blue smile
happier children | brighter futures

Annual Review 2024-25

Blue Smile reached our 15th birthday in 2025 - an opportunity to celebrate the impact of our work and the community who make it possible. Since 2010, thanks to supporters like you, over 3000 children have accessed our specialist support to help them enjoy happier childhoods and build brighter futures.

Our birthday also prompted reflection on how things have changed. When Amanda Langford founded Blue Smile, she was concerned by research suggesting 1 in 10 children faced significant mental health difficulties. Today, this has doubled to 1 in 5 children.

As needs have changed, our work has evolved. Initially, most Blue Smile support was delivered by trainee therapists; now they make up just a small proportion of our team, as children tend to come to us with more complex problems, needing an experienced therapist. We also expanded small-group, early-intervention support alongside 1-1 therapy, so we can reach more children promptly.

One thing that hasn't changed is the incredible generosity of our supporters. Like all small charities, we face challenges: rising costs, cuts to statutory services and pressure on funders, to name a few. But I am constantly inspired by our wonderful community, who sustain our work with donations, time and expertise. With your help, Blue Smile will continue to thrive and grow, so we can continue to be there for children who need us.

Anne

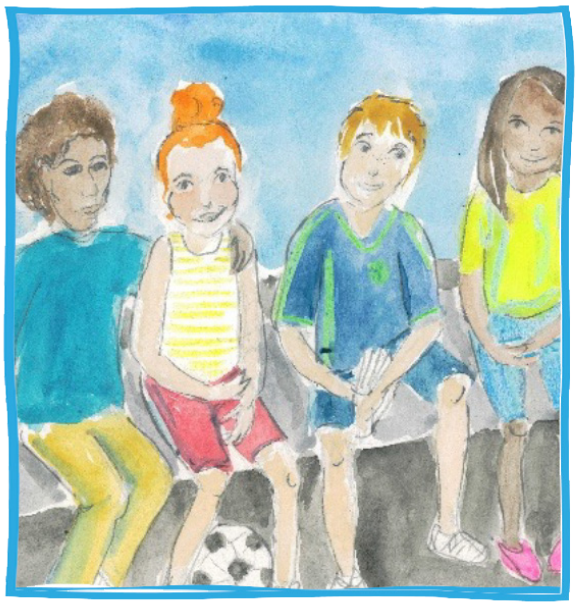
Anne Kent-Taylor, Charity Director

"My anxiety has shrunk. I can manage it most of the time now and if it gets big I know it helps to tell someone."

"I liked talking about all the goods and bads. It helped friendships and family stuff."

"It helps you let all your feelings out so you don't feel like you have nobody to talk to"

child feedback



Our year in numbers

6 children in a class of 30 have a probable mental health disorder, on average (NHS 2023).

427 children supported via 1-1 therapy or early-intervention groups

87% children reported progress towards their goals after therapy.

Focus on: school attendance

The proportion of children "persistently absent" - missing more than 10% of school - nearly doubled between 2018-19 and 2022-23. Children with Special Educational Needs and those eligible for Pupil Premium are more likely to be affected than their peers.

Many children referred to us struggle to go to school, like Jack (see below). Our support helps by boosting confidence and coping skills, and we help parents and teachers understand and address barriers children face.

We are also planning a community-based support pilot to reach children who aren't able to come into school.

Activities & Impact

In the 2024-5 school year, we helped 427 children in 31 schools, up from 424 in 2023-4. 9 Partner schools received a holistic package of services. At other schools, we provided 1-1 therapy, groupwork and/or teacher mentoring.

Who we helped

8.5 years average age at start of support.

50% eligible for Pupil Premium, indicating high socio-economic need.

45% with Special Educational Needs, as identified by the school.

77% faced one or more adverse childhood experiences e.g. family breakdown, bereavement, domestic abuse.

The most common reasons for referral were anger/lack of self-regulation, anxiety and low self-esteem.

We also **supported parents and teachers**, including 36 hours of formal teacher mentoring and at least two individual sessions with parents and teachers of each child having 1-1 therapy, helping them better understand and support children's emotional wellbeing.

Jack, 6 – from fearful to flourishing

Every morning, Jack would be tearful and upset when he had to go into school. He found the classroom overwhelming and needed a lot of support from staff. Jack had been diagnosed with autism and his parents were seeking assessment for ADHD. He didn't know why he was so worried about school and felt he was letting people down.

In Blue Smile therapy sessions, Jack enjoyed playing with Lego figures. He and his therapist started talking about how the characters felt in different situations, like interacting with friends, or going on trips without parents. Gradually, Jack began to talk about his own feelings. Jack's therapist helped him think about ways to manage big emotions, both on his own and with help from others. She also worked with his teacher and parents, sharing ideas to build his self-esteem. For example, his teacher started giving Jack small tasks to help with each morning, which he enjoyed.

By the end of therapy, Jack was coming into school happily, his sunny, playful demeanour a stark contrast from the quiet, tearful child before. Jack felt able to put his feelings into words and seek support from adults around him. He felt safe and valued at school and could start not only to cope, but to flourish.

Our services

289 children were supported through **1-1 therapy**. Our therapists delivered 3,938 art and play-based sessions to help them come to terms with difficult experiences and feelings.

138 children accessed **small-group support**. We ran 21 early-intervention groups building skills and knowledge to help cope with the transition to secondary school, emotional regulation or anxiety.

Our impact

87% of children said they had made progress towards their goals.

70% were more engaged in school, where prior engagement was low.

44% improved school attendance after 1-1 therapy.

