

# Extended Family

Autumn 2025



In this issue:

**Highlights from our Old Boys and Girls Reunion**

**Our campaign to lift millions of children out of poverty**

**A tribute to the Duchess of Kent**



# Hello

A very warm welcome to your autumn edition of *Extended Family* magazine.



I really enjoyed catching up with those of you we welcomed to the iconic Methodist Central Hall for our annual Old Boys and Girls Reunion. It was another wonderful opportunity to reminisce and come together for the work still to be done for children – 156 years after Action for Children began. I am so proud to be Chair of this brilliant charity and part of this amazing community.

There is a real family feel and warmth that only strengthens my belief in the importance of our work. You can read about the reunion highlights and see photos from the event on pages 8 and 9.

In recent months, we've seen the sad passing of two key figures in the Action for Children family, former NCH President, the Duchess of Kent and former CEO Tom White. Their legacy of love lives on, as you'll see on pages 6 and 7.

#### Driven by love

In 2024/25, we helped over half a million children, young people and families, supporting children in care, disabled children, parents and young carers.

We could not do it without amazing people like you. But there is still so much to do.

Today 4.5 million children live in poverty – a number that has been rising for years.

Every 15 minutes, a child goes into care in the UK. Over half will have suffered neglect and abuse.

After 156 years, a lot has changed. But the needs of children have not. That is why we are still taking action for children. For as long as children need us, we will be here. You can read about our amazing young campaigners and our Paying the Price campaign on page 5.

Sometimes we need to take hard decisions to help manage the tough financial climate so we can help more children. With that in mind, we are adapting the way we communicate with you. Most of our news will be shared with you in one annual edition of *Extended Family*, rather than two, which will be published in autumn. You will then hear from us again in the spring with an invite to the Annual Reunion, and a copy of our supporter magazine *Thanks to You*. We hope that you understand and continue to enjoy these updates.

If you know someone who would like to come to the reunion but does not get our magazine, please let our Supporter Team know on 0300 123 2112 and we will send them an invite.

My very best wishes to our extended family as we head towards the end of another year.

Sarika Patel, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Action for Children

## Contents

- 3 Secret Santa.
- 4 A royal visit to remember.
- 5 Stop children Paying the Price.
- 6 Remembering Tom White.
- 7 A tribute to the Duchess of Kent.
- 8 A family affair - reunion memories.
- 11 Driven by love - sharing our impact.

# Be a Secret Santa for a vulnerable child



\*This story is based on real examples of children we support, showing what they've been through while protecting their identities.

The magic of Christmas begins in childhood. Hanging stockings. Sharing festive food. Presents under the tree.

But for too many children across the UK, Christmas is anything but magical. No stockings. No presents. No festive food – often no food at all.

Be a Secret Santa and you could help children like Chloe\* feel the magic of Christmas.

***“I really don't mind Mummy – I don't need any presents,” Chloe said.***

Christmas was just weeks away. But six-year-old Chloe's\* mum Layla\* just didn't know how she would afford it.

“I barely had enough money for food, let alone decorations and Christmas presents. At one point I didn't even have enough money for a pint of milk.”

“Chloe had crossed off the presents on her letter to Santa. Instead, she had asked if he could bring her mum some 'special food' to make a Christmas dinner.”

“I wanted to burst into tears.”

## **The gift of kindness**

That week the family were referred to Action for Children for support.

Their support worker arrived at Chloe's house with fairy lights, chocolate decorations for their little tree and fresh fruit and vegetables. She also brought a bag full of wrapped presents.

On Christmas morning, Layla watched Chloe's excitement as she opened the living room door and saw the presents.

“At first she couldn't speak, she was just staring at the presents with her mouth wide open. She kept glancing back at me like she wasn't sure if they were really for her.”

“She burst into tears and kept saying ‘Santa came, he really came!’”

For Chloe it was the best Christmas ever.

“I was so, so grateful. You [Action for Children] literally saved our Christmas. Your kindness and generosity meant we could enjoy a Christmas meal together and most of all, you made sure Santa visited Chloe. It was a day we will never forget.”

