

Autumn 2023

Spurgeons 

Together



In this issue:

Church Family Hubs – key to transforming family wellbeing?

Don Esson – managing my mental health as a dad

Boys2Men – how it changed Carl's life

How to take part in Prisons Week 8th-14th October

Top Tips – supporting your child's mental health

Thank you for helping children and families to thrive!

Welcome!



There's been a lot in the news recently about the state of young people's mental health.

Two statistics stood out for me: Around 1 in 5 children aged 7 to 16 have a probable mental health disorder¹, and last year a record 1.2 million under 18s² (around 1 in 10) were referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Whilst shocking, the figures are not entirely surprising given what young people in general have been through in the last few years – see the article opposite. However, many of those young people affected are simply not getting the mental health support they need.

CAMHS waiting times are up to 2 years, and local authority spend on early intervention – those children with less acute mental health issues – has halved.

Supporting the mental health of children and parents is a key part of what Spurgeons does, as you'll see from many of the articles in this edition of the magazine.

And (at risk of repeating myself!) we are really excited about the huge potential that Family Hubs have in terms of providing much more widespread and easily accessible mental health support at an early stage.

One expression of these is in partnership with churches. On page 6 we explore why our current Church Family Hubs benefit both churches and the families and young people they serve. Ultimately, we believe they will reduce the number of children and young people waiting for CAMHS and Early Help.

We could do none of this without your faithful support, whether you volunteer, donate or pray. We are truly grateful to you. Together, we really can help children, young people and their families to achieve their full God-given potential.

Ian Soars
Chief Executive Officer

Make a gift of love!



During 2022-23 we helped 30,500 families, children, young people and adults and 2 million people heard our voice through online, media and other streams outside our physical services.

Will you give a gift of love to help more families to get through the tough times we are living in and give them the opportunity to flourish? You can make a donation:

Online at spurgeons.org/donate

By phone on **01933 417059**
(Monday–Friday 9am–4pm)

By post using the form at the back of this magazine

Thank you for your kindness!

Top tips to help your child's mental health

Record numbers of children are struggling with anxiety, depression, anger and self-harm. If your child is affected, our Counselling Clinical Lead Debbie Pattison suggests some ways in which you can help them.

'Covid left a lasting legacy,' Debbie says, 'It disrupted children's education and led them to lose touch with friends which has affected their social skills. Additionally, the cost of living crisis is now another destabilising factor in their lives.'

So what can you do to help? Here are Debbie's tips:

Give perspective: Emphasise to your child how long the pandemic and lockdowns persisted, relative to their lifespan. They may barely remember a time before school closures and social distancing.

Encourage them to talk about their feelings: In particular, this may help children who are experiencing separation anxiety and/or struggling to socialise again.

Help them burn off nervous energy through dancing to music, running around, going for a walk or bouncing on a trampoline.

Support their mental health: Spend time with them outdoors and make sure they eat a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep and exercise. Give them time for free play too, to enable them to process their emotions.

Teach them calming techniques: **Breathing:** Get them to breathe in for 7 seconds and out for 11. As they breathe out, encourage them to imagine that they are exhaling all their anxiety and bad feelings

Grounding technique: Distraction can help with anxiety – ask your child to look for 3 things of a certain colour, smell 3 different smells and listen for 3 different sounds.

If you're worried: Talk to staff at your child's school as they may be able to offer some support. Counselling can also help children work through their emotions and feelings and learn some coping strategies.

Don't miss out on parenting tips!

To receive parenting tips via email from our team of experts, subscribe to our emails:



Scan this QR code here or go online to subscribe.spurgeons.org

Or complete your details and email on the form at the back of this magazine and return it to us by post



¹NHS Digital: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 – wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey, November 2022

²NHS Digital: Mental health referrals (by month and by year) updated; A count of referrals to NHS funded secondary mental health, learning disabilities and autism services in England in 2019/20 and 2021/22 – by month and by year.

