

Spring 2024

Spurgeons 

Together

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Thank you for helping children
and families to thrive!

Welcome!



As spring arrives, ushering in a time of new life and growth, Spurgeons too is thriving. We are delighted to have secured new tenders to provide services for children and families in Elmbridge and Wiltshire (including the new-to-us area of North Wiltshire).

Although the services in these locations will be delivered in slightly different ways, they share a common goal which is to provide families with easier access and more holistic early help designed to meet their specific needs.

This means that more children will get a better start in life in spite of the challenges they might face – discover on page 4 what this looks like in practice in Wiltshire!

We have also recently been appointed to run the first ever family hub in Birmingham.

While local government funds the basics of these services, it's so often the 'extras' on top that make all the difference to families, particularly those that are going through tough times.

So thank you for all that YOU have done in the past months - volunteering, praying, donating vital funds or giving much-needed items to help families, from laptops to baby clothes.

Together, we are helping children and families to flourish, whatever the season.

Ian Soars
Chief Executive,
Spurgeons

Make a gift of love!

You can help even more families get the support that they so desperately need in these challenging times by making a monthly gift to Spurgeons! You can make your gift online at spurgeons.org/donate, or by phone on **01933 417059** (Monday-Friday 9am-4pm)

Thank you for your kindness!

Thank You!

A huge thank you once again to the store chain The Entertainer which has donated gift cards worth **£1000 to Spurgeons.**

Pray with us

Lord God, we give you thanks for the gift of life and for the potential you create in all of us. We pray for those children and families whose circumstances make it hard for them to flourish. We ask that you help us to do all we can with all you have blessed us with so that we might support them to be able to live their best lives. Amen.

If you'd like to receive our prayer news and pray regularly for children and families in need, please email prayernews@spurgeons.org.

Prison Family Services

Spurgeons runs family prison services and provides support to prisoners' families. We encourage dads in prison to be the best parent they can be while incarcerated and upon release. We also enable children to spend quality time with their dads through family days, baby bonding visits and homework clubs.



Prison dad Dale raises funds for Spurgeons

Dale Somerset, an inmate at HMP Winchester, has been raising money for Spurgeons' Invisible Walls service after the support he and his family received from us.

Dale has been in four different prisons but this is the first time he's had help. He says, 'My partner... was worrying and having communication with Lucy (Spurgeons Beyond the Walls, Behind the Gates Lead) has helped put her mind at ease. Lucy has been chasing up a social worker regarding my daughter. I've had all this help - advice and stuff that I would never have got before.

'The more time goes on the more I see the benefit of what you do.'

In gratitude, Dale has been doing a "Million Metre Challenge", using running and rowing equipment inside the prison to raise funds for Spurgeons.

'When a dad goes to prison it can have a huge impact on their family – emotionally, financially and physically,' explains Vicky Baird, Spurgeons Prison Family Services Manager. 'But that negative impact can be hugely reduced with the right levels of support. We are proud of the work we do and the difference this can make for the families we come into contact with. And we're so grateful to Dale for raising over £1600 for us so that we can help support more families of prisoners.'



Birdhouses forge family bonds

At HMP/YOI Winchester, the prisoners who work in the pallet recycling workshop made 30 birdhouses for us to give out on one of our family day visits. The prison dads and their children then painted the birdhouses together and the children got to take them home and put them to use.

One family said to us, 'This is a great idea, we are taking it to the caravan and we can then tell Dad all about the birds that visit.'



Holistic family support across Wiltshire

From April, Spurgeons will provide Family Hub services across Wiltshire to children and young people aged 0-19 (up to 25 for those with special educational needs) and their parents. This will be delivered through a variety of community locations to make it easier for families to access the specific help they need. Our colleagues will provide some support directly but may also partner with other local organisations depending on each family's circumstances. Families will also be able to access self help support through an online platform.

Here are some examples of how, with your support, we are helping Wiltshire families.

Together, we do more!

Our volunteers and partners play a key part in offering wraparound support to children and families. Here are some examples from across Wiltshire:



1. **Useable school uniforms** are saved from landfill and passed to local families in need. (Partners – Sustainable Devizes and St James' Church Devizes.)
2. **Parenting workshops** (Partner - Wiltshire Parent Carer Council)
3. **Children and families learn to cook healthy meals on a tight budget.** (Partners - Sustainable Devizes, Phunky Foods, Plot 35 Devizes, Trowbridge Museum)
4. **Parents learn Paediatric First Aid.** (Partner - St John's Ambulance.)
5. **Children at an after school club** enjoy short talks, activities and a free hot meal. (Partner - Wiltshire Museum)
6. **Our Together with Families** team link up with local churches to support families with Baby Bundles, New Parent New Baby groups, parents & toddlers groups, after school and holiday activities.

