



Continuing our work through lockdown

Our Director Bernadette Fisher recounts the experiences of guiding bccs through this challenging period



As I watched the daily news in early March - the 'R' number rising daily and the traumatic scenes from Italian hospitals - the writing was on the wall: schools were going to close, lockdown was imminent.

Two weeks before lockdown, our professional team began preparing children and families for the inevitable change in support. Children were prepared for the break in face-to-face sessions and reassured that support would continue albeit in a different way. It was important that we showed them that we were thinking about them and still available to them. From a practical point of view this meant purchasing Zoom licences, training the team to use this new video platform and introducing it as an appropriate means of communication to our children, young people, families, staff and schools.

Regular telephone check-ins, weekly Zoom sessions and emailed resources soon became the norm. It was immediately evident that support for parents managing the multi-layered challenges of home schooling and home working whilst containing their children's anxieties would be central to our work. We offered consultation and support to parents and in doing so provided a sounding board for feelings of stress, inadequacy and worries about how these feelings would affect their child.

Whilst we were faced with the challenges of sustaining therapeutic support for children, school staff on the front line were faced with the challenges of teaching and caring for vulnerable children and those of keyworkers. It quickly became apparent that we needed to support our school colleagues in whatever way we could: reflective discussions, supervision and therapy was offered.

One of the most heart-breaking and toughest decisions we made was to close our charity shop in Highams Park. We are eternally grateful to our amazing and spirited group of volunteers who have given unstinting support to us over the last 25 years and in doing so have enhanced the lives of many children.

Like many other charities our fundraising and events portfolio was suspended and our Marketing & Fundraising Team had to work creatively to keep in touch with supporters and to offer different ways of raising funds through on-line challenges and remote events. Our social media platforms became an invaluable way to disseminate news, share new resources and advise of changes to working practices.

Without doubt this pandemic will re shape the lives of many in our community and has certainly changed our way of working.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our community as a whole: our volunteers who have been tremendous in hosting and supporting our on-line events and participating in our challenges; our trustees who have used this period as an opportunity to review our internal systems and policies; our staff who have shown professionalism and dedication in our mission to enhance the lives of children and families; and finally thanks to our dear supporters for their continued and generous support during this challenging time.

*During lockdown we delivered
over 500 sessions to children and
over 50 sessions to school staff*

Bernadette Fisher
Director



From the Front Line

Some of the bccs professional team share their experiences of providing front line support to children, families and school staff during lockdown.

The new normal

It is 17th March 2020 and my last day in schools before lockdown. There is a general sense of unease about what is to come, the children's reaction is mixed. Some are pleased at the prospect of not attending school, others dreading the loss of security and community provided by this anchor they so rely on.

March 23rd: we have woken up to a new world as lockdown is announced. I swiftly download and familiarise myself with the on-line platform Zoom and a new way of working. One week in and I review my caseload:

I have a child living in cramped, shared, temporary accommodation who has fallen ill with Covid-19 symptoms along with other family members.

I have children living separately from their parents, frontline NHS workers, overloaded and stressed.

I have children cared for by vulnerable grandparents doing their best in very challenging situations and single parents, at home and isolated with young families, one of whom - a keyworker - has also contracted the virus.

Some families are struggling to home-educate children, one is sharing a computer also needed for remote working by a parent.

Another family has lost a beloved grandparent and is devastated at not having been able to be with them when they passed.

The following week I receive a new referral for an 8-year-old boy. Most of his family has contracted Covid-19 with his dad currently hospitalised in ICU. The child is healthy but terrified, having frequent panic attacks and is convinced everyone close to him is going to die. I speak to his mum, who is recovering but extremely fragile and suggest some strategies I think may be helpful, including a creative project which I feel may focus her son's mind



elsewhere at least temporarily. We also look at what might help to alleviate her own stress at this awful time. A few days later and I speak to her son on the phone - his father is now out of danger and recovering well. We talk about the project I have given him, which he is enjoying and other ways of emotionally self-regulating in challenging circumstances which he feels might work for him. He tells me about himself, what he is interested in, what he enjoyed doing before lockdown and what life is like now.

A week later and everyone in the family is now safely at home and recovering. The boy's mum tells me he is much improved and no longer having the extreme panic attacks that so scared her, though still up and down in his moods. In the weeks that follow we look at lots of different strategies to help with his anxiety, we practise positive thinking and I give him the time and space to talk about his recent experiences. We play games and talk about what he is looking forward to as lockdown eases. A few weeks later he returns to school part-time and is coping well. I am happy he is now in a much better place and will be well prepared to face whatever challenges the new school year may bring in September.

A reflective look at how one parent coped during lockdown

Lockdown is upon us and uncertain times lie ahead. Families are now together in a way they have never known; parents and carers faced with months of keeping it all together indoors. Never has the need to go to the park been greater, admiration of our frontline workers higher.

One of the hardest things for a parent is to admit they are not enough for their child if things start to go wrong and they have to reach out for help. One of the privileges of our work is to speak with parents, to hear about their families, their backgrounds, their support networks, their aspirations and their fears.

The question that I ask parents sometimes is: 'who is supporting you?' This aspect is often overlooked; too occupied with the demands of the family, parents often carry on unsupported. During the lockdown period, I spoke to a parent who was still working whilst her husband was at home with the early stages of a terminal degenerative illness. The referral for support was actually for her son who is not talking about his concerns. After speaking with the son, it was apparent that not talking was not necessarily a problem for him at this time as he was processing the situation and the timing wasn't right for that discussion to take place just yet.