15 years of Blue Smile

"I started Blue Smile in 2010 because I was really concerned that 1 in 10 children had mental health difficulties, with little help available. Shockingly, the number of children struggling has now doubled to 1 in 5, with huge gaps in services"

Amanda Langford, Blue Smile founder

"I first got involved with Blue Smile at its beginning as an advisor, because I work in the field of mental health and neurodevelopmental disability...I could see even in the early days that Blue Smile was filling a void for children and their mental health."

Sir Simon Baron-Cohen, Blue Smile Patron, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, University of Cambridge and Director, Autism Research Centre

"In my time with Blue Smile, the complexity of the need has really increased - thresholds for accessing statutory services have massively increased as there are less resources, which means that the kinds of cases we're seeing are much more complex."

Jane Unsworth, therapist and School Clinical Lead

For more reflections from Simon, Amanda and others visit www.youtube.com/@bluesmilecam

"It has done my child the world of good and that helps me and all the family. He likes to come to school now, which is a complete change from before"– parent

*Marking our birthday - above: Professor Sir Simon Baron-Cohen, Amanda Langford and Anne Kent-Taylor. **Below:** Blue Smile therapists and staff.*

Looking forward

In 2025-6 we plan to:

- Offer high-quality arts-based mental health support to more children, with particular focus on increasing awareness and reach in underserved areas eg Fenland and Peterborough.
- Pilot new approaches to support children struggling to attend school.

A huge thank you to all the individuals and organisations who supported us in 2024-5, including:

Community & Corporate: Apache Capital Partners, Barnes Construction, Beyond Co, Bottisham Village College, Bourn Players, Cambridge Cognition, Cooperative Community Fund, Friends of Blue Smile, Get Busy, Girton College Chapel, Graduate by Hilton Cambridge, Great St Mary's Church, Histon Feast, Kid Kreations, KISS Communications, Lesley's Social Dance, Mott MacDonald, Northstowe Running Festival, OpenArch Properties, Perse Prep/Pelican Schools and Parents' Associations, PEM, Rathbones, Rotary Club of Cambridge, RxCelerate, St John's College School Parents' Association, St Mary's School, Stratagem IPM, Strawberry Fair, Thanh Binh Restaurant, This Land, TK Maxx and Homesense Foundation, Walk and Talk 4 Men St Neots, Yellow Door.

Trusts & Foundations: Alan Boswell Group Charitable Trust, Albert Van den Bergh Charitable Trust, Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust, Barnabas Oley's Charity, Batterson Chivers Foundation, BBC Children in Need, The Betty Lawes Foundation, Big Give/Global's Make Some Noise, The Britford Bridge Trust, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Eastern Counties Educational Trust, Edward Gostling Foundation, Ely Community Unit Trust, Enabling Activities Charitable Trust, The Evelyn Trust, Henry Smith Foundation, Homelands Charitable Trust, Leathersellers' Foundation, Netherby Trust, Newby Trust, Openwork Foundation, Paragon Trust, Pixel Fund, Pye Foundation, S2 Partnership Community Fund (CCF), Sir Bernard & Lady Schreier Foundation, Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust, Stone Family Foundation, Warwick and Dominey Fund (CCF).

Blue Smile Heroes

We're so grateful to supporters like you, who make our life-changing work possible! Here are some highlights from how you've helped Cambs children this past year.

Walk and Talk 4 Men group in St Neots walked over 1000 miles in a week and raised **£2309**!

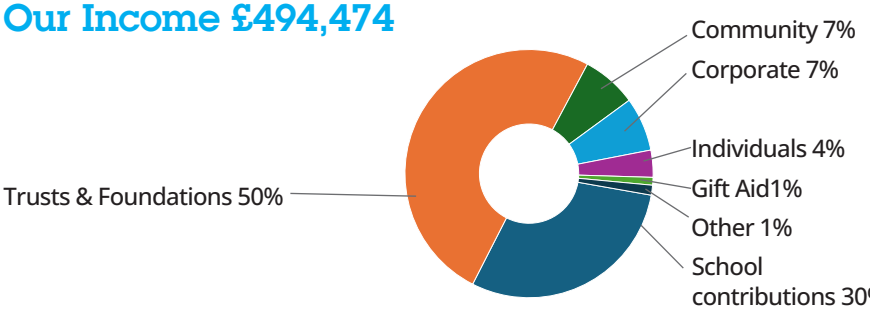
San Choi performed an incredible violin and piano concert, raising nearly **£500**, and **Abbie** completed the London Marathon as her latest fundraising challenge.

Colleagues at **Beyond Co** collectively pedalled over 100km, fuelled by a bake sale, while a team from **Cambridge Cognition** took on the Welsh 3 Peaks, raising **£2136**.

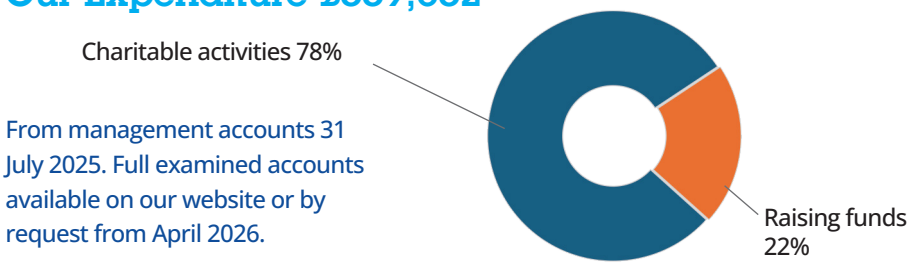
Special thanks to our regular donors who help us be there for children, week in week out. Tim Bryson gives monthly and has also included a gift in his Will to help future generations. He says: *"I'm delighted to support Blue Smile in any way I can..it's such an important charity in the lives of young children".*

Finances 2024-5

Our Income £494,474



Our Expenditure £559,052



From management accounts 31 July 2025. Full examined accounts available on our website or by request from April 2026.

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