Childhood is short. We only get a few chances to make magical memories. Be a Secret Santa for a vulnerable child and you could help them feel the magic of Christmas.

Visit [iamsanta.org.uk](https://iamsanta.org.uk)





# A royal visit to remember

In February our patron, HRH the Princess of Wales, had a special visit to our Mother and Baby Unit at Styal Prison and Young Offender Institution in Wilmslow.

There she met mums and heard how our expert staff help them nurture and keep a loving bond with their babies. They also provide help to break the cycle of reoffending and develop new skills, plus one-to-one support on everything from budgeting to cooking healthy meals.

"The Princess took time to talk to our staff about how our service works to ensure these babies don't miss out and to give them the best chance of a positive future," said Amanda Taylor, Operational Director of our Children's Services.

***"Staff and mums in the unit loved our patron's visit - a real highlight - and the Princess of Wales seemed to really enjoy learning about our vital work. As an added bonus, we're going to receive a special charity rose, named after our patron. Our mums and babies will love watching 'Catherine's Rose' bloom in the grounds of the unit."***

Claire Pentin, Children's Services Manager

## Happier lives from the start

Work like this is vital, as we know early positive interactions help babies enjoy happier lives. So we're privileged to be some of the earliest adopters of the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood's The Explainer series.



The series, which launched in August 2025, features seven animated films bringing to life the science behind early brain development and how it shapes children's social and emotional development.

We're excited to be using the films to train our early years staff – and on our Building Babies Brains programme.



# Stop children Paying the Price

In Westminster our young campaigners shared their real-life experiences and urged politicians to lift more than a million children out of poverty.

No child should have to pay the price of poverty.

That was the message our incredible young campaigners with direct experience of child poverty told politicians loud and clear at our Paying the Price campaign and report launch in Westminster.

Supported by our partner Nationwide Building Society, our campaign revealed that 4.5 million children now live in poverty in the UK. But it doesn't have to be this way. We've got practical policy solutions to lift at least a million children out of poverty by the end of the decade and halve the rate of child poverty in the long term.

## The reality of child poverty

Our young campaigners Louise, Freya, Aaron and Georgia took the stage to share their own experiences of poverty. They spoke powerfully about the lack of food growing up and of always going to bed hungry.

Freya, now mum to a baby boy, explained how “shocking” price rises affected her family as everyday essentials became “extremely unaffordable”.

“If poverty was improved it would make managing mental health so much easier,” she said.

She explained how money worries “...never leave your mind. I want to give my son everything and give him the life I didn't have. I want him to have a better life than I did but to give him that things need to change.”

Aaron experienced homelessness as well as poverty growing up. He said he had “...no normal pleasures of childhood. That has left me with emotional problems I will have for the rest of my life.”

## Poverty has a high price

Our Chief Executive Paul explained to the audience that the UK stands at a crossroads on child poverty.

“We recognise the very difficult decisions government has to make,” he said. “Investing in children comes at a cost, but poverty comes at a far higher price.”

Scott, our Senior Policy Advisor, added that “The UK could rank as among the best performing countries internationally on child poverty rather than one of the worst.”

Our launch won massive media coverage – covered everywhere from ITV News to The Independent and STV News. Plus, a letter from our celebrity supporter, Hollywood actor Brian Cox, was also featured in national newspapers like The Daily Mail and The Sun.

We continue to call on the government to take bold action ahead of its child poverty strategy expected in November.



You can read more about our campaign and take action. Visit [actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/campaign-with-us/child-poverty/](https://actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/campaign-with-us/child-poverty/)

# Remembering...



## Tom White

We're sad to report our former chief executive Tom White has died aged 93. Here we celebrate his passion for giving more children safe and loving homes.

Starting life as a miner's son, Tom left home at 16 to find work to support his sick father, mother and four younger brothers.

This early struggle fuelled his passion for social justice. And it's this drive that saw him join Action for Children in 1985. During just over a decade with us he more than doubled the number of projects we ran – enabling our charity to help five times the number of children through a fresh focus on family support.

