



A listening heart, in the light of the Risen Lord



Predictions about Coronavirus are, as we have discovered during the pandemic, pretty useless. So dare I start with a prediction?! As I write, in February, it looks as if lockdown will be easing and ending in the weeks of Easter and Eastertide; the moment when Jesus walks from the tomb, and we live afresh in Resurrection joy and hope – the hope that has sustained us throughout the pandemic. Now we can live that hope tangibly, as we step out of our entombment – able once again to see friends and family, able to socialise together, able to hug! Nature, too, will play its part – we will be in the season when God's creation awakens from its winter hibernation – buds blossom on trees, spring flowers bring a burst of glorious colour, birdsong fills the air. Such themes will infuse the work of the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society, but sadly they will not be the only themes.

A year ago, at the start of the pandemic Pope Francis stood dramatically alone in St Peter's Square. He spoke using the image of the disciples on the boat with Jesus in the storm. It is most certainly where we have been, these last 12 months. The waves crashing around many of the children and families in our Diocese have included crises of mental health, domestic abuse, family break-up, stress, bereavement, food poverty, digital poverty, and depression. Into these storms – sometimes violent, and often destructive – **bccc** have brought the calm of trained experts: present, gently listening, helping those in the boat to know that they are not alone. In a time when suicides have increased, along with self harm and addiction, the work of the society has been, quite literally, life saving.

Now, with lockdown easing and many walking into the Resurrection light of Easter, some of their work will change, but it will not diminish. In these weeks the professional team will be picking up the pieces for those who have not been able to share their story in lockdown: the family who have been trapped in a house where there is domestic abuse; the University student who is LGBT+ but dare not tell their parents, in a home they cannot leave; the young child who could not hug her mother as she left home in an ambulance, for what turned out to be her final journey; the working household which relied on Grandparents for childcare and practical support, and which has gradually fallen apart in the months where the Grandparents have been shielding.

As the children and adults in such situations find the space and voice to share their lockdown experiences, there is no doubt that the work of **bccc** will be as vital as ever. You are reading this newsletter because this work touches your heart; for that, and for any support you can give, thank you. The end of lockdown will in no way mean the end of the effects of the pandemic, and **bccc** will be the Resurrection hope for those who will take many, many months to truly step out of the darkness of the last year.

Along with this, the society will be campaigning. The practical lessons of the pandemic could be profound; free school meal provision continuing in each holiday; WiFi in every home; a laptop for every child; serious investment in services to nurture and protect the mental well-being of young people. Such steps transform lives and life-chances. To join these campaigns is, in the words of St Oscar Romero, to be "God's microphone", and "a voice for the voiceless." To this we might add, "a listening heart, for those trying to find the words to tell their story." This is what the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society have been throughout lockdown, and what they will continue to be this spring, in the light of the Risen Lord.

Fr Dominic Howarth
Episcopal Vicar for Youth Ministry & Pastoral Care

One of our practitioners outlines some issues faced by one little boy during lockdown and how they found a special way to communicate.



I had been working with Eric for just a few weeks before the first lockdown began in March 2020. His school had referred him to me as they were concerned about his behaviour and progress in class. Eric seemed to find it very difficult to

complete tasks, holding onto the teacher to keep her next to him at all times, and when she wasn't, he would wander about, shouting and sometimes hiding under the table. Eric's mum Lena told me his behaviour at home was also challenging; he often refused to follow simple instructions and she felt like she was walking on eggshells, every battle threatening to turn into a "meltdown". Lena felt that Eric had struggled since his parents separated two years before, Eric now having very occasional visits with his dad, who was in a new relationship and had a new baby. When lockdown began and the schools closed, Lena told me she wasn't sure how they would cope together at home all day, how she would manage his meltdowns as well as her own worries for her job and her family's safety. We agreed to set up regular phone calls for us to talk, as well as weekly Zoom sessions for Eric.

In our early online sessions, Eric seemed very "scattered"; he would struggle to stay in front of the screen, disappear under the table, slam the laptop shut or switch the camera off. This "chaotic" feeling gave me a sense that Eric was feeling out of control inside without the routine of school and perhaps picking up on the uncertainty of adults about this new and unsettling situation. On screen, I would bring Tiger, Eric's favourite puppet from our school sessions, who would play and talk with Sharky, a small plastic shark that Eric brought along. "I'm going to bite you!" Sharky would growl fiercely through Eric. "Oh no, that's so scary!" Tiger would cry through me. I wondered with Eric whether Sharky was feeling angry, or sad and

missing his friend, perhaps wanting to bite off a piece of him to keep. By talking through the animals, we were able to explore some of Eric's difficult feelings at a safe distance; providing him with the vocabulary of feelings enabled Eric to identify and understand his emotions - making them seem more manageable - a process we call "name it to tame it".

In our phone calls, Lena and I thought together about ways to support Eric by replacing the missing structure of the school day. Together they made a visual timetable of his home routine and Lena marked on a calendar so Eric could see when he would next visit with dad. By working to make things more predictable for Eric where she could, Lena noted that Eric seemed more at ease, more able to trust in her and less like he needed to take control. In our Zoom sessions too Eric appeared more settled, now creating longer stories with a collection of his sharks which he presented like episodes of a TV show he called "Sharkworld".

Back together in school in the Autumn term we continued our sessions, thinking together about the many changes in school but also recognising what had stayed the same, such as his friendships. Eric's new class teacher found that although he still liked to check in with her regularly, he seemed more confident and able to try new tasks by himself, showing a developing ability to trust in adults and so feeling safer to explore new things.

