

Half-Yearly Report Jan - June 2026

A Message From Steph

2026 is the pivotal year in Gympanzees' journey, and we are half way through! The first half of the year has had some incredible fundraising highs, taking us over the £8 million mark. Although we have more to do before we can open our doors, this is a great achievement by the team and drives the momentum as we enter the final stretch.

We're delighted by the positive engagement we've received from my new articles in the LinkedIn newsletter and our 'year ahead' Webinar in which we launched our **'Supporter Sprint'** community fundraising campaign. ✨

I'm thrilled to see the room designs nearing completion with equipment orders underway, as well as the detailed planning and designs of the centre's operations and services. Our vision is becoming more real, and with each passing month, it is developing into something even better than we could have possibly imagined when we started this adventure.

The first six-months wasn't all plain sailing. As can often be the case with the redevelopment of a large 1960's building, we've unearthed several challenges during site renovations, particularly with the floor. The outcome of which has meant that our opening will be pushed to early next year, rather than late this year. Whilst a set-back, we cannot and will not rush or compromise the end product, and the flooring plays a major role in getting it right, ensuring we can build rooms that are sensorially sensitive to the multitude of needs we are meeting. This has impacted on our fundraising target too. We now need to raise a further £1m and whilst we have a strong pipeline of funding opportunities, its never been more important to meet like-minded individuals and businesses who can help in this final straight. If you can offer any further support or help broaden our networks, we'd love to speak with you.

So as to keep our commitment to our families that 2026 will deliver for them, we have decided to host a 10th and final Pop Up spanning the first three-weeks of August. I do hope you might come along and see us during this window. Huge thanks to the Kenny Family for helping fund this Pop Up event.

The team's energy and determination coming into 2026 is greater than ever. New partnerships forming, a packed events calendar, fundraising campaigns in full swing and a building on the brink of transformation into our dream centre for the disabled community. It's a busy year ahead and I'm hugely thankful to everyone who continues to help make Gympanzees centre an ever-closer reality!

Warmest wishes,

Steph

Stephanie Wheen
CEO & Founder
Gympanzees



The Build

The team at Oakland Construction, together with our outstanding design consultants Stride Treglown, Giraffe Engineering, Box Twenty, and Sweco, have been working tirelessly to transform the Gympanzees site into our future permanent home. Their collaboration, expertise and commitment continue to drive the project forward as we move from construction into creating the incredible spaces our children and families will enjoy.

One of the most exciting transformations has been the Trampoline Room. The trampoline pit excavation has been completed, the concrete lining installed, and a second-floor opening has been created to provide the height needed for this spectacular space. Alongside this, we are working with specialist partners to develop a fully accessible climbing wall, ensuring children of all abilities will be able to experience the excitement and challenge of climbing.

Across the rest of the centre, significant progress has been made in the detailed design of our activity spaces. The Dark Sensory Room is fully designed, funded and ready to progress. The Active Sensory Room has its core equipment confirmed, with final room layouts now being completed. The gym equipment has been finalised, while our Changing Places facilities are fully funded and equipment has been ordered.

The Celebration Room is being designed as a truly unique space, with immersive technology and fully customisable equipment that will allow every child to celebrate birthdays and milestones in a way that meets their individual needs. We can't wait to see the memories that will be created here.



Outside, our accessible playground continues to move forward, with the order confirmed and site surveys completed. The Soft Play area remains one of the project's most technically complex spaces, with the design team integrating a ceiling hoist system that will enable children with physical disabilities to independently access both levels of the play structure. Meanwhile, the Swing Room, Hangout, and Music Room have all progressed into active design, bringing us another step closer to completing the full visitor experience.

Accessibility remains at the heart of every design decision. Our specialist hoist supplier, TVM, continues to work closely with the wider design team to ensure seamless accessibility throughout the building, helping us deliver spaces that are genuinely inclusive for every child and young person.

As with many refurbishment projects, opening up the existing building revealed some unexpected challenges. Once the original floor was removed, it became clear that the condition of the underlying sub-base was not suitable to support the proposed floor construction. This issue could only be identified after construction had begun.

To ensure the building meets the highest standards of safety and longevity, works were temporarily paused while the project team investigated the issue, redesigned the floor build-up and agreed a revised construction solution. Although this resulted in additional programme time, the issue has now been fully resolved, ensuring the new floor will provide a safe, compliant and durable foundation for the permanent centre.