Summer of fun

Our teams have been working hard to give children in challenging circumstances some much-needed opportunities to have fun! Here's a little flavour:



At **Winchester Prison**, families enjoyed meeting and petting donkeys, goats, sheep and pigs on our two annual family Farm Days, one in the resettlement area and one in the visits hall of the main prison, with animals provided by Miller's Ark Farm and Em's Friendly Farm respectively. These precious days enable children with a parent in the prison get to have some quality time with their dads, making memories to treasure for time to come.

One parent said, '(We're) really grateful to be given the opportunity to spend quality time as a family in a more relaxed, friendly environment – loved the animals!' Another commented, 'We were in a prison, but we really did not feel that, the staff were friendly and approachable.' Thank you to the Parish of St Matthew with St Paul in Winchester who made both events possible through a generous donation of £1000.



Did you know?

97% of families make progress across their lives when working alongside us and **63%** of families have improved wellbeing.



 **Hear Tino, one of the children, share how he enjoyed taking part!**

The activities on offer included:

Paddle boarding, kayaking (Elmbridge Canoe Club); Football, dodgeball (Elite Sports); Nerf gun battles, face painting (NEAT); Tag rugby, tennis (X-Sports); Giant Jenga and other activity equipment (SHOUT!); animal visitors (Reptile Roadshow and Miller's Ark Animals).



8 children also had a tour of **Chelsea Football Club** courtesy of Spurgeons and Chelsea Foundation, and a football session with Elite Sports.

Elmbridge Family Centres ran Club4, a Holiday Activities Food Club (HAF) funded by Active Surrey (via Surrey County Council). It brought together lots of organisations to provide delicious food and fun for 240 children whose families could not otherwise afford to access such things.



And nobody went hungry!

Vouchers from Morrisons bought items for lunch. The children took home food made by Totally Tangerine Cookery and Stoked Eats Pizzas.

Helping churches care for families

The UK's 40,000 churches could be the key to transforming the wellbeing of families across the nation. Sarah Wallis, our Head of Delivery, Partnerships and Development, explains how and why.

The issue and how churches can help

'Statutory children and family support in the UK can be summed up in the Continuum of Need model shown opposite: Since 2011, spending on early intervention (Level 2) has halved, with spending focused on help for families with the most complex or acute needs (Levels 3-4). This is deeply unfair on children and families at Level 2 and may lead to their own needs intensifying.

'Churches, with a presence in and a strong heart for communities across the country, already offer practical, trusted Universal support (Level 1) to families through volunteer-run toddler groups, holiday clubs, cafes and so on. Most are not equipped to provide more intensive Level 2 support – but that's where Spurgeons comes in.

How we support churches

'Spurgeons partners with churches to create Church Family Hubs, stepping into that gap to provide the next level of support to the families they serve. We know the statutory landscape well, and have the necessary experience, safeguarding protocols and OCR accredited training. And we're experienced - we launched our first Church Family Hub six years ago, long before the government began to champion the concept; now we support 10 across the South East.

Adapting to local needs

'The core Church Family Hub services we offer are toddler groups or preschools, parent support and counselling. We then add in specialist support (e.g. special educational needs, domestic abuse) according to the specific local needs identified by the church. We can also involve other local family services.

'For example, in Weald Family Hub, we provided counselling to primary pupils in their local village schools, but they got little support once they moved up to secondary school in the larger towns.

'So we partnered with a rural GP surgery to provide counselling for teenagers in after school and evening sessions, once they get home from school.

'Church Family Hubs don't have to be restricted to church buildings. Two of our church partners host their Hubs in local schools, at the schools' request.

Teamwork and transformation

'We've learned that it's best for a group of churches to operate a Family Hub, although one church might be the main driver. Working together helps spread the cost, there's a bigger pool of volunteers available and often the different churches offer different kinds of clubs and groups to local families, meaning that together they meet a broader range of needs.

'Church Family Hubs can transform whole communities on many levels. They enable churches to step into their calling of loving and serving their communities; families to get the support they need; and children to achieve their full potential.'



Sarah (left) with Ian and Nicky Soars and Rachel Dyer at New Wine where they spoke to churches about setting up Family Hubs.

Find out more!

