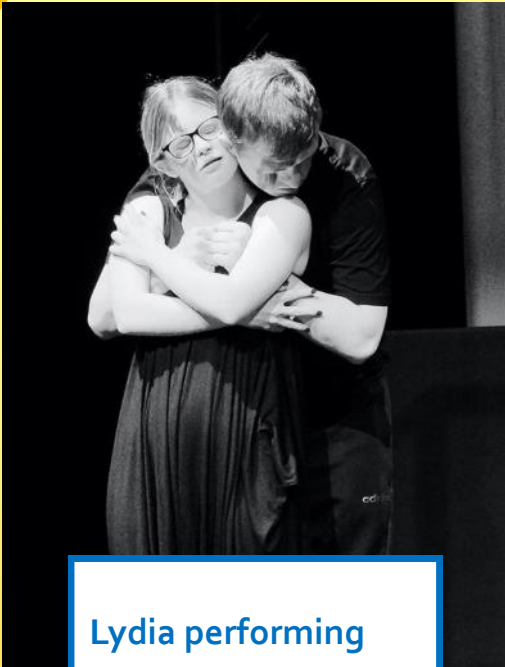
So in 2004 I contacted all the families I knew of and we started to meet in Hitchin. It soon became set on the second Saturday of the month between 2 and 4 o'clock, and has stayed the same ever since!

## Lydia

Lydia went to mainstream school in Hitchin until she was 16, and then spent 3 years at the 6<sup>th</sup> form of Ivel Valley school, and 2 years at North Herts College. She is currently enjoying performing arts activities with Bedazzle, but we are expecting changes this year when she moves to adult care services when her EHCP comes to an end.



# Frances Gerber-Hawkins and Lydia Denning



Lydia performing  
with Bedazzle

So while the challenge of securing the right provision is still a constant feature of supporting her, Lydia continues to shine her light and amaze us with what she does.

Lydia is thriving in supported living, and is really finding her voice and making decisions about her life. She loves live music and she enjoys gigs and festivals, quite often ending up on stage herself! She has appeared as an extra in two films, including one about vampires, and she regularly performs in shows and pantomimes in schools and theatres.

I'd like to thank all the people who have been involved with and supported the group in any way since it's

inception, in particular our wonderful Trustees past and present, and also a special thanks to Julie Evens.

Frances Gerber-Hawkins

## Help us celebrate

Is the young person in your life with DS in, or approaching, their twenties? Were you one of the families who first came across us all those years ago? If so, would you be willing to share a few lines and pictures with us about your story? We would love to collect '20 stories of those at 20' to share with our members and help celebrate our special anniversary.



# Hitchin Youth Showcase

Saturday 27th September 2025 10.00am—3.00pm

Do you have a young person with an extra chromosome in your family who loves to perform? Do they love music and Makaton? If so and you are free on Saturday 27th September we would love them to join us on stage at the Hitchin



Youth Showcase to sign along to a couple of pop songs with our very own signing guru Eleanor Stapley-Alexander. We are delighted to have been asked

to return to the showcase for a third year as it is always great fun. We will have a stall at the event, which is held in the market square, and a performance slot at around

11.00am. We'd love as many of our children and young people with DS, and their siblings, to join



us on stage (or in the audience if they prefer) to sign along to a couple of songs in Makaton that we will learn over the summer by watching the experts at

Singing Hands. Signing ability is not important—it's all about the enjoyment of performance and raising a bit of awareness. Email us on

[enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk) to find out more or express an interest.





