

Spring 2025

Spurgeons 

Together



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Special Educational Needs

- The challenges for parents
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- Scaling up our SEND support

How Harry made his dad proud

NEW Parenting after Separation course

Thank you for all you do in support of children and families!

"A hero is someone who does what must be done and needs no other reason."

Christopher Golden & Nancy Holder

From Spurgeons CEO

Apparently 28th April is International Superhero Day - who knew? But not all heroes wear capes. Society thrives on humble acts of kindness and bravery by people simply doing what must be done. And I'd like to highlight two particular groups of these 'everyday heroes'.

The first group is parents of children with a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) - which is our theme for this edition of **Together**. Despite 1 in 5 children being affected, their parents face huge struggles to get adequate support or even an official diagnosis on which so much other SEND support hinges.

It takes unwavering resolve, boundless energy and patient persistence to succeed. I think you'll see all those qualities embodied in mum Shabana, whose son has SEND, as you read her story on page 4.

The second group of 'everyday heroes' is you, our supporters. Last Christmas, we invited you to make a gift to help give hope back to families struggling with poverty, domestic abuse, mental health problems and more. In spite of these tough times, collectively you gave £24,000, helping hundreds of vulnerable families to have parenting support. Thank you!

Together, let us continue to do all we can to give children and families hope and a better future.



Ian Soars
Chief Executive,
Spurgeons Children's
Charity

Pray with us

Heavenly Father, thank you for every family of all shapes and sizes, and for the joy that parents and children can share. We pray for those families which include one or more children with a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND). We ask that you give them strength and the wisdom they need for managing the day-to-day challenges. We pray too that you would bless us with the resources and capacity to surround them with love, acceptance and practical support. Amen.

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



SEND Support

SEND needs are not being met

1.7 million school age children in England (nearly 1 in 5) have some kind of special educational need. It can affect their physical abilities and their capacity to socialise, communicate and concentrate. But getting them the support they need can be a huge challenge for their families.

The number of children with SEND is growing. Nobody really knows why - medical advances, greater public awareness and more requests for diagnosis are all potential factors.

What is certain is that services and support for these children and their families is not keeping up with the need. There are too few places in special schools. Budgets in mainstream schools are under increasing strain, and there is inadequate funding to train and resource teachers, teaching assistants and other educational staff to support SEND children. Schools and local authorities are having to spend other funds on SEND support, meaning there is less money for other essential purposes. It is estimated that 140,000 SEND children are not getting support in school.

Parents have to navigate confusing and complicated systems to get the right level of support for their SEND child. Around 600,000 children with more complex needs are legally entitled to education, health and care plans (EHCPs). However, only half of those are being issued within the legal 20 week limit, and there are huge variations around the country. Where children are deemed not to need an EHCP, increasing numbers of parents are appealing that decision and nearly all appeals find partially or fully in favour of the parents.

Spurgeons brings community and compassionate, expert support to families of SEND children, responding to the needs of parents by offering:

- **Sensory stay** and play classes to help with the transition to nursery
- **Parenting workshops** specific to a child's needs
- **Practical support** and advice on topics such as the next steps for a child or how to access the Disability Living Allowance
- **Peer-to-peer support** with other families affected by SEND

Read on to find out how we supported one parent of a child with SEND, and how it helped to transform their lives...

References:

Dr. Jo Van Herwegen, Centre for Educational Neuroscience website (April 2022) - "Why has there been a rise in number of SEN children, especially in the early years?"
Joely Santa Cruz, SKY News website (Jan 2025) - "England's special educational needs system is a postcode lottery in urgent need of funding and reform, say MPs"
Dept for Education (June 2024) - "Special Educational Needs in England", Academic Year 2023/24



1.7m

school age children in England (nearly 1 in 5) have some kind of special educational need.



140k

SEND children are not getting support in school.



600k

children with more complex needs are legally entitled to education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

Shabana: Ready to face the future

Shabana, mum of four-year-old Imran who has autism, is at our Lakeside Children's Centre in Birmingham to tell us about her journey from frustration to hope, and how Spurgeons staff have helped her.

In a sunny room upstairs at the Children's Centre, Imran sits and plays contentedly with toys, supervised by Wendy Salter, his Spurgeons SEND specialist practitioner. Shabana keeps a watchful eye on him too as she talks to us. Beneath her soft and steady voice is a hint of the steely determination that has served her so well in supporting her son.