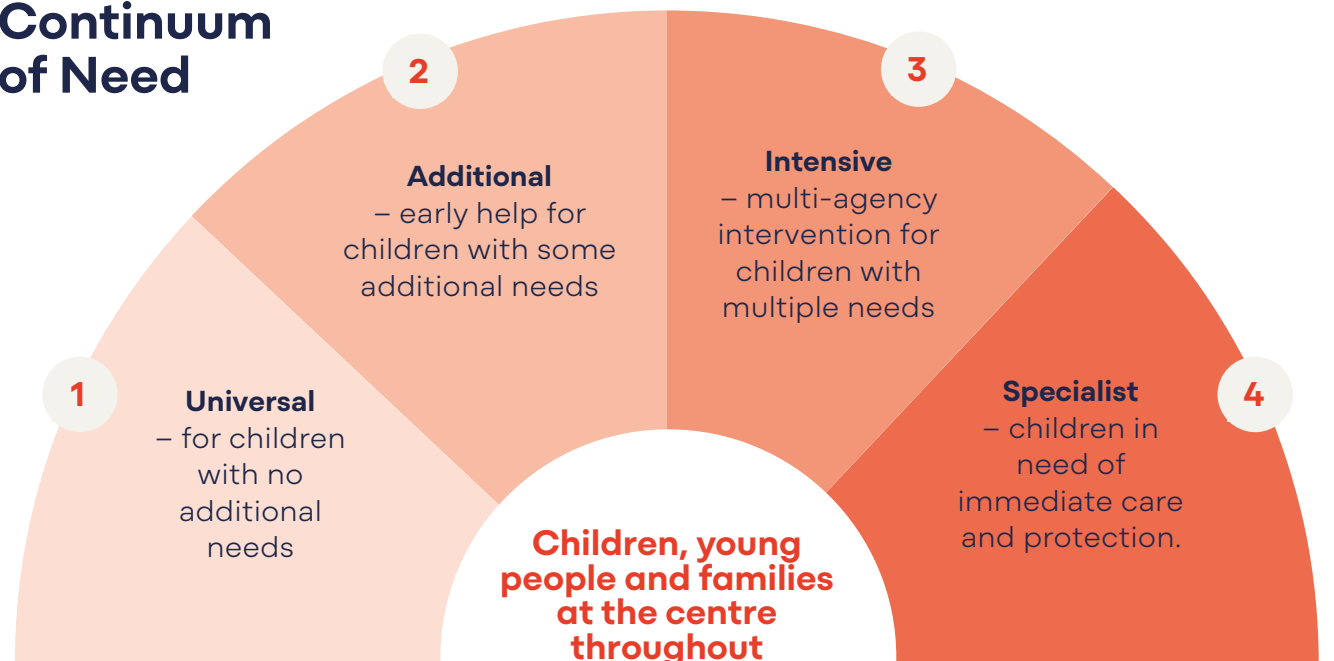
Our vision is to partner with 50 new churches by the end of 2025 to set up Family Hubs in their communities. So please do contact us if your church would like to know more!

Contact us at partnerships@spurgeons.org

Coming soon:

Christmas campaign
 Launching in a few weeks, Family Hubs are this year's theme – find out why children and families really benefit from them and how you can help to establish more.

Continuum of Need



Dad Don on keeping it positive

November is Men's Mental Health Awareness month. Don Esson, dad of daughters aged five and three (and also Spurgeons Director of Partnerships and Development) shares some of his own experiences.

'Becoming a dad is the toughest but greatest thing I have ever done. My wife seemed to glide effortlessly into the waters of parenthood. Me, I spent the first year trying to adjust to fatherhood and the inevitable reduction on freedom that come with having new responsibilities. But it's also been the biggest blessing – I have these two little girls who look up to me and when they ask me questions I'm aware that my answer could influence for them for years to come. So I really try to listen and respond thoughtfully, even on those days when I'm really not in the best place myself.



'I don't always get it right. But I'd rather try than just let social media or TV shape them.'

What's the biggest crisis you've faced as a father and how did you manage it?

'A while back, my wife and I faced a number of challenges over several months. One of these was her having an accident which shattered her foot (she still has a limp). At this time, our toddler had also had quite a big operation and was in a cast, so she needed extra care.

