

# **Steps and Stories: The BrightPaths Newsletter**

## **Five years of BrightPaths**

Hello and a warm welcome to all our new readers, and to those who have been with us for a while, thank you for walking alongside us. This month marks five years of BrightPaths, and it feels like the right moment to pause, look back, and share what we are seeing on the ground.

When BrightPaths began, the aim was simple: to offer early, relational support to children who were struggling but not being seen. Five years later, that mission feels more important than ever. Many young people are still waiting 18 months to two years for CAMHS, and many fall between thresholds for statutory services. Some mask their difficulties, some appear fine on the surface, and others are misunderstood in school. Too often, these children become invisible to the systems around them.

Since 2021, BrightPaths has grown from a small pilot into a community organisation working with more than 43 schools and supporting 867 children and young people. Our focus remains the same: compassionate, neurodiversity-affirming support that helps children feel understood, regulated and safe enough to learn.

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## **What we're seeing on the ground**

Across our partner schools, a few themes are standing out. Many children who do not meet thresholds for specialist support are still deeply overwhelmed. They are masking, withdrawing, or quietly struggling through the school day. Schools are doing everything they can to bridge widening gaps, often without the time, tools or capacity they need.

At the same time, we continue to see the difference that early, relational support can make. Some of the most important moments are the smallest ones: a child beginning to trust an adult, attending school for the first time in weeks, or feeling able to talk honestly about how they feel. These moments might look tiny from the outside, but they are often the foundation for long-term change.

We are also seeing something hopeful. Children who have not connected with other support before are engaging strongly with mentoring. Those early “I think I can trust you” moments are happening every week, and they shape everything that follows.

As one young person told us this year: “Nobody ever explains why things help. You explained what worry does to my body and it finally made sense.”

These moments remind us why early support matters, and why we remain committed to meeting children where they are, long before crisis.



## **Five years of BrightPaths**

This year marks our fifth anniversary, and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who has been part of the journey so far.

Over the past five years we have:

- delivered mentoring, workshops and wellbeing support across Bedfordshire
- supported children experiencing anxiety, emotional school avoidance and unmet SEND needs
- created free resources for families and schools
- advocated for more compassionate and inclusive approaches to wellbeing and education
- built a team of dedicated volunteers who bring empathy, creativity and expertise to our work

Thank you to every school, family, volunteer and supporter who has helped make this possible.

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## **Celebrating our volunteers and team**

We are thrilled not only to be celebrating five years of BrightPaths, but also the one-year anniversaries of several volunteers who have become an important part of our community. Their care, consistency and commitment have shaped so much of what we do.

This spring marks one year with Katherine, Nick, Yasmin, Megan, Natalea, and Grace.

A huge congratulations to Yasmin, who has recently completed her degree and is heading off travelling before beginning her Psychology Master's. We are delighted she will be returning to mentor with us.

Natalea has supported BrightPaths with real thoughtfulness, especially in how our work is communicated.

Grace brings consistency and a strong sense of responsibility to the work that often sits behind the scenes.

Katherine brings patience and steadiness alongside her counselling studies, making a meaningful difference to the young people she supports.

Megan has helped shape how BrightPaths communicates its work, including helping us find our voice through this very newsletter.

We are so grateful for every volunteer and mentor who helps make BrightPaths what it is.

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## **Recent articles and insights**

This month, we have been sharing reflections on the challenges children and families continue to face, and the voices that help us understand them better.

### **SEND tribunals and what families really experience**

A look at the emotional and practical toll SEND tribunals place on families, and why early support and clearer pathways matter.

 <https://brightpaths.org.uk/blog/send-tribunals-and-what-families-really-experience/>

## When isolation is used as punishment

A reflection on how isolation rooms often miss the root of a child's distress, and what a more compassionate approach could look like.



<https://brightpaths.org.uk/blog/when-isolation-is-used-as-punishment-what-problem-are-we-really-trying-to-solve/>

## Child exploitation awareness day

Raising awareness of child exploitation, the signs adults often miss, and why early relational support is essential in keeping young people safe.

 <https://brightpaths.org.uk/blog/child-exploitation-awareness-day-ceaday26/>

## Podcast: early help, real lives

Our Founder and CEO, Natasha, recently joined the *Truth About Local Government* podcast to discuss why so many children still fall between the gaps in statutory provision, why school avoidance is rising, and what early, relational support can offer that crisis-based systems cannot.