But before joining us, and after national service with the Royal Air Force, Tom studied social science at Swansea University and eventually became a social worker.

Throughout his work, he championed doing everything he could to keep families together. Tom also used the contacts he'd made as a Labour party supporter to lobby for change and influence government policy.



In 1970, he moved to Coventry, becoming the city's first-ever director of social services. Over the next 15 years Tom was right at the heart of changes that created hope for the future, helping make Coventry a pioneering force in progressive and innovative social work that shaped new ways to support children.



In 1990 he was awarded a CBE for his work supporting people and communities and that same decade gained an honorary doctorate from Coventry University.

### An enduring legacy

He retired in 1996, but didn't stop there, serving the community as a councillor. True to his social work roots, he took on responsibility for community wellbeing.

At his funeral, his friend and former social services director Adrienne Jones described Tom as “driven, visionary, modest, ambitious and energetic”.

She added: “Tom has left an enduring legacy having made a positive impact throughout his whole working life.

“He did not react to challenges on a whim. He brought inspiration, strength and dedication. He applied himself in a purposeful way to improving legislation, resources and services. All this was for the benefit of children and adults who need and use social care and for the staff who deliver the services.”

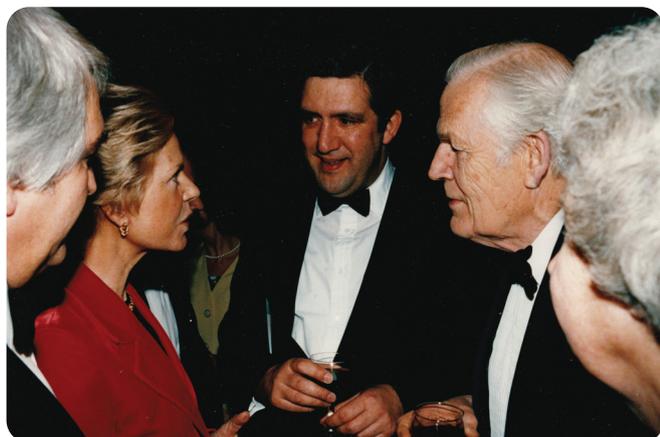
Tom's wife Eileen passed away last year. He is survived by his two daughters Vivienne and Ceri.

# A tribute to the Duchess of Kent

In September we heard the sad news of the passing of Katharine, HRH The Duchess of Kent, at the age of 92. The Duchess was president of NCH (The National Children's Home, now Action for Children). Here, Clive Williams – one of our 'Old Boys' who went on to become a trustee – shares some special memories from the years he worked with her.



"I was sorry to learn that HRH the Duchess of Kent, at one time President of NCH Action for Children, had recently passed away.



"As a previous trustee, I remember being with [HRH The Duchess of Kent] during a wonderful fundraising performance of Handel's Messiah at Westminster Abbey, which was part of our 125th anniversary celebrations of NCH in February 1994. As a result, in October 1994, supporters could enjoy the glorious Messiah on a double CD featuring the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Choral Society which was recorded to raise funds for NCH (Action for Children)."

"In the summer of 1995, NCH announced that The Duchess had replaced the retiring Viscount

Tonypandy as our new president. Chief Executive at the time, Tom White, expressed delight at the appointment." The Duchess planned to start her presidency with a visit to Highbury and Legard House, a referred family support centre, in October.

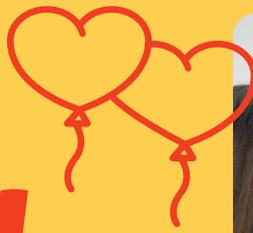
"In October 1995, HRH visited our central office and Legard House Family Centre, both in Highbury, London. And in April the following year, she visited two more centres - Newbiggin Hall Family Centre in Newcastle, and Monksfield, a respite care service for children with disabilities, in Hexham, Northumberland."

"As our President she always looked forward to spending as much time as possible getting to know our work throughout our projects."