'So I was working flat out, being a dad flat out... it got to me. I stood in the garden one freezing night, almost screaming at God in anguish. Then I contacted a Christian counsellor friend of a friend, who reassured me that I wasn't falling apart, I was just stressed. He gave me some relaxation techniques. I was skeptical at first, to be honest, but they really worked!'

What things have helped you maintain positive mental health?

'I've built up a good network of friends I can talk to, we just chew the fat on what we're dealing with in life. I try to seek out positive people and build a relationship with them (I make sure to help them in return, this has to be two way). But I've also learned to accept that sometimes help isn't forthcoming from the people I'd most expect it from!

'I try to look after myself because my family need me to be the best version of myself. I purposely build "nothing" slots into my life, time and space to think and reflect, such as going for a walk without my mobile phone. And I try to take regular exercise and eat properly because it helps me deal better with those times of stress.

"Becoming a dad is the toughest but greatest thing I have ever done"

'I've learned how important it is in parenting to communicate well with my family – mostly through failing at it!

'To help me juggle childcare and work responsibilities, I chose a job with flexible working.

'When times get tough, as they inevitably do, I've learned to acknowledge it, to be kinder to myself and remind myself that things won't be like this forever. I draw encouragement from my memories of the good times to spur me on.

'I've also learned not to compare myself with other people – especially not with the idealistic standards portrayed through TV or social media. And one really good bit of advice a friend gave me was to learn to be a parent to myself, to give myself encouragement, celebrate my successes, and realise that I'm probably doing a better job than I might think!'



**Help
for dads
24/7!**

Get lots of tips from other dads and parenting support professionals at Spurgeons' dad.info website, Europe's largest advice and support website for fathers.



Carl finds his way with words

Spurgeons project Boys2Men tackles the negative concepts of masculinity prevalent among young male offenders. Project leader Nii Anum tells us how it changed the life of one of them.

'Carl* had grown up on a very violent London estate and ended up at Feltham Young Offenders Institute. He was volatile, always in trouble, felt his life had no purpose. I invited him onto the pilot of Boys2Men two years ago - and it changed him. When a fight broke out on the block, rather than getting involved like he usually did, Carl courageously took a step back. He told me, "I'm different now, so I don't need to get involved."

'It's one thing to say you've changed, it's quite another in that tough environment to live it out.

'A key step for Carl was learning how to communicate his emotions. On Boys2Men, we encourage the boys to write down their thoughts and feelings between sessions. But he really struggled to put words on paper. He liked music, so I suggested he write it down as a rap.

'Then I suggested he tried writing it as poetry, but he didn't know what poetry was! Once I explained it, he wrote a poem about his experiences. He won an award for it while still inside.

'He's become a fantastic writer who really puts soul into what he does.

'Since his release, he's done public performances of his poetry too - it's good to see how far he's come.

'Boys2Men is growing fast - it's being launched in HMP Winchester for young adults, and we're exploring how to take it into the community in Surrey and Kent, so we can reach young people before they end up in the criminal justice system. Carl's really keen to get involved in this work, and to help other young people to not make the same decisions he made while growing up.'

*Name and details changed to protect young person's identity.



Prisons week:

8th-14th October 2023

Get involved with this annual week of prayer, for which Spurgeons helps to create resources.

LOOK UP

This year's theme is 'Look Up', inspired by Psalm 19 v 1. Even at times when God feels distant, we are reminded that He is always with us.

Pray with us using the Prisons Week leaflet (enclosed, or download a copy from the website prisonsweek.org). It includes prayers inspired by the Psalms and written by prisoners and their families, victims of crime and their communities, and those working or volunteering in the criminal justice system.

Watch Songs of Praise which features Prisons Week 2023 and a short film of our Invisible Walls project at HMP Winchester. This will be screened later this autumn - follow our social media for updates.

Watch and share the inspirational Prisons Week film on the prisonsweek.org website.

Take further action: What one thing could you or your church do to practically help any of those for whom you are praying?

We are so grateful for the many ways in which you, our supporters, help children and families – through giving donations, your time or your prayers. Thank you!

Wheels are a win-win!

How a corporate teambuilding event resulted in new bikes for families facing transport challenges.

