BCCS News

BCCS
a children's charity for
Essex and East London

CHRISTMAS EDITION • 2026

A Fresh Start

Supporting Looked After Children



Collaboration
Connected by purpose

Advent Appeal
One small gift at a time

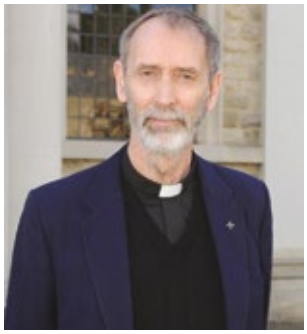
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A Fond Farewell .....

Since being appointed Bishop of Brentwood in 2014, I have also had the honour and privilege of serving as the President of the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society. During that time, I have seen at first hand the amazing work they do, and the compassion and dedication with which they support the children, young people, and families in our Diocese and as I prepare to say farewell, I want to express my deep gratitude to everyone who makes this work possible.

Advent invites us to wait in hope and welcome Christ, who comes among us in humility and love. Yet this season can also bring added pressures for children and families. While many look forward to Christmas, others may be facing loneliness, anxiety, family difficulties, or uncertainty about what lies ahead. For some children, childhood is not the safe and joyful time it should be, and they need our attention, our prayers, and our practical support.

BCCS offers that support and its work is more important now than ever. BCCS reaches thousands of children each year, equips schools to recognise and respond to difficulties, and provides dedicated support.



The presence and growth of BCCS are gifts to our diocesan family - gifts we should cherish and never take for granted. Its vital work depends on our prayers and generosity and as we prepare for Advent, I invite you to support the parish crib collection, which is given to BCCS each year. Your kindness will help BCCS continue its vital work supporting children, young people, and families who are facing difficulties.

May the hope of Advent encourage us to notice those who are struggling and to share Christ's love in practical ways.

Thank you for all you have done to support BCCS and as I say farewell, please know how grateful I am for your kindness, and how warmly I commend this important work to your continued care.

The Rt Rev Alan Williams SM
Bishop of Brentwood

Support Our Advent Appeal

Advent is a time of waiting, wonder and preparing for brighter days. For children and young people facing mental health challenges, that hope can begin with someone listening, offering support, and reminding them they are not alone.

Your donation to our Advent Appeal can help make that happen. A gift could help a child speak with a trained counsellor, give a parent guidance on supporting their child, or provide a safe space where a young person can share what is troubling them. Each donation helps bring comfort and hope - one small gift at a time.

As we count down to Christmas, please consider giving what you can and together, we can make this Advent a little brighter and help more children discover that they do not have to face things alone – Thank you.

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To donate please scan here

A NEW WAY OF WORKING

We are working alongside Body and Mind, an NHS Right to Choose provider who provide diagnoses for neurodivergent children and young people.

A welcoming space after diagnosis

Diagnosis can bring clarity, but it can also leave families wondering what happens next. We are delighted to be extending our support beyond schools, working alongside statutory services so that more families can get help when they need it.

Making sense of mixed emotions

Our programme gives parents and carers a confidential, friendly environment to pause, share experiences, and feel understood. Having space to process uncertainty can help them feel better able to support their child or young person with acceptance and understanding.

Building confidence, skills and connections

Combining emotional support with practical help, parents and carers will build confidence in responding to their child's needs, deepen their understanding of how their child experiences the world, and give space to reflect on what the diagnosis means for family life. Meeting others in a similar situation can also create valuable connections and reduce feelings of isolation.

The difference it can make

Lead by our experienced therapists with warmth and care, parents and carers will leave feeling less alone, with more confidence in their role and better understanding of their child's needs.

We are very excited to enter this partnership to help families navigate their post-diagnosis journey.

Collaborative working is the way forward

Working Together to Support SEND Families

BCCS has developed a close relationship with SNAP, a local charity providing support to families of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

SNAP regularly refers families to BCCS for therapeutic support, while we signpost families to SNAP to access their wide range of services. By working together, we help families access the support they need, when they need it.

We recently met with SNAP to learn more about each other's work, share our experiences and explore how we could further collaborate to meet the needs of the families we support.

We have both recognised a significant gap in therapeutic support for parents and carers of SEND children. Parents and carers often spend so much time in a constant state of caring for and supporting their children that they have little opportunity to focus on their own emotional wellbeing.

We are now exploring an exciting collaboration to provide dedicated therapeutic support for parents and carers. Sessions will be delivered by a BCCS Parental Therapist at SNAP's centre, making this support accessible to SNAP families.