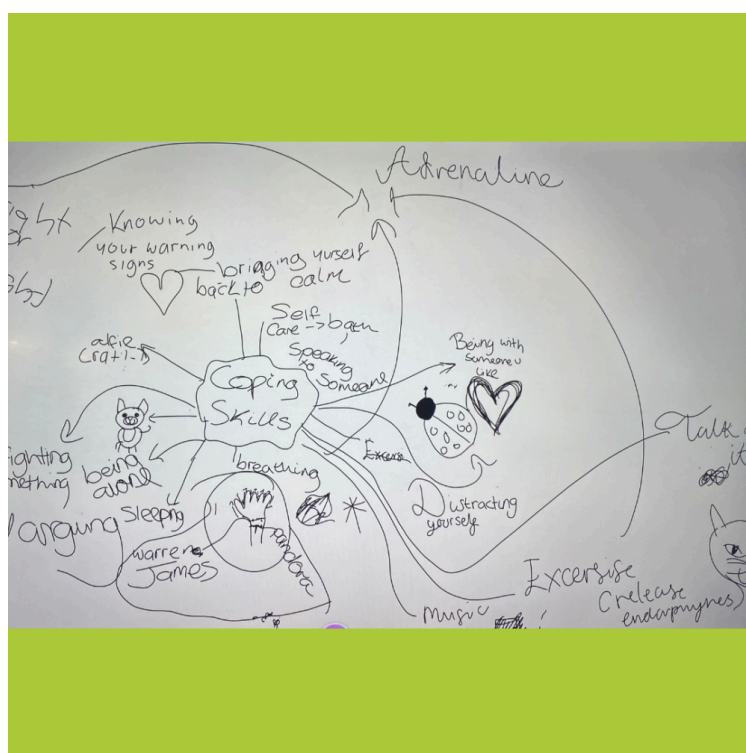
 Listen to the episode: [Early Help, Real Lives: Why Children Still Fall Between the Gaps](#)

## Our new free wellbeing resource hub

We are excited to share our new free wellbeing resource hub, bringing together trusted guidance, practical tools and supportive resources for families, schools and young people.


From sensory regulation to emotional wellbeing, we've gathered clear, down-to-earth guidance and trusted tools from organisations who really understand children's needs.

 [Explore the wellbeing resource hub](#)



### Community spotlight: Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum

We've been sharing a number of BBPCF posts recently, and for good reason. The forum offers brilliant support, events and workshops for families locally. Upcoming sessions include EHCP workshops, sensory support sessions and relaxed coffee mornings that help parents feel informed and supported.

You can explore what's coming up here:  [Explore upcoming BBPCF events](#)

## **SEND reform consultation**

The national SEND reform consultation is open until 18 May.

This is a key opportunity for families, educators, and professionals to share their experiences.

More information: [!\[\]\(feabb98897b440bc8695a03336a6e2df\_img.jpg\) Learn more](#) [!\[\]\(c7f935293d8062fa748ed86b74d28761\_img.jpg\) Submit feedback](#)

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## **Looking ahead**

Behind the scenes, we have been strengthening structures and developing new opportunities to help BrightPaths grow sustainably and consistently.

New volunteer roles, including opportunities linked to social media and content creation, will be advertised soon.

If you enjoy our articles or resources, one of the simplest ways to support us is by liking, sharing or commenting on our posts. Every interaction helps us reach more schools, families and young people who may benefit from our work.

We are also continuing to welcome enquiries from schools interested in partnering with BrightPaths.

[!\[\]\(3cb60d42b10e53f9522bb0b392c1c4cd\_img.jpg\) Learn more about our partner school offer](#)

## **This month's free resource: exam season self-care guide**

With exam season starting, many young people are feeling the pressure. We've created a simple, gentle resource focused on:




- Looking after your nervous system
- Understanding that different brains work in different ways
- Reducing pressure rather than increasing it
- Practical regulation strategies for revision and exam days


 [Download the exam season self-care guide](#)

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## **Stay connected**

Thank you for reading this edition of Steps and Stories. Whether you have supported us from the beginning or have only recently discovered BrightPaths, we are so grateful to have you with us.

Follow us for more updates, stories, and inspiration:  [Instagram](#) |  [LinkedIn](#) |  [Facebook](#)

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