Good news for Taya

Kaitlin White, Spurgeons Family Support Worker in Wiltshire, explains how helping parents to overcome complex issues can make a huge impact on the wellbeing and development of their child.

'Three-year-old Taya's nursery noticed she was behind on speech and language development, was not eating properly and was still in nappies. How would she cope when she started school?

'That's when Spurgeons got involved. Taya's parents Dan and Ally were understandably wary so I needed to show them I was on their side.

'I went to visit them at their home. Taya was sitting in front of the TV which was turned up loud. She shouted "No!" a lot and her parents didn't really interact with her.

'I began by finding out from Dan and Ally where they felt they needed help.

'They had a lot to contend with, had lost hope and were feeling trapped.

'Both had had some difficult experiences in childhood, with little positive parental role modelling to learn from. Mental health problems had meant they had become socially isolated and had no support network. Dan had lost his job and with it, his confidence.

'The family were living on benefits and couldn't make ends meet, particularly as Dan had inherited big debts from a relative which involved unaffordable monthly repayments.

'He and Ally argued a lot – never in front of Taya, but she was picking up on the tension.

'Working with partner organisations, we set about helping them to get back in control of their lives so that Taya could have a better start to hers.

'Rectifying the financial situation was a priority. We gave Dan and Ally foodboxes (through their local foodbank) to tide them over, taught them how to budget and got them on a Healthy Eating course to learn how to make cheap, healthy and tasty meals.

"Mental health problems had meant they had become socially isolated and had no support network. Dan had lost his job and with it, his confidence."

'Meanwhile Wiltshire Council's Supporting Families Employment Advisors (SFEA) managed to get the debt transferred back to the relative and a refund of several thousand pounds for the family.

'That got their finances back on track and now they can save for treats, for Christmas, for a rainy day.

'Also through SFEA, Dan is looking at doing an apprenticeship and Ally is training to work in a call centre.

'We worked one-to-one with them on their parenting skills and they did some of our courses, enabling them to meet and share experiences with other parents. These new friendships will be a support to them and Taya in future. Now, the TV in their home is off more because Dan and Ally understand the importance of singing or playing with Taya each day – and they all have lots of fun!

'We also helped Dan and Ally communicate and understand things from each other's point of view so they argue less.

'With a better home life, Taya is happier, her speech and language has improved, she is toilet trained – and she has recently been able to start school!'



NEW – Real Parenting Course

Spurgeons has developed this short course for parents of children under 11. The aim is to help them navigate the challenges of parenthood and build a better, happier home life for the whole family.

Real Parenting is designed to be run by church and community volunteers (with training and support from Spurgeons) to a group of parents in a safe, supportive setting. There are four 90-minute sessions which incorporate engaging videos, lively group discussions and simple and effective tips and guidance to help parents get the best from their children and enjoy being a parent. Through your support, we are able to offer it free of charge to both those leading and those participating.

After the course, parents have the opportunity to stay in touch with their local group and facilitator and access extra support from Spurgeons' online digital hub.

"It's a great thing for churches to offer".

Through your support, Jane Procter from Jubilee Community Church in East Grinstead co-led a Spurgeons Real Parenting course and has seen the positive impacts of it.

'Every parent has their struggles and is learning, no matter who they are, how old their kids are, even if they had great parents themselves. The course gives them the tools they need and a safe space where they feel they can open up and talk about their struggles and share ideas with each other. There's no judgement because, let's be honest, none of us get it right all the time!

'**Real Parenting** covers all sorts of topics - how to establish good routines, spend quality one-to-one time with your children, be consistent and meaning no when you say no.

'We discuss how to help children manage their emotions – many don't, especially since the isolation of the pandemic. And we talk about the importance of parents being role models because our children are watching us and learning from us all the time. If our way of managing anger is to explode and lose control, our children will do the same. If I'd known some of this when my kids were small, I think it would have saved a lot of angst and stress!

'The training from Spurgeons is excellent and the course is really easy to lead and deliver – I did it with my son Will Norris (the church pastor for 0-18s). If a parent asks you a question to which you don't know the answer, you can ask Spurgeons for advice.

'This was the first time we'd run **Real Parenting**.

'We had about twelve people from our church but we hope to run it again at which point we'll probably open it to others in the community.

'Many churches run parent and toddler groups, so **Real Parenting** is a great thing to be able to offer to those parents. Or you could do it the other way round - use the course as a means of connecting with the community and then set up a toddler group. Either way, it's a great opportunity to strengthen church relationships with the community.'

"Every parent has their struggles and is learning, no matter who they are, how old their kids are, even if they had great parents themselves."



A Parent's Perspective

Parent's name:

Lizzy, mum to two boys aged 9 and 6, did the **Real Parenting** course that Jane ran.

Key parenting challenges:

Boys with very different personalities; different parenting style to her husband; the pressures of getting the boys out of the door to school which then stresses them out. Maintaining a harmonious household was beginning to feel like an uphill battle!

