



Improving people's lives in Northern Ireland

In Focus

The newsletter of BCM
(Belfast Central Mission)

April 2022

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram icons and @wearebcmni

“Don't be afraid to ask for help, take a chance, it may change your life!”

That was a comment made by one of the parents we helped in our Parent Support Project based in Coalisland. Short but powerful and a call of encouragement to those who find it difficult to ask for help.

We have a small but mighty team in the project consisting of one full time staff and three volunteers who do an hour a week. But what a difference these people make!

BCM's Parent Support Project works throughout rural areas in Armagh and Dungannon and with many who have no access to public or private transport. We offer home-based early intervention, emotional and practical support to 20 families at any one time. These families will all have a child (children) under the age of 17 years.

These families are going through many complex issues which include mental or physical ill health, family and relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, homelessness, poverty and unemployment. Families are in crisis and there is potential for children to be neglected, domestic violence to increase and ultimately serious trauma

to occur. The team support parents with developing routines, managing challenging behaviour, improving the mental health of parent and child and supporting them through assessment processes which can be long and arduous. Families can access the support through the local family support hub or, if they need advice, the project also has a signposting service called Parents Connect.

One of those helped by the team told them, **“Before I started with BCM I felt like I was failing at being a parent, my support worker helped me to see that I wasn't and gave me the tools I needed to parent the best way for me, my children and my family as a whole. Now, my family is stronger, they have been so helpful and supportive through a lot of problems and really helped me through a very difficult time in my life”**

Joanne, Project Manager told us, **“Every family we meet has needed the opportunity to talk about what they are going through, and we have listened. We accepted long ago that we don't have the power to change anyone's life, they do that themselves when they feel ready. What we are better at doing is encouraging our families to take a “helicopter” view of their life, an opportunity to consider the direction they are travelling in and the other avenues that are open to them. We provide advice, suggestions, build their confidence, plant a seed, set goals, give encouragement but most of all we offer compassion and the opportunity to see everything they are doing right. We know that being a parent is the hardest job of all, that's why we are there.”**



Thinking Inside The Box

While studying for my housing degree I was on placement at a supported accommodation project where I met many young people who inspired me with their resilience and hope for the future. All had experience of the care system and had one thing in common, they all arrived with their belongings in black bin bags.

I've been working with BCM for 16 years and, during this time, all the young people I have helped move, whether from family situations which have broken down, to temporary placements, or to their own independent accommodation, have also moved their belongings in bin bags.

Every young person that comes to our service is supported to find stable accommodation. Our support workers help with moving, we go to local shops and ask for cardboard boxes and help them pack. We are a one-stop-shop in that sense, finding boxes, packing and moving, and this is an important part of our role.

Recently I helped a young person move from temporary accommodation to their first permanent home.

She was delighted to finally have somewhere she could call home. Yet, when I arrived to help her move, the entire contents of her life amounted to four bin bags.

I felt that removing these bags from one property and carrying them into another chipped away at her dignity, her self-worth. I could feel her shrink behind me as we carted them to her new home, no doubt worrying, "what will the neighbours think?" She is more than what these bags held, and I had wished she had something more appropriate to move her items in. I felt that a placard wouldn't have gone amiss stating "no, not a troublemaker, just no suitcase!"

In the run up to Christmas and with the focus on Homelessness Awareness Week, many people were asking how they could help and #thinkinginsidethebox was a tangible way they could do so. We've since had large plastic storage boxes donated which have helped in lots of ways.

Support workers have filled the boxes with food donated by local churches; service users use the boxes for storing clothing as, during this colder weather, many can't heat their places adequately so their clothing and baby clothes were getting damp.



The boxes have also been used to organise the possession of service users who are showing signs of hoarding, while families that struggle with mountains of clothes and laundry have also benefited.

These boxes allow us to ensure our service users are treated with dignity, that when it comes to moving home they will have an appropriate way to do this, because no one's life belongs in a bin bag.

Joanne McCourt is a Project Manager with BCM for both Housing Support for Young People and Parent Support teams based out of Coalisland.



Christmas Programme

Huge thanks to everyone who contributed to our Christmas toy appeal. We were, once again, overwhelmed by the generosity and thoughtfulness shown by so many, which resulted in 3,840 toy parcels being distributed to children.



Testimonial

From a parent whose son was supported by BCM's Housing Support for Young People and Supported Housing projects

"I'm sure all areas of BCM offer fantastic support however the areas that have affected me personally is the support you have put in place for my son Geoff*. He was supported by David in the community. ... honestly I wouldn't have got through last year without the support of David and how he helped Geoff.

"This year he is in Tafelta Rise and the staff there are absolutely brilliant as is the accommodation. Geoff is currently in hospital and the staff are so selfless, easy to talk to and empathetic. They are also non judgemental, which is so comforting as I have met some very patronising and judgemental professionals in my journey with Geoff!"

*Name has been changed.

Hagan Homes

Ballyclare firm Hagan Homes is celebrating its third year in partnership with BCM to help fund one of its Supported Housing projects for young people in East Belfast. The relationship has already seen the company donate £50,000 in its first two years while in 2022 it will pledge a further £25,000 to cover the salary of a full-time support worker (Stephen) who will provide one-to-one support and an aftercare programme.



Stephen will support 16- to 21-year-olds who have been in the care of the HSCT, through the transition of leaving the care system or homelessness and preparing them to live more independently.

He will also aim to equip service users with the skill set and motivation to progress in life, with the overall aim to break the cycle of homelessness, which is often more prevalent in this younger demographic.



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Copelands residents
enjoy a 'pizza' the
action in Pebbles Cafe

Your gift for their future

Leaving a gift in your Will to BCM
(Belfast Central Mission) means that
after your death you can continue to
make a difference for people in
Northern Ireland.

Help us support future generations of
young people or enrich the lives of older
or lonely members of our community.

Contact: Rev David Campton
BCM, 5 Glengall Street, Belfast BT12 5AD
superintendentsoffice@belfastcentralmission.org
T: 028 90241917



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