'I thought something wasn't right when Imran, then nearly one, was not yet speaking,' she recalls. 'I contacted my GP but he said to wait. As time went by, I noticed Imran had no facial expression and would not make eye contact.'

A place of acceptance

At Imran's 2-year review, Shabana was referred to Spurgeons and Stepping Stones, a 'stay and play' style Early Help service for parents and children with SEND. Shabana comments, 'It's really lonely, being mum of a special needs child, and there aren't nurseries for SEND children. But Stepping Stones was a place where my special child and I felt accepted, understood and supported. I saw a massive difference in Imran. He loved this toy cow – he loves animals – so we would hide it in the room and he'd go and find it rather than just sitting down. He would line up sweets and toys, anything! He was happy, he was moving and interacting!'

Getting a SEND diagnosis took over a year and confirmed that Imran has autism. Meanwhile, Spurgeons helped Shabana gather evidence, write reports and get referrals to specialist support with neurodevelopment, speech and language, eating and drinking, dental care and occupational therapy.

Help with the challenges

'Initially we were turned down for occupational therapy and had to fight back,' Shabana says. 'You can't get help unless you ask for it, and you have to ask quite hard – everything takes a long time. Special needs children don't come with a manual.'

'Ultimately, you as the parent have to educate yourself, build a network of professionals and keep driving things forward or you get nowhere.'

'But Spurgeons gives you the information, confidence and motivation to help you get to the places where you need to be. Wendy helped me with applying for Disability Living Allowance and also writing an Education Care and Health Plan to get him the right support once he had moved on to nursery. If ever I get stuck with things, I still contact her – she's become a real friend.'

'I think Stepping Stones is the start that every special needs child should have.'

Shabana wanted Imran to go to a special school, but delays in paperwork meant he lost his place. Currently he is in mainstream school with a one-to-one support worker. 'But with 30 children in the class, it's noisy. He gets awful ear pain and can't tell anyone as he doesn't speak. They do try – they give him extra time, they feed him in the classroom rather than in the dinner hall with the other children, and they've got a lovely sensory room. But he can't meet the curriculum. So we've got a hearing for him to go to special school where he will have the right facilities and support.'

'Imran's come a long way. He explores, he's learning to make marks with a pen, and when I say his name he looks at me. He struggles with sensory, so brushing teeth was hard for him, but Wendy suggested an electric toothbrush and he likes that! He's a calm and happy child, even with his limitations.'

'Every day I'm proud of him.'

Shabana now feels ready to face whatever the future may bring. She's also helped us to develop and roll out Footsteps, a new SEND service - find out more overleaf!

"Imran's come a long way. He explores, he's learning to make marks with a pen, and when I say his name he looks at me."
"Every day I'm proud of him."



Donate today - help and more families!



To make your gift, scan the QR code, or go online at spurgeons.org/donate, or phone 01933 417059 (Monday-Friday 9am-4pm)

Thank you for your kindness!

SEND support at Lakeside

Children with SEND and their parents need access to expert support as early as possible, but it can be hard to come by. So, at our Lakeside Children's Centre in Birmingham, our SEND specialist practitioners (many of whom are parents to SEND children themselves) have worked with other SEND parents to develop two offerings to meet this need.

Stepping Stones: Vital early help

These weekly 'play and stay' sessions for preschoolers with SEND help them transition to nursery by familiarising them with routines and being with other children.

The setting mimics the layout of a nursery with activity 'stations'. There's a high ratio of Spurgeons specialist SEND practitioners to children. They observe each child, chat to parents about their concerns, offer tips and strategies, and advise on support available.

Children get the reassurance of familiar faces - the nursery's SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) will visit a child at Stepping Stones and, once the child has moved to nursery, our practitioners visit them there.

NEW! Footsteps: A map for the journey

Shabana and other parents often have similar concerns relating to their child's SEND journey. So, with their input, we developed a series of workshops called Footsteps. Themes vary according to the needs of each group but might include:

- **The range of support** and funding available
- **Writing a profile** of your child so the professionals you'll be dealing with get complete and consistent information.
- **Setting up and preparing** for meetings with different agencies.
- **Transitioning your child from playgroup to school** (including ECHPs - when you need one, how to get one or do your own).
- **The importance of routines** for SEND children.

