

# Extended Family

Spring 2024

Action for  
Children

In this issue:

**The story of  
Francis Horner, one  
of our founders.**

**Welcoming Fatima  
Whitbread – our  
new Ambassador!**

**A day in the life of  
a Parenting Coach.**

Also inside:



**Your invitation to our Annual  
Reunion for Old Boys and Girls**



# Hello

And a warm welcome to your Spring issue of Extended Family magazine.



It's always such a privilege to write directly to you and send you news of our work. We're so grateful to have you as part of the Action for Children family.

In this edition, we bring you the amazing story of one of our founders, Francis Horner (pages 4 and 5). We shine a light on our amazing Parent Coaches on pages 6 and 7. Also, on page 3, we welcome Fatima Whitbread – our amazing new Ambassador, sharing some of her incredible achievements for Action for Children so far. We also look back at our spectacular Starry Night Gala on page 8.

And while Christmas now seems a long time ago as we head into the warmer months, we want to say 'thank you' to everyone who became a Secret Santa for a vulnerable child and helped to

raise £1.5 million for children and young people across the UK.

But my most important message for this issue is to invite you to our 2024 Old Boys and Girls Reunion on 6 July at Methodist Central Hall in London. We'd absolutely love to see you there for what is always a very special day of catching up, sharing memories and having fun. You can find all the details of the event and how to RSVP on the invite in this mailing.

My very best wishes to all our Extended Family for the months to come.

*Paul Carberry*

Paul Carberry,  
Chief Executive

## Contents

- 3 Welcoming Fatima Whitbread – our new Ambassador.
- 4 The story Francis Horner – one of our founders.
- 6 A day in the life of our Parenting Coaches.
- 8 Our first Starry Night Gala.
- 9 Remembering Shirley Anne Field.

### On the cover:

Members of our Old Boys and Girls family and guests at our Annual Reunion last year.

## Fatima Whitbread

### Our new Ambassador

We recently welcomed Fatima Whitbread – Olympic javelin medallist, *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here* contestant and long-time supporter of Action for Children – as our Celebrity Ambassador. Fatima has care experience herself, and since she joined our family in March 2022, has made a massive difference to the work we do.

From supporting National Care Day in the press, raising much-needed awareness for our cause, to climbing Mont Blanc to raise vital funds. Attending events to represent our mission, and helping raise around £6,000 with Fatima's 29 Mile February – she's gone above and beyond to help vulnerable children across the UK.

Her passion and commitment to making positive change – for today's children, and the children of tomorrow – is truly inspirational. We're so excited to continue this amazing journey with Fatima, as an Ambassador. And to see what she does next!



## “A special place for children...”



The engraved bench Stella provided

Old Girl Stella, along with her brother, sister and other fellow Old Boys and Girls, have created a bench to remember the children's home at Sheringham where they grew up. The former home was knocked down last year to make room for a new development, and Stella felt passionately about recognising the wonderful home that had given them such a happy start in life.

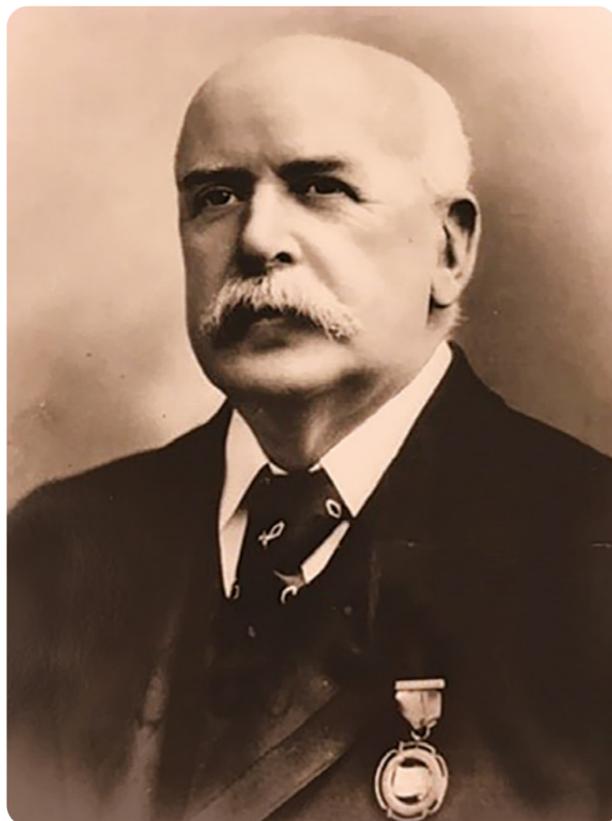
Stella fondly remembers film nights, Christmas parties, Easter egg hunts and holidays with the