In June, Elmbridge Family Centres and some of our partner organisations were fortunate to receive a donation of bikes for some of the families we work with. Company O3E were running a teambuilding day for 188 Virgin Media O2 employees in Slough. Under the direction of O3E's bike engineers and working in teams of up to 8 people, the staff built 23 bikes from scratch.

Along the way, they learned useful skills such as how to change a tyre, adjust for comfort, sort out brakes and gears and MOT a bike.

At the event, Spurgeons' Katie Vinnicombe explained how Elmbridge Family Centres supports families going through challenges, and how having the bikes would help some of them. We and our partners had already identified the families who would benefit, as O3E needed that information so that bikes of the right size and configuration would be built during the event.

We're really grateful to O3A and Virgin Media O2 for this amazing opportunity. And so is Earnette (pictured) who received bikes for her two oldest children so they can cycle to their respective schools as the family does not have a car.



Could your company help families in need?

We'd love to help you put together a plan so you can support Spurgeons in ways that meet your goals too. Please contact our Fundraising team - supportercare@spurgeons.org.

Celebrating our Winchester volunteers



Our Invisible Walls project at HMP Winchester depends on the commitment of 70 wonderful volunteers who help mainly with the Visitors Centre, Play Area and Tea Bar during visiting hours.

We were therefore delighted to be able to invite 15 of them (selected on the basis of length of service and extent of involvement) to a special reception hosted by Amelia Riviere, the High Sheriff of Hampshire, in recognition of their contribution.

Amelia is a magistrate and a former member of the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board) at HMP Winchester so fully appreciates the significant contribution that volunteers make within the criminal justice system.

A different event, this time in the Spurgeons Visitor's Centre at HMP Winchester and attended by Governor Jim Bourke and Mayor of Winchester Angela Clear, honoured other Spurgeons volunteers.

Some, including Jennie Espiner, have volunteered for over a decade. Jennie says, 'I have worked for many organisations as a volunteer, and this is the only one where I have felt truly valued.'

In the last year, our volunteers have been on hand to help 514 children in our Play Area and 1475 children and 7937 adults in our Visitor Centre. We and the families we work with are extremely grateful to every one of our amazing volunteers, thank you all for giving so generously of your time and skills!

Become a vital volunteer!

If you could give a little of your precious time in support of families, please contact the relevant member of staff:



Winchester Prison Family Hub:

Deb Wood, 01962 723260, iwvolunteers@spurgeons.org

Elmbridge Family Centres, Surrey:

Katie Vinnicombe, 01932 229103, kvinnicombe@spurgeons.org

Birmingham Young Carers:

Jo Martin, 07970 677827, jmartin@spurgeons.org

Parent Support team, Kent and Sussex:

Sarah Wallis, 01892 538288, swallis@spurgeons.org

We love to hear the recollections of our Old Scholars (Spurgeons) and Old Boys (Fegans), those who grew up in our Children's Homes when they still existed. We hope you enjoy reading their stories too!

My Spurgeons Story: Jimmy Green

Jimmy went to Spurgeons Children's Home in Reigate in 1944 aged 5. He shares some of his recollections.

'As I stepped into the entrance hall, I remember looking up at a tall staircase that seem to fold up into the ceiling, I'd never seen anything like it before. I was bawling my eyes out and taken straight to the play area behind the house. A little boy came up to me and gave me a toy cork pop gun he had been playing with – perhaps he felt sorry for me.

'I hardly ever saw my mum. My Nan was my legal guardian and I stayed with her during the holidays. It's a shame she couldn't look after me.

'I was in Waterbeach house with Mr and Mrs McPherson who were very good houseparents.

'Some of us lads would creep into Mr Mac's bedroom, take his false leg from behind the door and hide it on the top shelf of the airing cupboard. In the morning he'd be hopping down the corridor calling out "Where d'you put me leg, lads?" But he was never really angry!

'Once I got a bit upset and said, "That's it, I'm going home." Mr Mac packed my case, handed it to me, opened the back gate, and said, "Right, off you go." Apparently Mrs Mac asked him to stop me, but he responded, "Don't worry, he'll be back when he's hungry." He was right; within minutes I returned, wanting to know what time tea would be ready. I loved my food and he knew it!

