

# bccs news



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## A Christmas Message from our President

As the season of advent approaches, we begin to focus on the image of the crib – our Christian symbol of family life – as it appears in homes and parishes throughout the diocese of Brentwood.

It has been a difficult year for families many of whom have been dealing with sickness, loneliness, financial hardship and bereavement. Even those who have managed to avoid such difficulties have been distanced from loved ones, unable to care for or visit older family members or pay their last respects in our traditional ways.

Children and young people have missed the important structure of school routines and the company of their peers during lockdown. For some, this has been an inconvenience they have become accustomed to. For others less fortunate, it has been a period of hardship as families struggle to put food on the table, to home-school children without the necessary technology, or to shield their children from an abusive home-life.

We are extremely fortunate to have in our midst our own diocesan children's charity which has been supporting the wellbeing of families for more than 35 years. During the past eight months, their work has continued in schools and homes throughout Essex and East London as professional staff embraced new ways of communicating and supporting families and school staff.

**bccs** has continued to reach out to those young people and families whose mental health has been adversely affected by lockdown and the ensuing family pressures. We are grateful for everything they do but we are aware that they need our help in order to safeguard their future work.



The **bccs** team has worked tirelessly and imaginatively to raise the money needed to sustain this vital service. I would ask you all to take a minute to read about their work in this newsletter and to remember the staff and trustees in your prayers at this time. If you are able to, please make a donation to their work through the crib offering boxes in your parish church or via their website.

Christmas is a time for families; however we are able to share Christmas this year we should give thanks for the example of the Holy Family and will keep in our hearts those for whom this year will be particularly difficult.

May the blessings of the Holy Family be with you all at Christmas.

Bishop Alan SM

## A huge thank you to all the clubs, societies and committees who have fundraised for us throughout the year!

Societies, clubs and community groups play a vital role raising funds and increasing awareness for us. We take great pride in our strong links to local organisations and are very grateful to them all for their support.

Several Catenian Circles have nominated us as their charity of the year and anticipating early in lockdown the increased demand for our services, responded quickly to our need by making regular donations in lieu of their usual fundraising activities.

Some Catholic Women's League Sections supported us by joining in with our 'Hats on for bccs' remote event in place of our Ascot Ladies' Lunch in June while the Knights of St Columba and other parish groups walked for us during September as part of our Virtual Fun Walk.

Thanks also to our volunteers and challengers who supported remote events and undertook virtual challenges for us and helped us significantly with their fundraising.

This is indeed 'community at its best' and we thank them all for being there for us during these challenging times.



# Supporting our families in difficult times

Our holistic approach of supporting the child, the family and the school allows us to keep the needs of the child central to our collective thinking

We are immensely proud to say that we have continued to support children, young people and their families all through lockdown and have been alongside them as they transitioned back into school routines in September. As we anticipated, the lockdown period has left some psychological scars on the children and young people in our community with families feeling stressed, stretched and isolated during the initial period of lockdown. Now at this stage, we are beginning to repair the scars left by lockdown which are manifesting in various guises:

## Families and schools dealing with bereavement in a much larger context than ever before

## Self-berating parents who feel they didn't do a 'good enough job'

## Isolated adolescents who lost touch with their peer groups and who are struggling to reintegrate and re-connect

## Children preoccupied and burdened by having witnessed the distress of a parent or parents, or who have carried worries about adult issues such as financial stresses who have returned to school as different children

One family we supported lost a parent to COVID. We had anticipated it and knew that the ripple effect would be more far-reaching than normal. A mother lost her life and left behind three children, all under the age of 11. Not only did we support the children and father, we knew it was important to also support school staff who were faced with the uncomfortable reality of something very frightening feeling suddenly very close to home. As a society, we could argue we have all done as we have been asked, with the sole motivation of keeping the virus at bay. When it hits a family, and as a result a school or a Church community - the virus feels larger, scarier and more threatening than when we read about it in the newspaper

or on social media. So our response needed to encompass this: we supported a father, three children, a body of teaching staff affected not only by the death of one of their own, but whose own fears had been triggered about the virus and their exposure to it.

Staff who had no therapeutic training were called on to engage a little boy back into the school setting when he wanted to stay at home and wait for his Mummy to come back. They had to give permission to an older sibling to grieve, to bear the brunt of the anger and fear of a daughter who felt out of control of her world and to support a father who had lost his wife and was at a loss to know how he could possibly support his children.

Our work was vital within this community and we were proud to be able to help. This work will continue for a considerable period of time yet. To date, our work has involved hours of contact, therapy, calls, meetings, supervisions and discussions within the team and this is just in the support of one family's situation.

With Christmas approaching, we are mindful that it will feel different in so many ways for the children and young people in our care. We may not be able to celebrate alongside our families or attend Church in the traditional sense. Sadly, there may be people missing from some families and our work to support these families will not end. With the continuing help of our supporters in schools, parishes and homes throughout Brentwood Diocese, we will continue to work tirelessly to understand and to manage just what Christmas may look and feel like for each family in our care.

*"We are so grateful to our bccs worker for the face to face work she has been doing with our children. bccs is the only external provider coming in to school and this has been a 'lifesaver' to us."*

## Embracing new ways of delivery to schools

Our schools' mindfulness workshops have been our 'best seller' for a while now and during these challenging times it feels even more important to offer teachers the chance for some self-care within a facilitated and supportive environment.

Why does Mindfulness help? The source of our worries is often based in a past or future event; it has now been scientifically proven that trying to live a little more in the present helps to reduce stress. Working in schools is demanding, especially now and so it is recognised that mindfulness is a skill that can help staff to meet these challenges.

Many schools are still booking face to face sessions and we are happy to deliver these. However, for some schools there is not the room for all staff to be together in a socially distanced way and others are not inviting external agencies into school as

part of their COVID risk assessment. So, how do we reach staff when we can't be physically present? The answer is via a live stream from our laptops.

Our first live-stream session took place in October with over 30 members of staff attending from a local primary school. The workshop was delivered via Zoom - an on-line communications platform - and staff could join from their laptops at school or from home. Staff had the chance to learn about the theory behind mindfulness and, more importantly, to engage in different practices collectively which will help them moving forward. We are pleased to continue to support staff and pupils both remotely and in schools during the coming months. For more information about our workshops visit our website:

[www.bccs.org.uk/our-services](http://www.bccs.org.uk/our-services)



We are very sorry that we have had to cancel our Christmas Ladies' Lunch on Friday 4th December. However, following on from the success of our virtual 'Hats On' event in June and in line with government advice, we hope to invite supporters all over the diocese to hold a little festive event in their own homes to raise vital funds for us.

Following recommendations on numbers and social bubbles, could you get together and have a brunch/lunch or afternoon tea, put on a festive hat, maybe hold a raffle and ask for a contribution to be made to our work?

We would love to hear from you if you are interested in hosting a 'Festive Hats On' event for us - there were some fabulous photos shared with us on social media in the summer and it's a lovely way to keep in touch with our luncheon club members. Email Libby at [lphillips@bccs.org.uk](mailto:lphillips@bccs.org.uk) for more information or fundraising ideas and look out for updates on social media!

## Take A Minute Emergency Appeal

Firstly a huge 'Thank You' to everyone who has donated to our Take A Minute Appeal during this difficult year. When our appeal was launched it was with the hope that we could raise additional funds to support our work. With the arrival of a worldwide pandemic, it has taken on a completely new sense of urgency as more children and families find themselves having to navigate through very difficult and challenging times.

The suspension of our event and challenges portfolio has caused a significant reduction in our fundraising income while at the very same time the demand for our services has increased. Never have donations from our community been more vital so please donate if you can. To make a donation visit our website and click on the donate button or scan the QR code beside with the camera on your smartphone to go to our secure appeal page.



Thank you  
for your support.



*Light up an angel on our tree  
to remember a loved one.*



*Help us support  
children's mental  
health & wellbeing*

This year we are delighted to launch our new on-line **Tree of Angels** which will allow our supporters to light up an angel and post a virtual greeting or message of remembrance in the name of a loved one.

So many family events and celebrations have been postponed this year, opportunities to get together and share experiences have been missed and many of us have lost loved ones without being able to give them a traditional farewell. Our Tree of Angels can be used as a way of posting a prayer or dedication for a friend or family member to let them know you are thinking of them, to remember someone who has died or to simply place a message of thanks for the work of the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society.

Go to our website [www.bccs.org.uk](http://www.bccs.org.uk) and click on our Tree of Angels link to make a donation and light up an Angel. If you would like some help or more information about how to light an Angel in memory of a loved one, please contact Julie - [jabbott@bccs.org.uk](mailto:jabbott@bccs.org.uk)

**Thank you to Bennetts Funeral Directors for sponsoring our Tree of Angels**

## Annual Prize Draw

We have included a book of Grand Draw tickets with our Newsletter while understanding that many of you have already returned your Prize Draw stubs and money to us - thank you all for taking part. Please do not feel under any obligation to return these to us if you do not want to join in as we have plenty of spare tickets this year; you can simply re-cycle any unwanted tickets - thank you. Our Prize Draw will take place on Tuesday 12th January 2021 and we will notify winners as soon as possible following this date. Good luck!

## Christmas Cards - selling fast!

Thank you to everyone who has already requested their Christmas cards following our previous Newsletter. Sales have been brisk and we are so grateful for your support!

If you would like to order some of our religious-themed cards, please complete our order form and return to us as soon as possible; please do include a phone number in case we run out of your choices and need to make a substitution.

You can also make a direct payment into our bank account for your cards and scan your order form or email your requirement if you prefer. Simply go to [www.bccs.org.uk](http://www.bccs.org.uk), click to go to the Christmas tab and then on to our Christmas Card page for full details.



## Our Angels' Angel

Thanks to Linda, one of our volunteers who has been busy during lockdown stringing thousands of our little cardboard angels, we are able to send out an angel with each copy of our Christmas Newsletter. We have been sending these for many years to our supporters and parishes, inviting people to record a message or prayer for a loved one who is unwell or who has died. The angel can then be hung on your Christmas tree during the festive season. We are very grateful to Linda for giving up her time to do this for us.