Key learning from Real Parenting:

'When they were talking about a child's brain and the logical side of the brain and how that doesn't develop until adulthood. That really struck me.' Understanding the development of a child's brain made Lizzy more patient and empathetic towards her children's behaviour. She also realised she needed to give them more time to process requests and tasks rather than expect them to do them straight away.

Top takeaway tip:

Lizzy says, 'Spend 10 or 15 minutes of one-on-one time with the kids every day.' Amidst the chaos of daily life, it can make a world of difference!



Find out more online!

If you are connected with a school, church or other community group and would be interested in running a **Real Parenting** course please scan this QR code or visit realparenting.org.uk/runacourse

Support for Parents of Children with Autism

April is Autism Awareness month. Autism (ASC) is a lifelong condition and affects 1 in 100 people. The degree to which children are affected varies enormously, but commonly issues include social interaction and communication, restricted/repetitive behaviours and over or under sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch. They may have extreme anxiety and meltdowns or shutdowns, and highly focused interests.

Parenting a child with autism can have its challenges - but with the right support, it can also be very rewarding.



Children with Autism: Top Tips

- **Do your research** - be prepared for future challenges, and to understand what children need so you can best support them.
- **Enjoy your child** for who they are, rather than focusing on what makes them different.
- **Children with autism often need routine and structure**, so create a schedule that works for you and your child and stick to it. If your child is socialising and communicating using signs in the classroom for example, encourage them to do so at home.
- **Find non-verbal ways to communicate and connect.** When you are aware of your child's needs, it becomes easier to spot non-verbal cues.
- **Make a Calm Jar** – see back page of this magazine.

EarlyBird Plus and Teen Life Courses

EarlyBird Plus and Teen Life are courses for parents of autistic children aged 4-10 and 11-16 respectively. We provide them online or (for parents in Kent, Surrey and Sussex) in person.

Both courses are designed to provide autism support for parents and families to understand more about autism and how best to support their children. The focus tends to be on communication, routine and social understanding to reduce anxiety and empower parents and their children to manage challenges.

Thank you to The National Lottery who recently provided some funding towards this course which has so helped parents like Stuart and Aimee (see story opposite).



Understanding Darcie's World

Thanks to your support, we are able to provide free National Autistic Society EarlyBird Plus and Teen Life courses to parents of children with autism. Stuart explains how the EarlyBird Plus course has helped him, his daughter and the whole family.

Stuart and his wife Aimee have three young children – one has Down Syndrome so much of their attention was focused on her. But then they realised that their daughter Darcie had behavioural problems. 'She was struggling to focus and listen to instruction,' says Stuart. 'It was almost like she wasn't in the room with us. She was hyper focused on what she was into at that time. Anything for Darcie that has a routine or a structure is an opportunity for an outburst or a meltdown. It can be anything from having a hot meal at lunchtime rather than sandwiches, or us not having the same brand of food that she's used to.'

'I felt I spent every moment that I was awake, either shouting or being frustrated with my children's behaviour.'

The situation threatened to overwhelm Stuart and Aimee, their marriage and wider family, so they sought support. They spoke to a friend at church who was a child psychologist and whose husband was a GP. With their help and also support from Darcie's school, Stuart and Aimee were able to self-refer and start a pathway to diagnosis. They also came on the EarlyBird course run by Spurgeons.

Stuart says, 'It helped us understand what might trigger a meltdown and how to respond when it came. It also really helped to know that you are not alone, and to get advice from other parents that have been through the same.'

'The most stressful times seem to be around uncertainty, and it's helped to have a plan for now and next, and timetables.'

On the days that Darcie's behaviour is challenging Stuart can now deal with the situation better. 'It has enabled me to take a step back and try to understand her world more.'

"I felt I spent every moment that I was awake, either shouting or being frustrated with my children's behaviour."



Find out more on our website – scan the QR code!

“Barbara asked if I would like to go to the kids disco in Birchington the following Friday. I was very excited - I’d never been to a disco before!”



Spurgeons Old Scholars and Fegans Old Boys

We love to hear the recollections of those who grew up in our Children’s Homes when they still existed. So if you have some memories to share, please contact Karen Logan (email partnerships@spurgeons.org or call 01933 417059).

Sue, John and Barbara at the Spurgeons Reunion 2022

Knickerbocker Glory – an Orphan’s Story



John Lowdell arrived at Stockwell House, Spurgeons Homes for Children in Birchington on All Hallows Eve, 1974 – the night that Muhammad Ali became heavyweight champion of the world for the second time when he knocked out George Foreman in the “Rumble in the Jungle.” John takes up the story...

‘I too felt battered – my younger brother Bill and I had spent the summer in a very tough council run children’s home. It was a relief to be reunited with our little brother and sister.