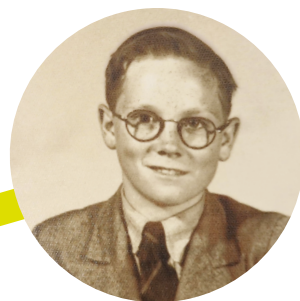
'When I left the Home at 15, I was due to stay with Nan, but she died two months beforehand. I was so upset. I had to go and live with my mum who by now had a husband and more children. But at 18 I moved out when I got a job with the Stock Exchange. Later I worked for London Transport, for 4 years as a conductor then 26 years as a driver. I loved driving the buses.

'I now live in Essex. My wife Mary and I were married for 39 years until she sadly passed away in 2019. I have 4 children and 7 grandchildren.

'I had a very good upbringing at Spurgeons.'

Calling all Old Scholars and Old Boys!

Would you like to share some of your memories? Do please get in touch with us – email Karen Logan at klogan@spurgeons.org or call **01933 412412**.



14 Pictures from the left: Jimmy Green; Jimmy and his Nan

Obituary: Mick Brown

17/7/1942-7/7/2023

Michael Royston Brown was born in Bury St Edmunds, the eldest of four children.

His siblings Daphne, Roger and Robert were separated from their parents when they were quite young, with Mick, Daphne and Robert going to Spurgeon's Children's Home, first in Reigate, then in Birchington.

Later, Mick joined the RAF. His first posting was to RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire, where he developed his skills as a driver. While there, he met his wife Louise at a Sunday dance held at the base – she was on holiday from Middlesborough, visiting her sister.

When Louise was suddenly left without a dancing partner, Mick came her rescue. He must have been really sure he had discovered his soulmate as he proposed to her four days later – and she accepted.

The couple were married in Middlesborough in May 1969, and spent 54 happy years of married life together.

Mick was thoughtful and kind, as he demonstrated in organising two reunions of the "Old Scholars" from his former Children's Home. It involved a lot of work, but the events were a great success. Many people of all ages came – some were Mick's peers, others had lived at the Home more recently. Of his own accord, he also assembled a CD of photos from his Birchington days, which he presented to Spurgeons.

Mick will be greatly missed by Louise, Robert, Michelle, his five grandchildren and two great granddaughters and all who were so privileged to have known this unique and special man.



15 Pictures from the left: Mick and his siblings; Mick on his motorbike.

Pia Finds New Purpose

15-year-old Pia*, who has autism, had become trapped in a joyless existence. Counselling through Spurgeons helped her to break free and rediscover hope. Her counsellor tells us more.

'Pia's family had moved several times, entailing changes in school which she found unsettling. Her parents' relationship had broken down (they have since separated) and her dad's tone was aggressive when he spoke to either Pia or her mum. Pia felt unable to talk to either parent. She couldn't sleep at night and then fell asleep during the day. She was reluctant to go to school and often she had low mood and suicidal thoughts.

'Pia was keen to improve communication with her parents and really engaged with the counselling process right from the start.

'I think it helped her just to have someone to talk to, given that she was so isolated. I shared some tools with her which help her to communicate with her parents and friends – she says her parents are using the techniques too.

'Positive changes are happening. Her dad's cousin Kate used to visit their home. Pia didn't like her and would hide in her room. So Pia chose a moment to talk to Dad when he was likely to listen – when he was driving her to our session! He was receptive and empathetic. Now Pia briefly spends time with Kate when she visits, then her dad takes Kate out somewhere. It all works.

'Pia's sleep patterns have improved and her suicidal thoughts are decreasing – they're still there, but now she knows how to manage them.

Did you know?

100% of children say they made progress when being supported by our services and **86%** have made headway with their feelings and behaviour

'She says she wants to be a counsellor or someone else who helps people, because counselling has helped her so much. She's found focus and hope and I'm delighted to have journeyed with her.'

*Name and identifying details changed to protect child



Connect with us online...

...for more about how your support changes lives and for more instant updates:



spurgeons.org
– our new website
launches in October



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