The Duchess' dedication to the welfare of children through her role as president, and her support for our charity, leaves an inspiring legacy. We're extremely grateful for her service and send our warmest thoughts to her family.



# A family affair



This year's Old Boys and Girls Annual Reunion was an emotional and nostalgic afternoon held at the Methodist Central Hall in London on a sunny afternoon in July.



Among those attending were Sheila Freeman and Pamela Atkinson who grew up together at our Alverstoke home in Gosport near Portsmouth during the 1940's, '50's and early '60's. They were babies when they were taken into the home, with Sheila leaving just before she was 13, and Pamela leaving aged 16.

Everyone attending caught up with friends, shared stories from the past and heard about the vital work we're doing for families in the present. They were joined, too, by Sarika - our Chair of the Board of Trustees.

***"If it wasn't for the National Children's Homes (NCH) I may not have been here at all"***

Ronnie Archer-Morgan is known to millions for his presenting work on Antiques Roadshow and Millionaire Hoarders. But what many people don't know is that he grew up in our care until age six, first at Woking in Surrey before moving to Westdene in Southport, Lancashire.

"If it wasn't for the National Children's Homes, I may not have been here at all," explained Ronnie. "They showed me care and stability in my life when I had none. They made me feel valued."

Thanks to our work (formerly known as National Children's Home, or NCH), Ronnie said he grew up

with the knowledge "of what it feels like to be cared for."

Also at the reunion were Frankie Gallagher and her brother Richard Holdsworth.

"I'm immensely, immensely grateful for my time in the home," said Frankie.

"The best thing that ever happened to us was going to the National Children's Home," added Richard.

## **A caring community**

Speaking at the event our Chief Executive Paul Carberry said: "I'm very proud to be part of this excellent community. There's a real family feel and real warmth.

"As officers of the charity we take the legacy really seriously. These are our roots."

When Paul told the audience we were opening five new children's homes this year, you could feel the buzz in the room.

"We are giving children care, love and support and everything they need to be successful adults and parents themselves," said Paul.

## **Connecting with our founders**

Also at the reunion was Sonia Sacadura, the great-great granddaughter of NCH co-founder Francis



Horner. She spoke about his passion for change and the caring spark that’s ignited our work for the last 156 years.

“He devoted himself to this mission, to this greater cause,” said Sonia.

Francis wrote a book about the history of our charity called *Shadow and Sun*. “This tells everything from the beginning, about the faith that inspired him, the early days about the two boys they took in and the rapid growth of [NCH] and everything they had to go through to secure homes,” she says.

“My Uncle Max passed onto me everything he had, and I was collecting pieces connected to NCH and when I found the book and read it I was absolutely thrilled with the story and proud of everything that had been achieved.”

“I feel immensely proud with a huge sense of responsibility to somehow pass this onto other people and inspire them.”

“There’s a level of poverty today but it’s more hidden. Back then the situation sounded horrendous and so

[change] had to start from somewhere with three people doing something different.

“Action for Children, as it stands today, is the result not only of the work of those three founders, but also of every individual who has crossed its path and contributed to its mission.”

Sonia has very kindly offered all Old Boys and Girls a free electronic or digital copy of the book. If you’d like a copy, please email [ssacadura@gmail.com](mailto:ssacadura@gmail.com).

### Our mission continues...

At the reunion, Chan, one of our amazing young campaigners, shared the ongoing work of Action for Children to make sure every child, whatever their background, doesn’t miss out on important opportunities and life chances.

“That’s what Action for Children has always stood for,” she told the audience.

“Not just protection – but potential. They continue to fight for children like me to have more than the bare minimum.”



### Come and join us

Want to be part of our next Old Boys and Girls Reunion in July 2026? We’d love to see you there to remember and reminisce. You’ll find your invitation in your copy of *Thanks to You* magazine next spring.

# A legacy of love

Loved one



**When someone leaves Action for Children a gift in their will, the course of a child's life could change.**

That's why we add a star in their name to our Sky of Stars. A star to remember the difference they've made to vulnerable children and young people. A star that will shine as a lasting light to help give children a brighter future.