Together, we aim to create a supportive space where parents and carers feel heard and can focus on their wellbeing and their children's needs



A Fresh Start

Supporting Looked After Children through therapy

Over the past year, we have seen an increase in referrals for **Looked After Children (LAC)**. These come from Social Services, seeking our specialist therapeutic support for children in their care, including child therapy and play therapy.

We have supported children living in foster placements, as well as those living with family under a **Special Guardianship Order (SGO)**. Many of these children have experienced significant trauma and disruption in their early lives, meaning their therapeutic needs can be very complex, requiring longer-term support to help them process their experiences and begin to heal.

Many of these children also have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This makes an holistic approach especially important - one that recognises how trauma and SEND can interact and tailors support to each child's individual needs.

Billy's Story

Billy was five when Social Care and his school referred him to us. He had received counselling at school, and it was felt that specialist play therapy outside the school setting could offer him further support. It also gave us the opportunity to work alongside his nan, who was now his carer.

Before meeting Billy, our play therapist met with his nan to learn more about his early experiences. Billy had been taken into care at the age of three. He had no contact with his dad, who had been in and out of prison. He was removed from his mum's care under an emergency care order due to her suffering from complex mental health, drug, and alcohol issues. Initially placed in respite care, before a temporary foster placement, he then settled with his paternal nan under an SGO. He had experienced significant disruption and change at a very young age, including changing schools to be closer to his new home.

Billy settled into therapy well. He was confident coming into sessions on his own and loved to play and be creative. It was important for Billy to lead the sessions, giving him a sense of control and allowing him to work at his own pace. It was clear from speaking to both his nan and his school that Billy needed time to build trust, and to feel an element of control to feel safe.

At first, Billy found it difficult to leave sessions and return to his nan. He loved her, but his

early experiences had made it challenging to build new attachments. To help, the therapist used an approach called **The Needs Paradox©**, which supports children who have experienced **relational trauma**. Nan was invited into the therapy room for the final five minutes of each session so they could play together. This helped make their transition out of the room calmer and made their reunion an important part of Billy's therapeutic experience. **Transitional objects** were also introduced to support him at school.

Billy found peer relationships challenging too. He needed support with making friends, sharing and feeling comfortable around other children. The safe, supportive therapy space gave him the opportunity to develop his play skills and learn to interact with others. These skills typically develop within the earliest years of life, but children who have experienced early trauma and neglect often miss important developmental stages.

Billy benefited from long-term therapy that could follow his emotional needs, rather than a fixed timeframe. Over time, Nan's involvement in sessions gradually reduced before stopping completely. The trusting relationship built between Billy, his nan and his therapist continued providing valuable support for the family.

Today, Billy has developed meaningful friendships and feels more settled at school. He is thriving academically, taking part in school clubs and growing in confidence. He knows his nan will be there to meet him - a reassuring routine that began during therapy.

Dictionary Corner

Looked After Child (LAC): A child cared for by their local authority for more than 24 hours. Often called a "child in care", they stop being looked after when they return home, are adopted or turn 18. Local authorities support care leavers until at least 21.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO): A legal order in England and Wales giving a child long-term care with someone other than their parent, who has parental responsibility until the child turns 18.

The Needs Paradox©: A therapeutic approach developed by Dr Karen O'Neil and Tara McDonald.

Relational Trauma: Trauma that affects a child's ability to form safe, trusting relationships.

Transitional Object: A familiar item that helps a child feel comforted during change or separation. An item carrying a parent or carer's scent may be especially reassuring.

As of 31 March 2025, there were 81,770 children looked after by local authorities in England.

A weekend of musical celebration



A heartfelt thank you to everyone who joined us, cheered us on and helped make our musical celebration weekend so special.

We were delighted that Fr Eugene and Fr Martin O'Hagan, formerly of The Priests, travelled from Belfast to support BCCS. Their generosity, commitment and outstanding performances at our Gala Dinner and Charity Luncheon brought warmth and joy to the weekend and helped raise vital funds for our work.

We are deeply grateful to them and to everyone who gave their time, talent and support to make this unique event possible - Thank you!

It was lovely to welcome Kilnbridge Construction, one of our valued corporate supporters, for a visit to film a video for their staff. The visit gave us an opportunity to share more about our work, celebrate the impact of Kilnbridge's support and explore new ways to share our story.

Our team bravely stepped in front of the camera to bring our mission to life -even if it took a little courage!

Thank you Kilnbridge for your continued partnership.