'Aunties and Uncles' from her time at Sheringham. She later spent 26 years working with children in a nursery school, telling us, "I have always felt that working in a childcare environment, I could give back to others of which was shown and given to me from age one to after I turned 18 – and of which I am eternally grateful."

Do you have a story for us? We'd love to hear it. Email us at [helen.lavelle@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:helen.lavelle@actionforchildren.org.uk)

# Francis Horner

## The story of one of our founders



Francis Horner was one of three pioneers who set up the National Childrens Home (NCH) in 1869.

Francis Horner was born in Ireland and had started a career in business by the time he met Reverend Dr Thomas Bowman Stephenson and Alfred Mager at Clifton Street Methodist Sunday School.

The story goes that Horner had been in London Bridge just before midnight one evening. It was snowing and he came across a landing pier where a large tarpaulin revealed young boys - shoeless, ragged and alone. They were two brothers whose mother had died and their father had deserted them.

Appalled at the levels of poverty and destitution facing young boys and determined to do something about it, Horner, Stephenson and Mager proposed founding a home for boys who did not have one. One where training could be offered in the 'principles of Christianity, together with industriousness'.

Horner, Mager and Stephenson set to work. Within three months of their first meeting, the first two boys - George Oliver and Frederick James Hall - went to live in the first home at No 8 Church Street, Waterloo.

The three pioneers lost no time in promoting their case. Three days later the home was used to host an appeal for wealthy potential supporters. Their aim

was 'to rescue children who, through death and vice or extreme poverty of their parents, are in danger of falling into criminal ways.'

The 'father' and 'mother' of this first home were tasked to 'surround them [the boys] with all the influences of a Christian family, to make the boys feel that they were part of one family. To provide small family-type homes with house parents to care for them.'

The vision was of a family-style system of childcare - unlike the cruel workhouses. Professional from the start, their recognition of the importance of professional training was a significant contribution to the development of childcare in the UK.

During the 1870s, many believed Canada could offer better prospects for vulnerable children with no contact with their birth families. Francis Horner accompanied 49 children from England to Canada on 23 May 1873. There was a new home set up for them, giving them training in skills like carpentry, printing and other trades. And Revd Stephenson played a big part in making sure 'placements' were properly monitored and inspected regularly.



Francis Horner outside of the door of our first home. The door is now on display at our office in Great Queen Street, London.

Francis Horner was instrumental in the opening of many more homes over the next 60 years. His legacy and that of Mager and Stephenson lives on in the innovative care that Action for Children now provides for children, young people and their families.

Horner died on 11 August 1930 after a long illness. Until the end of his life, his commitment to the welfare of children never wavered.

He wrote a book *Shadow and Sun*, published in 1919, where he shared many of his memories of the children he came into contact with and talks about the growth of the new homes for vulnerable children.

Sonia, Francis's great, great granddaughter, 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)



# A day in the life... ...of our Parent Talk coaches

Our multi-award winning online service, Parent Talk, gives down-to-earth parenting advice you can trust. Whether it's the answer to a question in our advice articles, or talking one-to-one to a parenting coach about something that's worrying a parent or caregiver – we're here for them, for free, when they need us.

Parent Coach, Ruth, tells us how she helps people on the service every day.

