

## Spurgeons

Good morning. The charity of the week this morning is Spurgeons, as we have included them in our annual round of donations from church funds.

The charity Spurgeons is particularly close to my heart, as I am a trustee. It is a Christian children's charity, founded by a Victorian Baptist, the Revd Charles Spurgeon, with a major donation from an Anglican lady. It continues its work today for children and their families in the most need. The senior staff and all the trustees are Christian, and so we look to provide a strong Christian ethos in all we do, for Christians and others of all faiths and none.

Our work covers a wide area of England and meets a number of different kinds of need:

- The Spurgeons BeLeave project supports **girls and young women**, aged 8 - 18, and their families to avoid Child Criminal Exploitation and gang-related harm across Birmingham.
- Through various hubs across the country, Spurgeons provides a digital doorway to its **children's centres**. They are places where parents of children aged 0–5 years can share the challenges and joys of parenthood, offering a range of activities and support services to help with all aspects of parenting.
- In Norwich Spurgeons provides unique assistance for **individuals, couples and families affected by domestic abuse** and they train 1,500 professionals a year on issues of domestic abuse.
- In a dozen or so prisons around the country, Spurgeons runs **family support services for prisoners and their families and friends** who visit them, with a particular focus on children and strengthening family relationships.
- Spurgeons offers a wide range of services to support **young carers**, from mentoring and educational support to activities and trips away to give them much needed time out from their caring duties. There are more than 244,000 young carers in the UK; young people who are caring for or supporting a family member with an illness or disability, in the way an adult normally would.

This work requires a tremendous amount of funding. About three quarters of that funding comes from local authorities, the NHS and the Prison authorities, as we are providing services which they need and which they are prepared to fund. However, they only fund the services to a certain extent, because of their restricted budgets.

So, donations are desperately needed to close the gap between a basic service with no added love, and a service of which a Christian organisation can be proud. Spurgeons is grateful for every penny it can raise.

Finally, I would like to tell you the story of a visit I made to Winchester Prison. At a presentation, ex-prisoners and current prisoners spoke to visitors about the impact of Spurgeons' services on them and their families. What Spurgeons does is to accompany the children of prisoners and their mothers in visits, to enable them to make the most of them. Play areas are available, and help is given to the men who are desperate to keep strong bonds with their children. One prisoner told me that his main reason for getting up in the morning is that he can look out on pictures drawn by his four year old and look forward to seeing him in the near future. Actually, this story is somewhat poignant now. Because of lockdown, prisoners are getting very few visits from their families and this is just one very sad effect of the pandemic.

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