

THE BOYS'
BRIGADE
> the adventure begins here



Learning in Lockdown

March to July 2020

Introduction

The Boys' Brigade's 2019/20 session has been like no other session that we can remember. Yet despite all of the challenges we have faced during the last five months our work has continued.

We may have had to operate in a different way than we have ever done before, but our mission to provide young people with opportunities to learn, grow and discover has continued.

We are of course looking forward to returning to face-to-face activities. But it is very much in keeping with our organisational history and heritage how we have adapted over recent months.

The value and impact of The Boys' Brigade is as important as ever, and as we move into the new 2020/21 BB session that will bring with it a new and different set of challenges, we can surely be confident that our work has something meaningful and important to offer as children and young people adjust to the 'new normal'.

Our vision is that children and young people experience “life to the full” – John 10:10

Adapting and responding to Covid-19

Following Government guidance, all face-to-face BB activity was suspended on 16th March. Within days we were seeing creative, inspiring and imaginative ways that BB leaders were finding to keep the BB adventure and community alive.

Within a week of suspending our face-to-face activities we were able to launch an alternative online programme called #BBatHOME – allowing us to continue to engage our members through a balanced programme of activities in their own homes, supported by parents/carers.



Over a 17 week period, activities were provided each week for each of our age groups - Anchors (5 – 8 years), Juniors (8 – 11 years) and Company/Seniors (11+) – following our six programme themes:

- Get Active
- Get Adventurous
- Get Creative
- Get into the Bible
- Get Involved
- Get Learning



As part of each week's activities we included devotional videos; BB Chaplains from across the UK took part in recording special devotions. Recognising that lockdown was going to be a difficult period of time for all children and young people – being restricted in their activities, not attending school or having opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities – all of the #BBatHOME materials were made freely available and accessible on our website.¹

Many BB Companies have also been delivering virtual BB sessions (including virtual camps) during lockdown, using platforms like Zoom, and in many cases this has actually helped to build relationships with young peoples' families and the wider community.

There has been an average of 5,500 downloads of our #BBatHOME activity packs, each week. We know that many of our Companies have downloaded these packs and then shared with their members via email and social media.

We estimate that #BBatHOME has reached an audience of **20,000** children and young people.



¹ See <https://boys-brigade.org.uk/bbathome>

We have received very positive feedback from BB leaders who have helped to share and promote the resources and also directly from parents and carers.

- 91% respondents to our leaders survey said their overall impression of #BBatHOME was “Brilliant” or “Good”
- 94% respondent to our Parents/Carers survey rated the #BBatHOME programme as “Brilliant” or “Good”
- 66% respondents to our Parents/Carers survey agreed that virtual BB sessions had a positive impact on their child, improving their mental health and wellbeing



“We have loved having #BBatHOME; it has allowed some normality and an opportunity to learn new skills and have fun.”

“The activities have been excellent and have given my boys something to look forward to.”

“As a family, we've really appreciated the efforts made by the leaders and volunteers during these uncertain times. Their commitment to weekly Zoom meetings and staying in touch with the young people has been a really positive experience for our son. I think the BB activities will feature strongly and positively in his memories of this time.”

“I would like to say that this has been a massive uplift for our foster child. The communication and support has been outstanding.”

“The Boys’ Brigade has gone above and beyond. You have been streets ahead of any other youth group my kids have been involved in.”

“#BBatHOME has done so much for this family's mental health during Lockdown. They've kept us laughing together, even on tough days. I can't thank you enough.”



CELEBRATING #BBATHOME

“THE #BBATHOME ACTIVITIES
HAVE BEEN **FUN, INTERESTING
AND EDUCATIONAL** - MY CHILD
HAS **THOROUGHLY ENJOYED**
TAKING PART IN THEM.
THANK YOU SO MUCH!”

- FEEDBACK FROM #BBATHOME
PARENTS/CARERS SURVEY



'Being BB' has continued

Although we have seen uncertainty and anxieties reach new highs this year, we have also seen acts of great kindness, care, generosity, love, strength and hope. We have certainly seen the values of the Brigade in action – Faith, Caring, Inspiring and Trusting. We have been particularly inspired to see how many caring actions have been carried out by the 'BB family' during lockdown.

William (1st Cumbernauld) took it upon himself to organise a collection for Kilsyth Community Food Bank as part of his Queen's Badge (highest award within the BB). He wrote to all of his neighbours and had a terrific response. With 58 bags of food collected in the first week, he's made a massive difference.