Since early June, progress has accelerated significantly. The rebuilding of the floor has begun, with the first layer of screed installed to raise the floor towards its finished level. This has been followed by the installation of the radon barrier and protective Treadguard layer, key elements of the new floor construction that will provide long-term protection and performance. With these foundations now in place, work is continuing to build the centre from the ground up, taking us one step closer to opening our doors to families at Easter next year.



Centre Manager Update

Our new Centre Manager, Emily, has hit the ground running on operational planning, family engagement, and accessibility-led designs for the Centre ahead of opening.



Two Visitor Information Sessions, held at ICC Wales and 'We the Curious' (Bristol), gave families a preview of room designs, session types, and how the centre will operate day-to-day. The response was very positive, with families seeing how their needs have been built into every aspect of the designs.

The outdoor playground was a standout hit and its design is progressing to be safe and accessible for every child. We've also hosted several online versions which were well attended, with lots of excited families, young people and other charity partners. These events were kindly sponsored by our Founding Member Irwin Mitchell, and we are hugely grateful for their continued support.

Meetings with The Feeding Trust and café designers and suppliers have been shaping plans to provide a flexible, deconstructed "pick and mix" menu in the cafe, with sectioned plates, varied cutlery and a range of furniture for all needs, alongside adaptive kitchen equipment to support disabled staff and volunteers, embedding accessibility and inclusivity into back-of-house operations as well as the customer-facing experience.



Meetings with access control providers have focused on secure zoning across the building, ensuring safe and flexible operational flow for all user groups. We are exploring an automated fogging system to efficiently disinfect spaces out of hours, with the potential to support allergy-specific sessions and wider facility decisions are being guided by sensory, practical, and hygiene considerations throughout.

Development has begun on tiered party packages and off-peak programming, whilst exploring how we can support schools through alternative provision opportunities and volunteer days have resumed, supporting ongoing site maintenance and outdoor preparation.

The Gympanzees Centre's operational design is in full swing, ensuring that when the doors open, every detail has been considered through a disability lens whilst balancing our ambition to deliver a fully inclusive, best-in-class facility within budget.



The Lending Library

2025 proved a record year for the Lending Library with our items accumulating nearly 2,000 days of combined use as we continued to expand our reach to more families, schools and organisations in need of specialist equipment.

In the first half of 2026 the Lending Library has welcomed lots of new members and a further 15 schools and organisations.



There have been over 250 loans, reaching families and organisations through deliveries, hub collections, and pickups. The library is also expanding, with stock growing to over 500 individual items, and 29 fee waivers supported by the Mothers' Union, ensuring cost remains no barrier and providing more opportunities to the families who need this specialist equipment the most. The hub network now includes these locations across Bristol, South Gloucestershire and South Wales, thanks to our partners:

- Kingswood (South Glos Parent Carers)
- Stonehouse (Red Lodge Children and Family Centre)
- Newport (Serennu Children's Centre)
- Caerphilly Children's Centre
- Radstock (Old Printworks Arts)
- Abergavenny (Gwent Parent Carer Hub)
- Clevedon (Baytree Partnership Hub)

A huge thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund, Foyle Foundation and the Mason Charitable Foundation who continue to support our ever-expanding Lending Library service delivery.



Lending Library Feedback

“More chances to move mean F is happier and more regulated and is learning how to self regulate more and more. So less meltdowns. She is calmer after having used the equipment and will take herself to the play tent to read and relax when she needs some down time. And there is a knock-on effect with the rest of the family feeling calmer and happier.”

Fundraising Campaign



The last six months have been extremely busy in the fundraising team. We've seen the conclusion of some bids that have taken nearly two years to come to fruition, as well as welcoming new funders from across all income streams, all of whom are helping us march towards the opening next year. Early in the year we were delighted to announce news of a £1m Capital grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, following their initial £500k grant at the end of 2024.

We've also begun a new partnership with Lifelites, an amazing organisation who are funding the £250k build and fit-out of our Celebration Room, whilst the Wolfson Foundation has part-funded the build of our kitchen.

We would also like to thank all other donors including; the Nuclear Restoration Services, Dorothy Pamela Smith CIO, South Gloucestershire Learning Difficulties Fund, The Wyld Family, Fairplay, Bailey Thomas Fund, Rockcliffe Charitable Trust, Ashfield Land Ltd, Digby Player Associates, Denman Charitable Trust, amongst others. We were delighted to have been awarded a grant from Moondance Foundation to support the purchase of gym equipment. A funder with a keen focus on supporting causes that benefit the communities in Wales, this award is a wonderful reflection of our reach and impact across South Wales and beyond.