## What does an average day look like for you on Parent Talk?

On Parent Talk no two days are the same, in terms of what people need support for. As no topic is too big or

too small. And it can be anything from toilet training to sleep, to helping with the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

We start with a morning briefing, where the team comes together to connect. Then we log into the online platform and either respond to messages that have come in the night before or have a live chat with them. I enjoy having live chats as I can ask questions and learn about how things are and what tips, strategies and signposts I can share. We also offer a phone call if they'd prefer.

Within my role as a Parent Coach, I've also had experience of doing radio interviews, from topics ranging from school refusal, parent burn out, and even how to talk to children about death when the Queen died. When the request comes in for a member of our team to speak to the media, I spend time researching and preparing. Sometimes the requests are very last minute, so it's important I'm prepared. Although I always get nervous, I really enjoy doing interviews and it's great to be able to raise awareness, share tips and strategies and signpost people to Parent Talk.

## Who are you helping in your role?

I believe we're helping everyone. By helping parents, grandparents, caregivers or whoever the service user is, we're also helping their children, their partners, their wider family, their friends. And that has a radiating impact, a ripple effect, beyond that one person. My passion is to see families thrive and I know Parent Talk does this.

## What issues are parents, grandparents and carers bringing to you right now?

The top issues are around parental burn out, school refusal, co-parenting, child mental health and SEND. Action for Children has released reports on these issues and spoken across the media about them, too.

## How else can Parent Talk help people?

As well as the live chat, we also have lots of content where people can access advice, tips and strategies around any topic of parenting. We also signpost to other services, for example, recommending someone speaks to their GP, their children's school or go to their local children centre. We can share tips around things like creating routine or potty training. We also ask about what support they have – the saying goes it takes a village to raise a child, so it's important they don't feel alone. And like the aeroplane analogy, it's so important parents are putting their oxygen mask on before anyone else's.

## Tell us about a time recently where you felt you made a real difference.

A parent came onto the chat saying they have two children age three and seven and they felt they weren't a good enough parent, they're struggling and don't know what to do.

This was a live chat so I was able to ask some questions to find the right support and guidance.

I felt that, firstly, this parent needed someone to talk to and listen to them. I was able to provide emotional support, encourage them and show them empathy. Tell them they're not alone and that there is always someone to talk to. I asked if they have support and explored with them what that looked like. I also asked about their wellbeing and what they're struggling with - are they able to eat properly, get enough exercise and sleep? Then I made some suggestions of where they could access support - the GP, school, the family centre. And I also sent some strategies for them to try, and said I would have a follow up with them.

At that follow up, they said they were in a much better place. They'd spoken to the GP and got a referral for someone to talk to. They'd also spoken to the children's school and nursery. And they'd managed to get out for a walk.

They said: "I am so thankful for this service as I really felt heard and so great to know I am not alone." This made me feel I'd made a difference and I know the whole team feels the same.

Parent Talk is here for anyone with a child in their life. Find 24/7 information, advice and support at [parents.actionforchildren.org](https://parents.actionforchildren.org)



# Starry Night

In November, Action for Children's very first Starry Night gala took place in the stunning Grade II listed Battersea Arts Centre in London.

With special guests including Kate Thornton and Alison Hammond, it was an extraordinary evening of theatre and heartwarming moments.

Clive and Sonia, part of our Old Boys and Girls family, joined as guests on the night, along with many other familiar faces.

Clive, who went to NCH Killay House in Wales said: "It was good to be reunited with other Old Boys and Girls, and Ronnie Archer-Morgan, former Old Boy and presenter on the BBC Antiques Road Show."



Our Young Carers Aloud Choir, mentored by Charlotte Church, wowed the audience with their incredibly moving performance. The next day, the choir joined Alison with Dermot O'Leary to perform on ITV's This Morning. And a week later, the choir performed at the 'Together and Christmas' carol concert at Westminster Abbey. The special event was hosted by HRH The Princess of Wales, and attended by other members of the royal family, celebrities, supporters and those who work directly to support children.