1st Tewkesbury and 1st Thurso have been busy creating craft & activity packs for their members and their local communities.

"We are aware that in this lockdown many children and young families may find themselves with limited supplies of simple things like pencils, paper, colouring pencils and craft supplies. These are great for keeping children and young people busy and good for mental health." – Johanna, Leader

44th Dundee decided to put their minibus to good use and have been helping a local charity to deliver food parcels to families in need of extra support during these difficult times.

"It is sad to see the number of families who are in need of this help but heart-warming to see the smiles on their faces when you deliver the food. I was walking away from one house on Friday when I heard a wee voice shouting 'Hey mister!' and when I turned round a little girl at the door shouted 'Thank you, you're a nice man!' and blew me a kiss. I am not ashamed to admit that at that moment I had a tear in my eye." – Bob, Leader



At 7th Northampton, brothers Oliver (11) and Alfie (9) shaved their heads as a fundraising event for the NHS to help support the fight against Covid-19. They set a target of £200 and have raised an incredible £719 so far. Well done and thank you to Oliver and Alfie!

“We are very proud of Alfie and Ollie for taking it upon themselves to take the negative Covid-19 situation and turn it into an opportunity to do good. They have shown the NHS that they are thinking of them, care about them and are willing to do what they can to help... This situation is obviously tough for everyone but it has certainly highlighted how naturally caring young people can be. I don't think they always know how big an impact they can have, but Alfie and Ollie have certainly shone light into the darkness and done themselves proud. Well done boys!” – Warren, Leader

We are blessed to have so many volunteer leaders who are so dedicated and committed to The Boys' Brigade – giving of their time and talents to support young people to learn, grow and discover. We pay particular tribute to our BB leaders who are also Key Workers and have been playing such an important role in keeping the country going during these unprecedented times.

Stronger, Safer, Together

As we look to the future, the Brigade has produced a Guidance Framework to support BB Companies on their journey to returning to face-to-face activities safely from 1st September. ²

We hope that many of the innovations and much of the creativity shown by our leaders over the last four months, like running virtual sessions, will continue. Our approach for the months ahead is based on flexibility, as there is likely to be a need to operate a mixture of both face-to-face and virtual sessions during the Autumn. A special monthly programme (from September – December) will be produced for BB Companies which will support both face-to-face activities or running virtual #BBatHOME sessions.

We have highlighted to our leaders that our guidance framework fits within an obvious hierarchy of guidance produced by national and local Government, Church denominational guidance and guidance relating to the place/venue where a BB Company meets.

All Companies will be required to be 'Covid-Ready' before being able to restart face-to-face BB activities. This means that they will have completed:

- Company Action Log
- 'Covid Ready' Risk Assessments (for each section/age group)

Approval for a Company then restarting will be through the Company Captain and the Chaplain or nominated Church Representative.

² Find out more about our guidance framework for returning to face-to-face activities: <https://boys-brigade.org.uk/ourframework>



What we have learnt

The last four months have undoubtedly been challenging – adapting to significant changes within our society, and also adapting to changes within the capacity of the organisation as we have utilised the Government’s Job Retention from 1st April. We must also acknowledge the huge financial impact the current crisis is having and will continue to have on the organisation.

We will clearly continue to face many uncertainties in the months (and years) ahead, around what will change, as well as when, how and where changes will occur.

We are proud that our alternative online programme – #BBatHOME – has clearly provided much needed fun and continuity for children and their families in these challenging times. The #BBatHOME programme has worked particularly well with our Anchor and Juniors Sections (5 – 11 years). Plans are in place to launch a new Over 11’s programme in the Spring of 2021.

Many of our Companies have been running virtual sessions running with their members. However, we must also acknowledge there are challenges to running these virtual sessions – lack of knowledge/expertise and time, digital deficit, concerns/perceptions around safety and also difficulties in getting parental support.

We have moved to more regular (weekly) e-communications with our leaders across the UK which has been well received. The ability to engage with leaders quickly and efficiently through Webinars using platforms like Zoom has worked very well, and we have seen many leaders from across the UK participating. These are an excellent space for sharing ideas and good practise.

We have moved the launch date of The Boys’ Brigade’s new five year strategy until January 2021; in the meantime we will enter into a short-term recovery phase of getting the organisation back to face-to-face activities. The focus of our new strategy, however, will remain the same – on improving quality and consistency of experiences offered to children and young people.

August 2020