Right now, we find ourselves once more in lockdown, and Eric and I are back together on Zoom. Season 2 of "Sharkworld" has been an eventful one so far, with sudden attacks and dramatic battles between the sharks, orchestrated with much glee by Eric. But through the show he has also begun to be the teacher, explaining about the different sharks, their skills, likes and dislikes. I am captivated not only by the stories but also by his growing sense of confidence and identity. We don't know how many more episodes are to come this season, but while the show is on the air, there are many exciting adventures to be had.

Farewell to Eleanor

We were very sad to hear of the death in December of our dear supporter Eleanor Piper. Eleanor was a regular table host at our Ladies' Lunches and sold our Christmas cards and Prize Draw tickets among friends, family and parishioners in Romford for many years.

She will be greatly missed by us all and we hope that her friends will continue to join us at our future lunches and raise a glass with us in her memory.



Why our work is so important

50%

of those with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14.

1 in 6

children and young people have a diagnosable mental health problem such as depression, anxiety and conduct disorders.

70%

of children and young people who experience mental health problems do not receive intervention at a sufficiently early age.

With the help of our dear supporters who kept us close by providing financial support in 2020 and despite all the difficulties and challenges we have faced, we are proud to be able to share our successes:

170 families supported with food vouchers, clothes and other essentials via our Crisis Fund

230 families received food vouchers at Christmas

Over **6000** sessions delivered to children and young people

450 new cases opened

720 children, young people and families supported by our professional team

80 professional meetings attended

Over **100** supervision sessions delivered to exhausted school staff

Weekly wellbeing check-ins provided to school staff

During 2020 - 28 members of staff supported 720 families and 90 schools

Your charity needs you!

Our Board of Trustees is the backbone of our society bringing expertise to the table and informing all our decision-making. We would like to appoint some new trustees to guide and support us as we continue our work and are looking for people who have a particular interest in supporting the wellbeing of children and families.

We are particularly keen to welcome young trustees (age 18+) to drive our vision forward ensuring our provision and services remain contemporary.

If you feel you could offer us your time and expertise, please email our Director Bernadette (bfisher@bccs.org.uk) who will be delighted to talk to you.

You can read more about this important role on our website www.bccs.org.uk under the **Who We Are** section where there is a full **Role Description** available to download.

Open Your Heart to Giving this Lenten Season

"It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving."

- Saint Teresa of Calcutta

A word from our Director

When lockdown #3 and school closures were announced in January, we were practised in the drill and our professional team were swiftly mobilised into action.

Our individual practitioners began to contact their schools to agree how best to support children, young people and families in our care whether through face to face or remote methods.

We completed a register of all vulnerable, hard-to-reach and at-risk students, identifying bespoke care plans to ensure their safety and wellbeing. We invited schools to connect with us if they were concerned about a child or family, and we used the experience of our specialist social workers to engage vulnerable families as well as to offer therapeutic guidance to staff who were reaching out to a child or family where there may have been barriers.

Like us, schools were concerned about the wellbeing of parents as they embarked on a further period of home-learning while trying to juggle work and home life commitments. Schools referred struggling parents to us for consultation. This process allows parents to liaise with us regarding worries about their child during the lockdown period; our aim is to provide strategies and remote support so that a family is under less emotional pressure during this time.

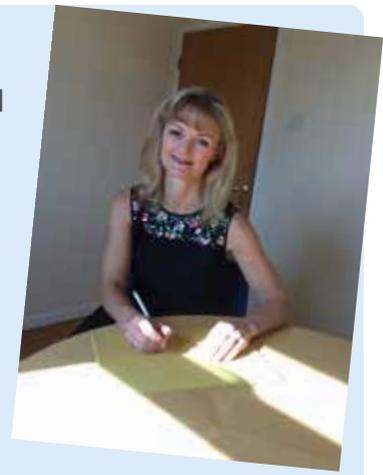
We are aware of the enormous pressure placed on all school staff currently and so have continued to offer our specialist support to any member of school staff working either in the school setting or from home. Our team of qualified and experienced counsellors and supervisors are available for wellbeing check-ins and our confidential counselling sessions and staff supervisions continue to be offered to school staff via video link or face to face. Our commitment is that we will always provide a space where staff will be listened to, supported, and restored.

As ever, the child remains central to our thinking. By working alongside parents, carers, teachers and support staff and through understanding and supporting their needs, we are better able to improve outcomes for children and families during these challenging times.

We thank you for supporting us particularly during this last year; we have received many lovely messages accompanying donations thanking us for all that we are doing across the Diocese and we are truly grateful. With young people's mental health in crisis, we know our mission is more important than ever before. We strive towards a goal where no child or young person feels alone and where there are no barriers to young people in our Diocese getting the support they need when they need it. We cannot do this without you! Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers so that we may continue to be here for those who need us most.

We wish you and your families a very happy and blessed Easter.

Bernadette Fisher



Lenten Appeal

Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving and we have always been fortunate to receive generous donations and prayers from our community during this period.

This year those donations will be more vital than ever. While some of us are choosing to 'give something up for Lent', others are being forced into living with far less than usual and are facing real hardship and an uncertain future. These families are reaching out to us and we are seeing a significant rise in the demand for our specialist care and services.

If you are giving up something for Lent, please transform it into lasting change by donating the money you save to make a difference to those who need us most.

Simply complete the enclosed donation card and return to us or if you would prefer to donate using your on-line banking, you can make a direct transfer to our bank account using **Lent 2021** as a reference:

Account Name: Brentwood Catholic Childrens Society
Account Number: 31094130
Sort Code: 40 13 22

Thank You