And Sonia Sacadura, who is a descendant of one of our founders Francis Horner (read more about him on pages 4 and 5) told us how much she enjoyed seeing the personal messages from Angela Rippon, Charlotte Church and our patron HRH The Princess of Wales. She said: "All this activity helps to raise the profile of Action for Children."



**Our Starry Night gala really was a night to remember, raising an incredible**

**£153,000**

**to help give more children the safe and happy childhood they deserve.**

# Remembering...

## Shirley Anne Field

Actress and Action for Children Ambassador. 27 June 1936 - 10 December 2023.

Actress and Action for Children Ambassador, Shirley Anne Field (born Shirley Broomfield) grew up at the Edgworth Children's Home in the 1940s, later moving to a hostel at Highbury before her acting career.

Her mother struggled to afford essentials like medicines and her father was sometimes involved in petty crime. They decided to send Shirley to a children's home near Woking in Surrey because she was too young to be evacuated during the war.

She was six when she moved to National Children's Home at Edgworth, near Bolton, Lancashire. Four years later she was moved to another children's home in Blackburn, where she went to Blakey Moor School for Girls. She returned to Edgworth until she was 15, when she moved to a children's home hostel in London, training as a typist while she went to school.

One of her teachers, Mr Bareham, gave her the lead role in a play called *The Monkey's Paw* when she was 13. Apparently she quietened a roomful of boisterous young people with her performance and it was then that she decided she wanted to be an actress.

Her mother visited her only once, and they were not reunited until 1978.

She did a course in modelling at the Lucie Clayton Modelling School and was working as a model when she was spotted by a theatrical agent. She had several small roles in British cinema before getting her breakout role in 1960's *The Entertainer*. She starred opposite Albert Finney in the acclaimed kitchen sink drama *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

Shirely starred in the Hammer horror film *The Damned* and the historical epic *Kings of the Sun*. In 1966, she had a supporting role in the Michael Caine classic *Alfie*. Later in her film career,



Shirley at the 2014 Old Boys and Girls Annual Reunion

she appeared in the popular film *My Beautiful Laundrette* as well as in *Getting it Right*, and *The Kid*.

Her other appearances on British and American TV included *Last of the Summer Wine*, *Where the Heart Is*, *Monarch of the Glen*, *Doctors*, and *Murder, She Wrote*.

She became an ambassador for Action for Children (then called NCH) in 1993, and a vice-president in 1994. Shirley supported the charity by attending and hosting many events. She appeared on *Celebrity Cash in The Attic* in which she spoke movingly about her involvement with Action for Children and her experiences of Edgworth Children's Home.

We remember Shirley fondly, and will always be so grateful for her invaluable support. We also send our thoughts to her family and friends.

### Remembering Lesley

We also remember Lesley Solway Panesar (nee Solway) who passed away at the end of December 2023. Lesley was at our former home at Sheringham, and was in Sister Phyllis' family.



# Writing brighter futures



Leaving a gift in your will to Action for Children could change the course of a child's life.

- ★ You could keep a child safe.
- ★ Make sure they're healthy and happy.
- ★ And help them to achieve incredible things.

**Give a child a brighter future.**

Call: 0300 123 2112

Visit: [actionforchildren.uk/brighterfutures](https://actionforchildren.uk/brighterfutures)

Or scan the QR code



## Can't wait to see you...

Included in this mailing is your invite to this year's Old Boys and Girls Reunion. We're so excited to see you there.

It's easy to let us know if you'll be there, and how many guests you're bringing. Just fill out the invite and send it back in the pre-paid envelope.

*"The fact that so many people come to the reunion shows that like me, they feel loyal and grateful to NCH for all the love and care they received."*

Any questions?  
Email [specialevents@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:specialevents@actionforchildren.org.uk)



Do you know an Old Boy or Girl who'd love to receive this mailing? Let them know they can sign up by emailing [helen.lavelle@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:helen.lavelle@actionforchildren.org.uk) or calling 0300 123 2112.

## Safe and happy childhood



Action for Children protects and supports children and young people, providing practical and emotional care and support, ensuring their voices are heard, and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives.