

# bccs news



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## Sharing the hope of Advent



As I sit to write this update for our Christmas newsletter, I am also digesting the findings of the national survey of children undertaken by the Children's Commissioner earlier this year. 'The Big Ask' sought to find out how children were feeling in their own words, and it asked the big questions.

Many of the report's findings are reflected in our own experiences of working with children and young people, and what appears to be critical to the wellbeing of families across the country is the overarching need for communication – not just between children and their peers but between generations. Communication is central to the success of our work and every day we see how a loss of communication and connection within families can lead to sadness and difficulties for all; we explore this idea in more detail in our professional article overleaf.

However, the report finds that there is much to celebrate in our young people: they may be veterans of a global pandemic who have seen how frightening life can be up close, but they want to get on, to get back to normal, to see their friends, go to school, sit exams – and we are here to help overcome obstacles which may prevent them from moving on.

In response to the pandemic, our service provision has expanded and evolved, and we have successfully introduced a new on-line parent programme focused on managing children's anxieties. This offers remote support and strategies to help manage the multiple pressures of family life and is having a very positive impact. Our comprehensive Bereavement Support Package is available to help school staff and bereaved families directly while our Family Outreach Programme allows us to work directly with families in the home setting using a combination of social work and therapeutic approaches to support the family system.

Whilst our day-to-day practices involve us working therapeutically with the child and family, we also work quietly behind the scenes to improve the quality of families' lives and are always mindful of those families where parents are forced to work several jobs and unsociable hours simply to make ends meet.

As our thoughts turn towards Advent and the preparation for Christmas, we think particularly of these families who are facing extra pressure on their households during this period. If you can, please help us make a difference to them by supporting our Advent Appeal; your donations are always particularly welcome to us at this time of year, and we are grateful for every one we receive. We wish you all a very happy Christmas and thank you for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers this year.

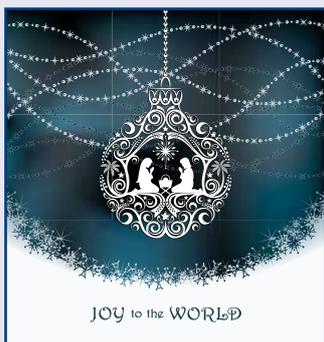
Bernadette Fisher  
Director

## Advent Appeal

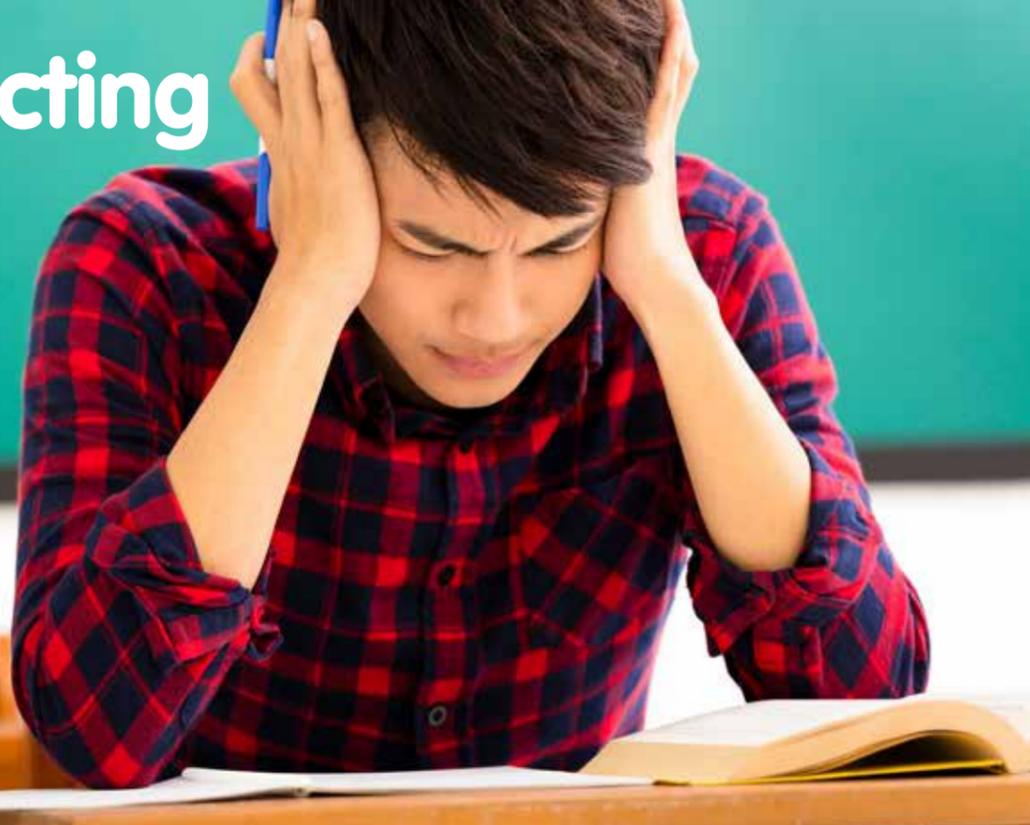
At the heart of Christmas is the family and more than ever, your support enables us to keep our communities connected. Thanks to your help this year, we have been able to celebrate some significant successes:

- 7000 sessions have been delivered to children and young people.
- 250 families will receive food vouchers this Christmas.
- 170 families have been supported with essentials via our Crisis Fund.
- 800 families have been supported directly by our schools' team.

**Please support our work by donating to our Advent Appeal. Thank you.**



# Reconnecting Families



***Our work with children and young people is our focus, wholeheartedly and unapologetically. Here Catherine, our Head of Schools Services, describes how a family became 'invisible' to one another and how our therapist worked with the whole family to help them to reconnect.***

We like to bring our work to life when we 'talk' to you, and we find it so satisfying when we can share with you what your support enables us to do. It is also gratifying when we receive your feedback and affirmation: whether that be verbal or financial – it spurs us on.

We worked recently with a family who had got lost within their relationships and their story – sadly – is very typical of our modern world. "David" is 15 and is studying hard at school; his mum and dad both work full-time. David's school had noticed that he often comments about his desire to please his parents, but this had taken him to extremes in his studies. When we first heard from David's school, the concern was that he was "too studious" and had "got lost in what is important." David was cramming every night at home and, given that his parents were often working late, he was doing this unsupervised, so no one knew the full extent of his anxiety and subsequent exhaustion.

We wanted to meet with the family as a whole before we decided where the therapy would be best provided. It felt a bit like the chicken and the egg – what came first? Does the focus of the work go into the anxious teenager, or into the family who have lost their pathways of communication?

We decided that the best course of action would be to work with this family as a whole. Our concern was that David was going to begin

to adopt OCD, controlling or self-harming behaviours to feel better as he was close to this when we assessed him. Our initial challenge was to help the family understand that this wasn't just 'David's problem'. We faced a lot of resistance, but we didn't give up. After several calls, we laid our concerns for David on the line and his parents consented to family therapy.

What struck our therapist most was the disconnection between David and between his parents: collectively as a three, but also individually. They had all got used to flying solo, and as a result they had stopped 'seeing' one another.

What is the result of disconnected families? In its most basic sense, everyone feels lonely. But it is more problematic than that: because people feel lonely, they work hard to try to connect, and the casualty is often the child or young person who needs and craves the attention and care of their parents. Why? Because, in their unconscious minds, to be absent from parental thinking is terrifying. Children are dependent on their parents to feed, clothe, nurture and protect them but when a parent is physically or psychologically absent, it triggers real distress and angst in a child and their behaviours begin to communicate this. David's behaviour and his commitment to making his parents feel proud of him, was really his communication of fear that he felt invisible, isolated and worried.

Our assessment proved to us that our instinct was right. There were several themes which were evident in each member of this small family.

Both parents felt huge guilt that they were out of the house so much. They felt pressurised into being at home to meet David's needs but then felt resentful of this because they had careers to attend to and so their guilt was layered. David also had to regulate feelings of guilt that he wasn't good enough: his unconscious belief was that his parents felt he wasn't important enough to be around for.

Each family member was dealing with stress but responding differently to it. In the classic format of fight/flight/freeze, David's dad fought. He challenged David's results and he was dismissive of his accomplishments, pushing him to work harder. Mum operated from the flight perspective: she found the conflict between David and his dad unbearable and didn't have the reserves to manage it, so she buried herself in her work and assured herself David was happy. David meanwhile operated from 'freeze' - he pushed himself in the forums he had control over (his studies), but when he was faced with his parents, he would freeze and couldn't think straight. He found it more peaceful to wrestle quietly with his studies and the control he felt in when he was working. His studies had become his avoidant place.

The parents were resentful of each other, of one another's careers and the resultant wrestle over who would be there for David. As a result, each person in this family felt isolated and fearful that they would be unable to get back what they had lost.

***Our therapist held this family in their separateness and worked with them collectively to understand each other's stance.***

This was, at face value, an exam-stress related case, but it was so much more than that. If we had worked on a one-to-one basis solely with David, we would only have been addressing the symptom of a much bigger, more painful and complex problem which is why our family therapy work is so crucial.

You will be pleased to know that David is thriving. His mum was able to change her working patterns and she and her husband now ensure they prioritise the important things: attentiveness to each other, time together, nurture, support, family mealtimes, time with David and time for each other. When they lose touch with this focus, they notice it and make efforts to rebalance things and because of this, David feels visible. He finds studying easier because he can absorb information, free from anxiety; he can celebrate his accomplishments, and he feels like his family is "a proper family".

We need your support, always and we are thankful for it. In this particular piece of work, we were not only able to celebrate our therapist's ability to hold the pain of a family, but we were able to celebrate our work as a whole. We achieve outcomes because of this and with your support, we will continue to help other families who find they have become disconnected and invisible.

## A Young Person's Voice



***We are very grateful to one of our young people who agreed to write about their experience of counselling, and we hope that by sharing their thoughts, it may encourage others to reach out for help if they need it.***

*'A lot of people around my age don't want to accept help from people, which is understandable. It's important to find a counsellor who is there for you, that you can easily feel comfortable with and most importantly, someone who has your best interest at heart.'*

*I am coming to the end of my appointments, and I feel with my counsellor I have come a long way. I have managed to come to terms with my feelings, understand them, realise who I am as a person, and I have learned ways to deal with my emotions in a healthy way.*

*I am not going to say that this whole experience is easy, it's not. When unpacking emotions that you have held in for a while, unpacking memories and making sense of these things, it's super tiring. However, the support during this journey was amazing, my counsellor has been so understanding and I have always felt comfortable around them. The outcome of my journey, I believe, is worth it. Looking back, seeing the change and how much knowledge I've gained, I am so thankful for the guidance and support. I would recommend anyone who is thinking about getting help, to get it.'*

# COMMUNITY CORNER

## Tree of Angels

Last year we were delighted to launch our new on-line Tree of Angels which allowed our supporters to light up an Angel and post a virtual greeting or message of remembrance in the name of a loved one.

This year, our Tree of Angels can be used again during November – the traditional month of remembrance – to post a prayer or dedication for someone who has died. It will continue to shine during Advent so that Christmas messages can also be shared with friends and family all over the world. You can upload a photo which will be displayed when you click on your Angel and there is a facility to share the link to your Angel with friends and family via social media or email.

Simply visit [www.visufund.com/treeofangels](http://www.visufund.com/treeofangels) or go to the Christmas tab on 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.



We would like to thank one of our former school therapists, Louise who has written a book to help children cope with feelings of anxiety. She has requested that all royalties from the purchase of the book will support our work and we are very grateful to her for this thoughtful pledge.



Louise's book was written for her grandchildren and can be purchased on Amazon. It is called **Lett-Uce Eat** by Louise Saad.

## 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 **11th January 2022** - Good luck!

## Festive Hats On

Increased event costs and uncertainty around large participation events mean that we are unable to host our usual Christmas Ladies' Lunch this December. We are sad not to see our friends for the second year running but are very grateful to several groups who have said they will hold a little festive gathering and raise some funds for us.

If you would like to put your Festive Hats On for **bccs**, we would love to hear about it and see your photos. Email Libby [lphillips@bccs.org.uk](mailto:lphillips@bccs.org.uk) for information and fundraising suggestions.

## 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 have already run out of design E Unto Us A Child Is Born.

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.

You can also 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 where you can download an order form and pay directly into our bank account if preferred.



For further information on these events or help and support on hosting your own fundraising event, please contact Julie Abbott on 01268 784544 or [jabbott@bccs.org.uk](mailto:jabbott@bccs.org.uk)

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