Footsteps also links up parents in each group to support one another longer term.

We are now training other agencies, schools and nurseries across Birmingham to run Footsteps and Stepping Stones groups themselves. Shabana and other parents of SEND children are also being trained and supported to deliver these services in community settings such as mosques and churches.

This means that soon, many more children with SEND and their parents will get a better quality of support earlier on - which is wonderful news!



'Harry wanted to make his dad proud'

It was a daunting prospect, taking three neurodivergent children to visit their dad Greg in prison. But mum Rachael says Spurgeons made it so much easier - and she and the children decided to give something back...

Rachael says the children miss their dad. 'They really do struggle because their dad is their best friend. Harry (my youngest) spent every day with his dad, going to work or whatever else - that was his security blanket. Our eldest girl really gets emotional about her dad, too.'

But Rachael says they've had fantastic help from Spurgeons. 'With Harry being out of a routine he gets very down and really verbal towards me. They've accommodated Harry and let him express himself. Being able to have the help is really good for the family. It makes it nicer when they go to visit their dad in prison.'

Greg is also doing Storybook Dads, where a recording of him reading a bedtime story is replayed to their children at home, strengthening family bonds.

Rachael and they children wanted to help other families of prisoners in Winchester, so they ran 5k from Boscombe Pier to Bournemouth and back, raising £950 in the process.

Rachael says, 'The weather was awful, and Harry had a few tears, but he never gave up because he wanted to make his dad proud. It was so emotional when we finished.'

We're so grateful to Rachael and her children for making such a difference - we really appreciate it!



Do your own fundraising challenge!

Do you feel inspired to raise funds for Spurgeons? You don't have to run 5k! You could have a spring clean and sell unwanted items, have a bake-off, or get sponsored to give up sweets.

Email supportercare@spurgeons.org.

Top tips: How to deal with a tantrum

Tantrums are short outbursts of anger or frustration when a child cannot get what they want but cannot yet articulate their feelings. They are a normal part of development, and tend to peter out at around 4 years, once a child is able to talk more and articulate what they are feeling.

Preventing tantrums

- **Help kids to understand emotions** by reading stories with them – afterwards, talk about how the characters might have felt.
- **Offer choices** (e.g. going to the park or the library) so they feel like they have a say.
- **Praise good behaviour often.**
- **Pick your battles.** Sometimes it's best to say yes to the things that kids ask for- e.g. a certain drink- so that they don't always think the answer is 'no'.
- **Tantrums are more likely if a child is tired,** hungry, anxious or wanting attention.
- **Let them express themselves.** It's healthy for children to be able to express their emotions, such as throwing their bedding on the floor (as long as they aren't risking injury and help tidy up afterwards).

Dealing with tantrums

- **Stay relaxed** – a child will recover more quickly if they're not picking up tension from you.
- **Is there an obvious, easily solved issue** – are they hungry, tired, need space or quiet?
- **Distract them with a snack or doing an activity.** If you're out in public then move them to a different area, or point out something they might be interested in, e.g. a dog.
- **Hold them calmly but firmly** and use a soft voice. This will prevent them hurting themselves or you and help them to feel safe and relaxed.
- **If none of the above work, then stay nearby but ignore the tantrum** until it calms down naturally.

However, do consult a GP or health visitor if a child rarely co-operates, hurts themselves or others during tantrums, or occurrences are becoming more frequent or serious.

This is from an original article from Dad.info, Europe's largest advice and support website for fathers (and run by Spurgeons) – scan this QR code to access it now!



Digital hub: FREE online help for every parent

Our Digital Hub offers a wealth of parenting tips and strategies from our experts. Visit spurgeons.org/resources-and-courses or scan the QR code on the right.



NEW! Parenting after Separation online course

Divorce or separation is tough for a parent – it's hard to keep on top of day-to-day needs while dealing with emotions and practical fallout resulting from the split. It's also hugely challenging for your child.

Our six-module Parenting After Separation course, designed by our parenting and counselling experts, supports your wellbeing and reduces relationship conflict, which in turn creates a happier, more secure environment for you and your child.