To find out more about our Sky of Stars visit: [actionforchildren.uk/skyofstars](https://actionforchildren.uk/skyofstars) or scan the QR code.

*"My grandma was a keen supporter of Action for Children throughout her lifetime, and left a gift in her will to continue her support for vulnerable children and young people. I was so touched to see her remembered on Action for Children's Sky of Stars – it's a beautiful (online) page, and a welcome reminder of her generosity in supporting others".*

# Driven by love

Just like you, we want to see a brighter future for children. Here's how, with your incredible support, we take action so children don't miss out on a safe and happy childhood.

In 2024/25, we took action for

# 551,400

children, young people and families across the UK.

We provide **342** vital services in local communities across the UK, in schools, and online.

We helped:



## 5,141

children, young people, their families and carers through our services supporting children in or at risk of going into care.



## 50,869

children and young people (and their families) with their mental health and wellbeing.



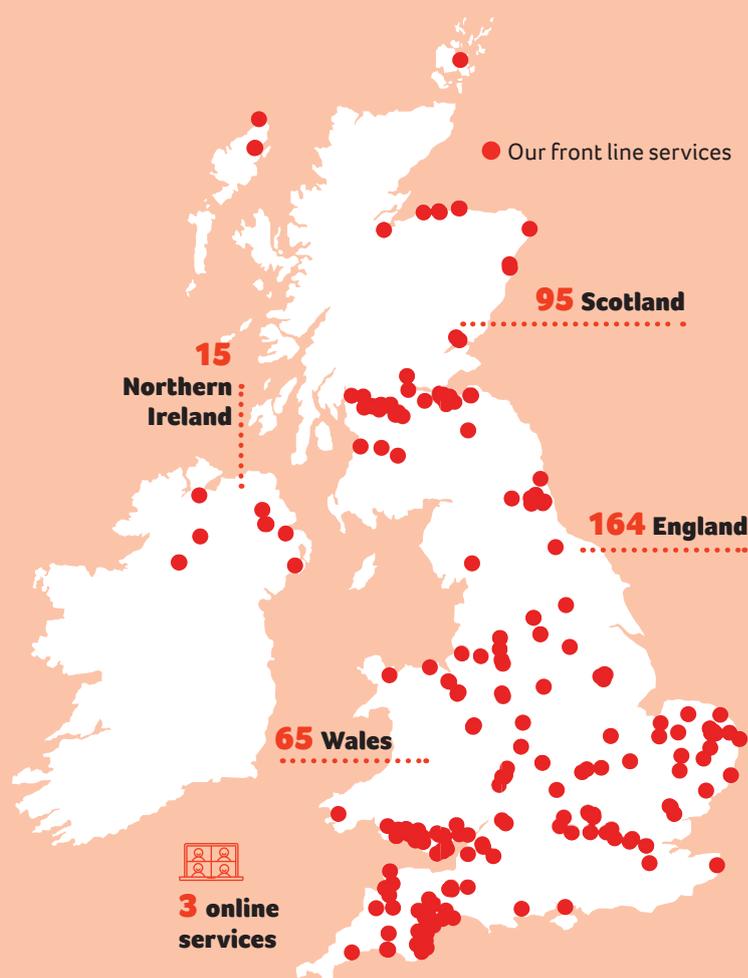
## 484,650

children, young people and families through our family support services.



## 10,740

disabled children, young people and their families.



Know someone who'd love this magazine?  
We know some of our Old Boys and Girls  
aren't getting *Extended Family*. If you know  
somebody who doesn't get it, but would  
like to, please put them in touch with:  
[helen.lavelle@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:helen.lavelle@actionforchildren.org.uk)

## Safe and happy childhood



Action for Children is driven by love. We take action so children don't miss out on a safe and happy childhood. We have thousands of people working on the ground, giving children and young people the protection and practical help they urgently need. And we campaign tirelessly for lasting change.