Everyone of these awards are impactful and making a difference. If you or someone you know is a trustee at a grant-giving trust or foundation or use such a structure to give personally, we would welcome a conversation. Please do get in touch with **jack@gympanzees.org**. There is still vital work to fund, and the right partnership at this stage can make a lasting difference.



Corporate Partnerships

At the start of 2026, we warmly welcomed Alastair Lee to the team as our new Business Development Manager, who's been busy increasing our reach and engagement.



Thank you to Ghyston and BaseKit, who have chosen us as their charity of the year. Ghyston's team hit the ground running by taking on the Newport City Half Marathon.

At the beginning of this year, Momentum Corporate Finance kindly pledged to double their support spanning three years. The Mortgage Advice Bureau Foundation granted up to £5k in match funding for the London Marathon fundraiser Sharon Worthy, who ran alongside Annabel Purnell and Robert Harding. St James Place and Turner & Townsend volunteered with our Lending Library. Irwin Mitchell kindly sponsored our April Visitor Information Days, and Container Team continues their annual support. Brain Injury Group invited us to the Child Brain Injury Conference and we exhibited at Purposefest, a great event connecting with current supporters and businesses from the B Corp community.

In May RWK Goodman donated £50,000 following the winding down of a clients estate, this gift in memoriam was an unexpected act of generosity, and one that will have a deep and meaningful impact on our work.

If you are in a similar position working on behalf of an estate or family, and would like to discuss how you can have a similar impact, we would welcome the opportunity to do so.

In mid-June we were thrilled to join SR2 at their H1 summit whereupon they presented the final instalment of their pledge to help fund the Reception area. This brings their total support since 2022 to over £130,000.

More than 1 in 10 working parents are caring for a disabled child. A partnership with us sends a clear signal that you stand with the disabled community and their families, championing equity and inclusivity in helping create a UK-First. If you'd like to explore ideas and opportunities, please contact **alastair@gympanzees.org**



Events

The 2026 events calendar is shaping up to be our most popular yet.

Great Bristol Run - Sunday 10th May 2026

All 10K places for the Great Bristol Run sold out and we had a staggering 100 runners pushing themselves over the line in support of Gympanzees. A big thanks to Consort Services Ltd for sponsoring running tops and goody bags.

Dragon Boat Race - Sunday 5th July 2026

Dragon Boat Race is always one of our most popular high energy, fun and exciting events of the year, and this time was no different. The competition was fierce and it turned out to be a fantastic day. Huge thanks to our headline sponsor Sweet Projects and our day sponsor Qroutes. It was great seeing all teams battling it out on the water!

Annual Golf Day - Wednesday 16th September 2026

Our Annual Golf Day returns to Thornbury Golf Centre, with Oaklands confirmed as headline sponsor. Teams are now signing up to join us on the course, and 14-hole sponsorships are still available, offering a strong branding opportunity for businesses on the day.

Pembrokeshire Coastal Path Walk - Wednesday 16th September 2026

Longstanding support Paul Spicer and Guest Day Fundraisers are taking on the challenge of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, in September. They'd love you to join or support their efforts.

For more info check out our events page!

If you or anyone you know is interested in supporting or sponsoring any of our events, please email

hannah.penfold@gympanzees.org ✨

Get involved!

Check out further information on our **'Supporter Sprint'** coming later this year and how you can support! ✨



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Thank you for being part of our journey. We're always happy to hear your thoughts, questions, or ideas about our campaign, your input makes a real difference. Stay connected and follow our latest updates, stories, and behind-the-scenes moments on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

Help us build something extraordinary

We're creating a centre that will change the lives of thousands of families every year. We're building a model that will be replicated across the UK.

Together, we're part of a ripple effect of true inclusion in society. Every session we run unlocks joy. Every lesson we learn will be shared. Every role we have will be open to all. Every centre we open will amplify this across the country.

Your partnership will help make this happen.



Get in touch

Book a call with **Jack Lewis**,
Director of fundraising

 JACK@GYMPANZEES.ORG



Or with **Alastair Lee**,
**Business Development
Manager**

 ALASTAIR@GYMPANZEES.ORG



Our values

GOLD STANDARD INCLUSION

Every disabled child and young person deserves equal access to exercise, play and connection.

PIONEERING CO-CREATION

We're building something the world has never seen before, and we're doing it together with disabled people and their families.

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

Every child and young person has potential waiting to be unlocked. We create the conditions where that potential can shine.



Charity Number 1189375