The St Benedict Joseph Labre Fund

Inspired by students across the Diocese who took part in sponsored sleepouts, BCCS and Caritas Brentwood have launched a brand new fund - **The St Benedict Joseph Labre Fund** to support children and young people affected by homelessness and housing insecurity.

Named after the patron saint of homeless people, St Benedict Joseph Labre experienced homelessness himself as a young man and his story of faith, resilience and hope makes him a fitting inspiration for a fund that will help families facing temporary or unstable housing, domestic violence, family breakdown, overcrowding or the risk of losing their home.

Working together with Caritas, we will identify those most in need through referrals from schools and parishes across the Diocese. Applications will be handled sensitively and confidentially, ensuring support reaches families facing genuine hardship.

Created through young people's compassion and generosity, the fund is faith in action - offering practical support and hope to families who need it most.

Feelgood fundraising

Follow us on Social Media to keep up to date with our events & campaigns. Every like, share and comment helps to spread awareness of our work.

World Mental Health Day

To mark World Mental Health Day in October, Year 4 pupils at St Joseph's Catholic Primary school in Stanford-Le-Hope wore yellow to stand out and start conversations. One of our therapists visited them to talk to the whole school before holding a workshop for the Year 4s.

The assembly centred around a BCCS bear, striving to support his own mental health and finding that he needed help. He then went to the workshop, focussing on the connection between body and mind, with clues children could find in their bodies to help them connect with how they feel.

It was a lot of fun such as guessing the emotion by pupils pulling a face, and doing the 'shake-it dance'. The class explored how the BCCS bear felt without a name, then had the opportunity to name and keep him, deciding on *Timmy*.



Waitrose

Selected for a green-token pitch at Waitrose in Billericay – we came second receiving a grant of £1,000. Thank you to everybody who voted for us.

Sponsored Walks

Thank you to everybody who took part in a sponsored walk for us over the summer. From returning walkers to new faces, it is always lovely to see the community come together – especially during the high temperatures this year – to get outside and raise funds for BCCS.

From the Fans

In July, Billericay Town FC hosted us for a bucket collection as fans came gathered to watch England beat Norway in the World Cup. Their generous donations highlight the power of sport bringing people together.

Save the Date

We will be supporting Children's Mental Health Week from 1st-7th February, with this year's theme of 'Step into our World' – an opportunity to see things from a child's perspective. Get in touch if you'd like to help spread awareness and fundraise.

Ingatestone Hall

In September, Lord Petre and his son Dominic once again gave personal tours of their historic home, Ingatestone Hall. Thanks to all who came along, helping us to raise over £1,000.

Challenges

Well done to our therapists Donna and Katharine who competed in the **Essex Games**, raising £660.

Thank you to everybody who took part in **September Fun Walks** – raising money and the opportunity of bonus donations from the Fun Walk Trust.

For 2027, with the additional Saturday race, we have 8 runners for the **London Marathon**. We wish them well as they start their training.

Get in touch if you'd like to take part in a challenge – perhaps **Santa in the City** in December? Contact Millie mdillane@bccs.org.uk



Christmas Craft & Gift Fair

Sunday 15th November
The Mill Arts & Events Centre, Rayleigh

Surround yourself with festive spirit and browse numerous stalls selling unique crafts and gifts from local artisans. Perfect for getting some early Christmas shopping complete, whilst enjoying lovely refreshments.

Open from 10:30-15:30 with free onsite parking.

£1.50 entry fee - free for under 14s.



Christmas Luncheon

Friday 4th December
The Lawn, Rochford

Come along to our Christmas Luncheon, hosted in this glorious Georgian House.

Enjoy a scrumptious two-course luncheon, followed by coffee & chocolates, in the bright orangery of this Grade II listed venue, surrounded by beautiful landscaped gardens.

Tickets £38.50 per person, including free onsite parking.



Scan here for Christmas



Annual Prize Draw

Your chance of winning a very welcome Christmas surprise with cash prizes of £300, £200 or £100.

You can buy 5 entries for £10 online via our digital Christmas card order form, or see our website for other payment methods.

Please get in touch if you would like to sell some on our behalf.

The draw will take place on Wednesday 16th December.



Christmas Cards

Our selection of quality cards are now in stock and all the profits from sales will directly help the families and children we support each year. They proudly display the BCCS logo on the back, so every card you send will also raise awareness of our work.

With popular designs and limited supply get your order in quick to get your first choice!

They are £4 for a pack of 10 with envelopes.