

"MY BOYS HAD THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME!"

Marie Carter, from Preston, shares how Dreamflight has helped her sons, Josh, 12, and Luke, 10



Josh and Luke were treated to a special NASA event when they visited Epcot on their dream holiday



Candis

Dreamflight

TOTAL RAISED
£62,832

THE FACTS

- Dreamflight was established in 1987 and has been operating annually since. The charity changes young lives by taking children with a serious illness or disability, minus their parents, to experience the theme parks of Orlando, Florida, for ten days.
- Dreamflight believes that having fun experiences is just as important as medical research and equipment; not all children can afford to wait for the treatment they need and others deserve to have a treat after illness or treatment that has brought pain and suffering into their lives.
- There are 192 children (8- to 14-year-olds) on each trip as well as volunteer doctors, nurses and physios and enough carers and helpers to support each child's individual needs.
- Visit: dreamflight.org

CHARITY NEWS

The boys were both nominated last April for a Dreamflight trip by the staff of Rainbow House, the rehabilitation and educational centre where Luke, now ten, has his therapy. Luke has cerebral palsy, which affects his mobility, and he's been going to Rainbow House since he was two. They provide lots of physio and conductive education to help him to lead a more active and independent life. Cognitively he's very bright but he cannot stand or walk without his walking frame. He has stiff limbs and a floppy body, which is common for people with cerebral palsy. Luke has an excellent memory and loves to recount facts, he's very competitive, has a strong personality and can be a little stubborn at times! He loves to watch football and my husband, Dave, takes him and Josh, 12, to support Preston North End every week. Josh also has ulcerative colitis, a chronic disease of the large intestine, which is regulated by taking a dose of anti-inflammatory mesalazine, which helps to prevent flare-ups. He also has other complications which have resulted in his having eight operations to date, he's a very brave boy.

Last June, Dreamflight invited both boys to Florida. Dave and I were thrilled and dying to tell them – I'd not mentioned the nomination, just in case they weren't allocated a place. The timing was perfect because Luke was in hospital recovering from a big operation – selective dorsal rhizotomy (SDR), which improves spasticity (muscle stiffness) in cerebral palsy.

It's a major operation but so worth it if it helps to improve Luke's mobility and ease the muscle pain and tightness he suffers from. We took Josh to visit Luke in hospital that evening and gave them the good news together. They were so excited! Luke was hospitalised for three weeks and having the trip to look forward to lifted his spirits. He also has



The boys had the time of their lives in Florida, particularly when they went swimming with dolphins



to have intense physiotherapy for two years, and was motivated to give his all in the sessions to have the best mobility possible for the holiday.

Luke was able to travel to Florida because the volunteers who go with them are all doctors, nurses, physios and/or other medical professionals, which meant that he could continue with his therapy while he was away. When the time came to travel, last October, Luke was strong enough to go. He was still quite stiff in the mornings but I was reassured he wouldn't relapse on the ten-day trip because he was in safe hands.

Nevertheless, it was difficult for Dave and me to place our trust in the carers, particularly as the children hadn't been away from home without us before, let alone thousands of miles away. The staff at Dreamflight helped us hugely, answering all our questions, and by the time of the trip we felt confident that everything would be OK.

The holiday began with a 'Departure Weekend', when 12 groups travel from their own regions to a hotel near Heathrow Airport on the Saturday afternoon. They were met there by an array of

characters from *Star Wars*, Harry Potter and Disney princesses, as well as police dogs and horses. They were also joined by medal-winning Paralympians, many of whom have been Dreamflight children in the past.

In the evening, BAFTA Award-winning duo Dick and Dom hosted a spectacular party for all the children. The night was rounded off with a marching band before the children made their way to bed, to rest for the big day on the Sunday.

On Sunday, the groups were taken to the special departure hangar, escorted by police motorcycles, and celebrities Joe Swash and Stacey Solomon waved the children off.

The ten days that followed were filled with fun and new experiences for our boys. They both found swimming with dolphins to be the ultimate highlight of the trip. Josh loves animals and was really looking forward to it, while Luke was a bit more wary. But once he saw the others taking part, it gave him the confidence to join in. When he got home, he told us it was THE best experience of his whole life! Josh also enjoyed seeing the film sets of *Star Wars* and Harry Potter at Universal Studios, while Luke

wanted to go on all the fastest rides – he thrives on adrenalin. They both visited Epcot, where they

were treated to a special NASA event. Every evening, there was something different planned, including a Halloween party. While away, the boys didn't share a room – they were with children of their own age, which was nice because I'd been a bit worried that Josh would feel he had to care for Luke and not enjoy the holiday as much himself. We were in touch with the boys throughout the holiday via WhatsApp – they sent photos to us and we could see they were fine.

Since they've been home, we've noticed Luke has gained confidence – I think being away without us showed him he can manage and take more responsibility for himself. Josh seems more independent, too – he appears to be growing into a kind and thoughtful young man. It's hard to put into words how fantastic the experience was for both our boys – we could never have afforded such a big holiday and it would have been difficult to manage and cater for Luke's needs. Dreamflight is such an amazing charity, offering children not only the opportunity of a fantastic holiday, but the courage to step out of their comfort zones as well as be themselves with people who respect and understand them for who they are. *

Before all the children set off for the US, TV personalities Dick and Dom hosted a spectacular party



THE CANDIS BIG GIVE

The money raised in The Candis Big Give will support former Dreamflight children after the trip, by providing help which could be in the form of sports training, grants or workplace mentoring. The aim is to give them an extra boost in reaching their potential.

THE CANDIS BIG GIVE

AS TOLD TO SALLY EVANS

DONATIONS TO DATE

We never forget it's YOUR subscriptions that enable Candis Club to give huge amounts to charities.

Our running total shows how much

£31,620,386
to the Cancer and Polio Research Fund (1962 to 2002)

£4,429,597
to the National Asthma Campaign (1990 to 2002)

£5,500,979
to Marie Curie (1998 to 2012)

£3,304,767
to Macmillan Cancer Support (1993 to 2013)

£3,309,982
to Bliss, the special care baby charity (1990 to 2009)

£2,190,977
to Liverpool University's Cancer Tissue Bank Research Centre (1989 to 1993)

£1,549,998
to the British Heart Foundation (2002 to 2008)

£914,053
to local groups via the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) (1990 to 2009)

£220,000
to ICAN (1989)

£246,876
to Tommy's, the baby charity (2006 to 2009)

£303,774
to Children's Hospices UK (2008 to 2010)

£2,000,000
to charities in The Candis Big Give

TOTAL TO DATE
£55,591,389

Make a difference

We've highlighted some of the charities taking part in The Candis Big Give. For a full list, and details of the life-changing projects they're raising money for, visit candis.co.uk/charity

Action for Stammering Children

What it does: Offers specialist support to help young people who stammer and their families.

Candis Big Give project: To provide more than 600 phone calls by speech and language therapists to youths with stammers, to offer support.

Location: National
Total raised: £31,177

Reverse Rett

What it does: Works towards cures for and treatments to Rett syndrome and related MECP2 disorders.

Candis Big Give project: To fund the MECP2 Gene Therapy Consortium.
Location: National
Total raised: £97,382

St Peter & St James Hospice

What it does: Provides care to the terminally ill and supports families.

Candis Big Give project: To make the hospice 'dementia-friendly' to meet needs of patients who are terminally ill and also have dementia.

Location: Sussex
Total raised: £48,623

SeeAbility

What it does: Supports people who have sight loss and multiple disabilities.

Candis Big Give project: To offer an outreach service for those suffering from juvenile Batten disease.

Location: National
Total raised: £56,827

Rethink Mental Illness

What it does: Offers support to anyone affected by mental illness.

Candis Big Give project: To set up a new support group.
Location: National
Total raised: £4,989

Action Medical Research

What it does: Finds and funds medical research across the UK to make a difference to sick children.

Candis Big Give project: To find new treatments for juvenile Batten disease.
Location: National
Total raised: £42,881

HOW BUYING A SUBSCRIPTION HELPS...

In 2018, Candis Club will donate at least £250,000 from members' magazine subscription revenue to health charities taking part in The Candis Big Give. Any additional funds will go to charities at the discretion of the General Committee of Candis Club.