‘Barbara Harris became our houseparent that day. An amazing Christian lady, she was forthright with a strong sense of right and wrong. She kept Stockwell House ship-shape and there was no messing with her regime, but she was fair and had a kind heart and a good sense of humour.

‘There were 10 children in the House aged from 6 to 16. I was 12 and the eldest boy and shared a large bedroom with my two younger brothers. The beds were immaculately made with crisp white sheets, folded with ‘envelope’ corners. The floors were so highly polished that you could see your face in them. Barbara would not tolerate a speck of dust to flitter in the searching beams of light that flooded through the large windows. To this day, I have always put cleanliness as one of the most important of virtues, as well as “envelope corners”!

‘The food was of high quality and for that first meal we had fish fingers and a lovely pudding. And as it was half-term and my first night, I was allowed to stay up and watch the big fight. This was a great start for my relationship with my new ‘Auntie’ who was from a long line of tough Welsh valleys stock, so no doubt appreciated a good scrap herself!

‘But most importantly, that night she saw my competitive spirit and determined to nurture it. I felt like I had an ally and felt safe for the first time in a long time.

‘The next day I got to meet the Principal, John Honey. He was a true old-fashioned gentleman – caring, empathetic and kind but strict if required. I warmed to him immediately and was eager not to disappoint him. He took me to Broadstairs to get my school uniform as I had been granted a place at Chatham House Grammar School for Boys in Ramsgate; Edward Heath was a former student of this historic school of high repute. So, choosing my smart new green uniform was a delight. Afterwards, “Uncle” John took me to Margate for my very first Knickerbocker Glory – yum! yum!

‘Barbara asked if I would like to go to the kids disco in Birchington the following Friday. I was very excited - I’d never been to a disco before! So after school, Barbara took me to the clothes shop.

‘I chose fashionable crepe shoes, a wide collared white shirt with vintage cars on it, and some blue flares. I also purchased some Brut 33. At the time, Henry Cooper was telling us to “splash it on all over!” And I did!

‘I absolutely loved the disco - the lights, the buzzing atmosphere and most of all the girls dancing to the great disco songs of the 70s – “Rock your Baby”- George Macrae, The Stylistics, Kool and the Gang and of course Hues Corporation – “Rock the Boat”. Most of all I loved “Tiger Feet” by Mud – my new crepe shoes had been invented for that dance! I learned too that one of the evening’s main objectives was to pluck up enough courage to ask a girl to slow dance – probably to Barbra Streisand’s hit “The Way We Were”. Thereafter, the disco became the highlight of my week and my place of social education. It’s where I learned those subtle interactions between boys and girls, experienced those first innocent kisses, and dared to dream of my perfect girl who would of course look like Frida out of ABBA, winners of Eurovision...!

Did John’s dream come true?



Find out in his book, **Knickerbocker Glory (An Orphan’s Story)**, available online at [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk).



Make a Calm Jar

Calm jars help children develop self-awareness, engage with their mental health and express their emotions in a healthy way, especially in times of stress.

The swirling glitter in the jar provides a visually calming focus and vigorously shaking the jar becomes a physical release, giving them a practical and therapeutic coping mechanism. Making their own calm jar is fun and empowering for children, and it's good to do this while they are young. (N.B. Use a plastic jar or bottle for your calm jar if it is for younger children, and ensure that children are supervised at all times both during making the jar and playing with it.)

You'll need:

- An empty container with lid (e.g. glass or plastic jar or bottle)
 - Coloured glitter glue
 - Three different colours of loose glitter
 - Stick on gems and/or stickers
 - A jug of warm water (enough to fill the jar or bottle)
 - An implement to stir the water (e.g. spoon)
1. Put around a tablespoon of glitter glue into the jar or bottle.
 2. Half fill the jar with the warm water and stir to mix with the glitter glue.
 3. Add a teaspoon each of the three coloured glitters, then top up with the remaining water.
 4. Add glue round the lid for extra security, screw it onto the container and leave overnight to set.
 5. Decorate the outside of the container with gems and/or stickers. Then shake the jar or bottle and enjoy!

Spurgeons - Together with Families

Families of all shapes and sizes face the challenges of trying to balance relationships, work, money, childcare and parenting, education, mental health. It's a lot – sometimes too much!

But we're always there to turn to, in good times and bad. Inspired by our Christian faith and our founder Charles Spurgeon, we bring hope and help, making family life better. Our Family Hubs, located in children and family centres, schools, churches, prisons, provide a welcoming one-stop place where families can access wraparound support. We can do this. Together.

We provide children and families with:

- Family support
- Parenting advice and support
- Early years health and wellbeing
- Domestic abuse care and recovery
- Young Carers
- Counselling
- Preschools with onsite early support in areas of intense need

Connect with us online for more stories!



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