Mum had been proactive and supportive in finding simple activities such as a walk in the woods, where she could spend time with her son, giving him the opportunity to have a safe place to talk should he need to. I thought she was amazing, so I told her so. She cried: full of self-doubt as to whether she was doing the right thing.

Supermum/dad is a lofty ambition most of us can only aspire to. Good enough parenting will do nicely.

A partner school tells how our support has made a difference

Since reopening on 2nd June for some pupils, we have also been able to welcome back our bccs counsellor into school. She is an integral part of our school's inclusive ethos and so in planning our reopening, it was a priority for us to have her back in school as soon as possible to support our staff and pupil wellbeing.

Over the period of lockdown our counsellor has continued to support her key children and families through virtual meetings and telephone calls. Since her return, she has been extremely creative with how she works with children and can often be found wandering the school field with a child. We have found it immensely reassuring that we have had the expertise and support of bccs at this time. It has enabled us to work collaboratively to create a recovery curriculum that meets the needs of our children and supports the emotional wellbeing of our staff.

Lisa Patmore - Ghyllgrove Primary School.

Supporting School Staff

Our holistic approach to supporting children's mental health means we are not only here for children but also their families and teachers too. We have provided more professional supervision and therapy to school staff than ever before to help them process the stresses and pressures of working in a school environment during the pandemic. We have devised a training programme for the first half of the autumn term designed to help teachers and staff support children returning into the school setting with special emphasis on coping with loss, bereavement and anxiety.

Contact Louise Picton for more information lpicton@bccs.org.uk



"I feel torn between caring for my children and my students. I feel I end up doing nothing very well despite my best efforts. Supervision with bccs always leaves me feeling lighter and I can think less emotively."

Take A Minute Emergency Appeal

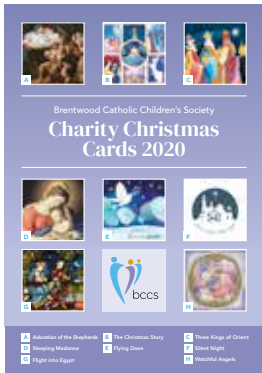
When our **Take A Minute Appeal** was launched last year, it was with the hope that we could raise an additional £35,000 to boost our funds. Several months later, with the arrival of this new worldwide challenge, our appeal took on a completely new sense of urgency as we faced into our new reality: a potential loss in our event-led fundraising alone of around £50,000 and an inevitable increase in the number of children, young people and families who were going to require our specialist services.

Your donations will help to safeguard our future and allow us to continue our important work in the diocese - Thank you.



Scan and click to make a secure online donation

COMMUNITY CORNER



2020 Charity Christmas Cards now in stock!

Choose from our new selection of charity Christmas cards – there is something to suit everyone. Packs of 10 cards cost £3.99 or buy 3 packs for £11. All proceeds from the sale of our Christmas cards will help make a difference to the lives of the children and families we support.

With our office team working remotely, we would ask you to place your order as soon as possible. This will allow us to deliver your cards in a safe and timely fashion.

Repository – if you would like further information about stocking our cards in your parish shop, please contact Libby lphillips@bccs.org.uk

Our new order form is available to download from our website at www.bccs.org.uk/Christmas. We would like to thank our friends at Design Portfolio for their design support.

At the start of June, we had to come to terms with the fact that our Ascot Ladies' Lunch would not be going ahead in 2020. It is a favourite event of ours and we were sad not to be able to see our supporters who have come together for the past seven years to raise funds for us. So, we had the idea to ask the ladies to put on their hats and to do their own little event for us in their own gardens, in a socially distanced way. It was a great success with lots of 'Hats On' events raising an amazing sum of £1900! We loved seeing all the photos of ladies in gardens – and a few on Zoom platforms too! Thanks to everyone who got involved and a particular welcome to ladies from various Catholic Women's League groups who joined in. We hope that we will be able to reunite with our friends – old and new – at our Christmas lunch at the Rayleigh Club on Friday December 4th.



Annual prize draw

Simply by purchasing tickets for our Annual Prize Draw, you can help us make a difference to the lives of children and families in our diocese. While doing so, you could also have the chance of winning a CASH PRIZE:

- 1ST PRIZE £250**
- 2ND PRIZE £100**
- 3RD PRIZE £50**

Tickets are £1 each – £5 for a book and additional books can be requested by contacting us on headoffice@bccs.org.uk

World Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day will take place on 10th October 2020 with the theme 'Mental Health for All'.

We know first-hand about the widespread levels of anxiety and emotional distress experienced in homes across Essex and East London as parents struggle to make ends meet and cope with bereavement, redundancy and worry about their children's wellbeing.

To support World Mental Health Day, we are inviting our supporters to either pledge £10 to our work during the course of October or on the day itself, or to take on a 10@10 physical challenge and ask 10 people to donate £10 each to our Take A Minute Appeal.



Amazon Smile is a simple way of supporting us whilst you shop. It is no different from shopping on the regular Amazon site: you will pay the same prices and enjoy the same benefits. Simply checkout via the Amazon Smile website for us to receive a donation.

Go to www.smile.amazon.co.uk and select us as your charity by clicking on 'Your Account' and then 'Change Your Charity'. In the search box type 'Brentwood Catholic Children's Society'.

For more information, go to our website www.bccs.org.uk/Get-Involved.

The Priests Concert – It is with great regret we have had to cancel The Priests Concert scheduled to take place at Brentwood Cathedral on Saturday 4th October. It is our intention to reschedule the event once it is safe to do so.



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

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