The course consists of six short animation videos, each followed by a quiz, plus worksheets to download and use afterwards. Topics include:

- **How to look after your own wellbeing** following a family breakdown
- **Being aware** of your child's emotions
- **Building a positive relationship/ bond** with your child
- **Understanding the causes of difficult child behaviour**, how to manage behaviour and the benefits of praise for children
- **Establishing 'house rules'**

"This course provides invaluable guidance on staying united as co-parents and keeping the focus on your children's needs and emotional well-being."



On completing the course, one parent said, "This course provides invaluable guidance on staying united as co-parents and keeping the focus on your children's needs and emotional well-being. It equips you with the tools to navigate this challenging time while ensuring your children feel supported and cared for emotionally. Spurgeons is one of the best organisations to deliver such a course, and I encourage everyone in a similar situation to take it."

To access the free course, please visit spurgeons.org/PAS or scan the QR code below.

Restoring young lives

Spurgeons is partnering with Oasis Restore to help children in the UK's first secure school to get their lives back on track.

Spurgeons' Boys2Men project was developed at HMP Feltham, a traditional Young Offender's facility. We help children and young people build a positive relational support network through which they can have honest and critical conversations about their past, their current mindset and their future aspirations.

Boys2Men has since expanded to other locations, the latest of which is Oasis Restore in Kent. This is the UK's only secure school for children aged 12-18 on remand and sentenced to custody. Founded by Revd Steve Chalke, its aim is to reduce reoffending by restoring these young people to live their best lives and avoid future reoffending. It's a trusting environment – there are no cells, bars or prison uniforms.

Often, past trauma and poor role models influence young people into crime, so therapists and counsellors are on hand to teach them new skills and ways of thinking. Likewise, Boys2Men will help them to reframe their thinking and behaviour.

One graduate of Boys2Men at HMP Feltham said, 'You spoke life into me when all I ever heard is people tell me I was never going to be anything.'

By working with Restore Oasis, we can bring that same hope of change and a positive future to many other young people.

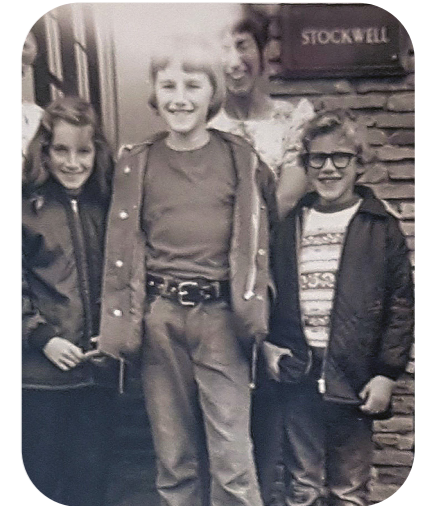


Watch our exciting new heritage video!

We're delighted to be able to share a heartwarming new video featuring footage of children from Spurgeons and Fegans homes in days gone by.



Just scan this QR code or visit spurgeons.org/heritage and scroll down the page. Enjoy!



Out now – Spurgeons annual report 2023-24!

Find out how your support had an impact on children and families, including stories and quotes from them, and get an overview of our plans for the future.



Visit spurgeons.org/about-us/our-impact/annual-report-2024 or scan this QR code:



Annual Report 2023-24



How green is our garden...

Volunteers from construction companies The Hill Group, Southgrove Group, Emersons, JS Wright and DWG Scaffolding/Brick did a wonderful job of transforming the garden area at our Family Centre in Walton-on-Thames – thanks to you, families will have a lovely green space to sit out in this spring!



Meet Navigator Nicky!

One of our Family and Community Navigators at Wiltshire Family Hubs, Nicky regularly visits libraries, town halls and leisure and community centres across the county. She offers advice to the families that drop in and provides opportunities for them to share their thoughts on shaping their communities.

'I've worked with Spurgeons for just over 2 years. I love going out into communities. Seeing children having fun and running around together with the sports chaps is great and I love getting the chance to chat with families and find out what it's really like to live in their street.

'I can only be an expert in my life, and this is something I share with others. As a Community and Family Navigator, I get to create a comfortable space for people to share their story and hope the opportunity empowers them to feel their own expertise.'



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
- Counselling
- Preschools with onsite early support in areas of intense need

Connect with us online for more stories!



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