# SEND Chat and Play

Thursday 17th July 10am



**Up On Downs**

Drop us an email to let us know you can make it:  
[enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk)

They have a selection of toys for all ages

Come and join Up on Downs at the Send chat and play. Meet other parents of children with Down's syndrome. Ideal for new parents and children under 5 years

**Broadwater Family Centre  
 Longmeadow Primary School  
 Stevenage, Oaks Cross  
 Hertfordshire  
 SG2 8LT**



## Teen and Young Adult Get Together Thursday 28th August—details TBC

Our teens had a great time at our bowling trip back at Easter and will be meeting again during the school holidays. The exact details will follow as our young people will be choosing the activity—crazy golf or bowling always popular. If you have a secondary school age to young adult in your family you are welcome to



join us and might be interested to know we have a WhatsApp group specifically for parents of this age group which is full useful chat and information. Let us know if you would like to join.



# St Albans Half Marathon 2025

A huge thank you to all the runners, walkers and cheerers who joined us at the St Albans Half Marathon and helped to make it such a great day—you were amazing!





# St Albans Half Marathon 2025





# MUMS NIGHT OUT



7PM  
SATURDAY,  
9<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2025

THE WHITE HORSE  
1 WHITE HORSE LANE,  
BURNHAM GREEN,  
DATCHWORTH, WELWYN  
AL6 0HA



PLEASE CALL OR MESSAGE GEMMA ON 07758467421  
IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN US. WE JUST NEED  
TO KNOW ROUGH NUMBERS TO RESERVE AND AREA

## Up on Downs Book Club

St Albans Library, Level 2, Maltings Shopping Centre AL1 3JQ  
Summer Holiday Tuesdays 6.00—7.00pm

Does your child or young adult enjoy books? Would you like to encourage and foster their love of books and reading whilst school is out? Would they like to take part in [Hertfordshire Libraries Summer Reading Challenge](#)? Why not join us on Tuesday evenings throughout the school hols for some fun book themed chat and activities aimed at improving social and communication skills and supporting anyone who would like to take on the Summer Reading Challenge.

Aimed at readers of all abilities, or pre-readers who are just enjoying books and stories in their own way, who would like to get together with others. Siblings welcome.

If you have any questions contact Jan at [enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk) or on 07738470634 or just join us in the Children's section in St Albans Library.





Enormous thanks  
to the Hitchin  
Property Trust for  
their grant of  
£7000

**HPT** HITCHIN  
PROPERTY  
TRUST

Many thanks to Victoria Burton for  
organising a WDSD fundraiser at Knutsford  
Primary Academy—here is son Adam  
helping to collect the cheque for £204.70!



Thanks to Bernards Heath  
Junior School for their WDSD  
fundraiser which raised £106



Our gratitude goes to the Statom  
Group for their donation of  
£1000.00 for our social events.

Huge thanks to the Challis family  
for their generous donation of  
£300 though Benevity, their  
workplace donation platform.

Thanks to the Freemasons  
Elstree Lodge of Instruction for  
their generous donation of £200

**STATOM GROUP**  
REMEDIATION • GROUNDWORKS • STRUCTURES





Many thanks to everyone who took part in the St Albans Half Marathon and all of their generous sponsors—Trish and Richard Hall raised £100!



Nick Probert raised an amazing £528.75—absolutely brilliant!

Jodie Donnelly and Del Lawton raised a superb £517.50—thank you so much!



The entire Jeram family ran, including a fancy dress contingent, and raised a super £351.25—great work everyone!

Thanks to The Grocers' Charity for their grant of £1,960 towards our work with new parents. Thanks also to member Karen Potton for her support with this.



THE  
GROCERS'  
CHARITY



# HOW TO FIND UP ON DOWNS

You can find us in a variety of ways, whatever way suits you best please come and find us:



[enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.nhdowns@yahoo.co.uk)



Call us on (01727) 420365



Visit the website: [www.upondowns.co.uk](http://www.upondowns.co.uk)



Up  
On Downs



Like Up on Downs on facebook

For members we have a private facebook group called Up on Downs Community. To request to join please go to our public page, click on groups tab to find the Up on Downs Community group.



Follow [upondowns\\_herts](#) on Instagram

Up on Downs, 20A Upper Culver Road, St Albans AL1 4EE  
Charity registration number 1126111