

PRESS RELEASE

Under strict embargo until 00.01 Monday 13 May 2024

BBC Children in Need launches *The Heaviest Backpack* campaign – are children carrying too much?

- A new **Censuswide** survey on behalf of BBC Children in Need has found over a quarter (27%) of children and young people surveyed regularly feel anxious and worried¹
- Nearly half of children and young people surveyed (44%) compared the weight of the worries they carry to books
- Free resources available in our dedicated mental health and wellbeing hub to support parents, carers and other adults develop positive relationships with children and young people
- **Vick Hope, Roman Kemp, Jamie Laing, Alex Scott MBE, Katie Thistleton and Joe Wicks MBE** have shared personal reflections of their childhoods and unpacked their own backpacks in a series of powerful films
- **McDonald's UK** remove the iconic smile from millions of its Happy Meal® boxes in restaurants across the country
 - **Winner of the £1million A Million and Me award announced today**

Monday 13 May 2024 - To mark Mental Health Awareness Week 2024, BBC Children in Need have launched a new campaign film – ***The Heaviest Backpack*** to highlight that the issues facing children and young people across the UK are growing, with 1 in 5 children now facing a mental health issue². The campaign aims to open up a nationwide conversation around the importance of positive relationships in protecting children's mental health. It offers free resources to support the right conversations between children and parents, carers and other trusted adults to ensure no child faces their emotional and mental health challenges alone.

As part of the campaign, BBC Children in Need has released the findings of a new **Censuswide** survey which sheds light that over a quarter (27%) of children and young people surveyed regularly feel anxious and worried³ with more than four in ten children and young people surveyed (44%) comparing the weight of the worries they carry to books, whilst (16%) compared the weight to bricks.

The UK wide survey commissioned by BBC Children in Need of 2,512 parents⁴ and 2,512 children and young people⁵ aged 11-18, also reveals that:

- The top five reasons behind the worries children and young people surveyed were:
 1. Doing well at school/college/university or other educational institution – 37%
 2. Losing someone they love – 30%
 3. Their appearance/body image – 30%
 4. Achieving their goals – 27%
 5. Fitting in – 27%

¹ Combination of always and often

² NHS (2023)

³ Combination of always and often

⁴ Total sample size was 2,512 parents who have children aged 11-18. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29 April 2024 – 07 May 2023. The survey was carried out online. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

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- 11% of children and young people surveyed said they last talked about their mental health or worries with a family member, close friend or trusted adult a month ago, whilst 8% said it had been 2-5 months and 7% reported 6-11 months.
- Nearly a quarter of children and young people surveyed (24%) regularly feel worried for their future.⁶
- Over half of children and young people surveyed (60%) said that being happy is most important to their future.
- 52% of parents surveyed believe children from affluent households carry less worries than those from struggling households⁷

BBC Children in Need's Chief Executive **Simon Antrobus** said: *"Our research indicates that far too many children and young people are facing considerable challenges that can weigh heavy on them. We know that if children have positive relationships that can support them through these challenges, then it can help to prevent more serious mental health issues from emerging. Our brilliant project workers - like Dylan from ReflectTeen who features in our Backpack film – create these positive relationships that open up early vital conversations which can have a transformative effect on wellbeing, helping young people to better understand and tackle any barriers they face.*

"That's why we are today asking everyone to help make life lighter for those children who are carrying too much by visiting our website, making use of the resources we have created, and simply starting a conversation and letting children and young people across the UK know that we are there for them."

To support the campaign, **Vick Hope, Roman Kemp, Jamie Laing, Alex Scott MBE, Katie Thistleton** and **Joe Wicks MBE** have shared personal reflections from their childhoods and unpacked their own backpacks in a series of powerful films. From discussions about bullying, anxiety, racism and issues at home, each film demonstrates the importance of positive relationships in childhood and the power of conversations in helping lighten the weight that some children carry.

As part of the series, **The One Show's Roman Kemp** - whose Challenge Squad raised £3.3m for the charity in 2023 - has powerfully opened up about the weights he carried during his teenage years: *"I carried them always, like a cloud over me."* A segment from Roman's film will premier this evening on **The One Show**.

BBC Children in Need partners have also thrown their support behind the campaign, including **McDonald's UK** who have, for the first time ever, removed the iconic smile from millions of its Happy Meal® boxes in restaurants across the country. The move aims to communicate to children it is okay not to be happy all the time and help spark family conversations about emotions with all limited edition boxes linking via a QR code to BBC Children in Need's mental wellbeing hub over the course of Mental Health Awareness Week.

BBC Children in Need is funding over 470 projects across the UK which supports children and young people with their emotional wellbeing and mental health to the value of £30.5m. These projects provide positive relationships, creating trusting and safe connections between children and the important people in their lives; which help them to overcome barriers and can prevent more serious mental health issues from emerging.

To further cement the charity's commitment to funding initiatives supporting early intervention and children's mental wellbeing, in October 2023 BBC Children in Need began a nationwide search, with the support of Ambassador for Mental Health Dr Alex George, for the winners of the first A Million & Me Award. It was looking to spot innovators developing creative, scalable and tangible mental

⁶ Combination of always and often

⁷ Combination of much and somewhat

health solutions. Together with our partners Health Foundation and Impact on Urban Health, BBC Children in Need have today announced The Children's Society as the winner of the £1million award.

To find out more about *The Heaviest Backpack*, and to access resources to start a conversation, or to access signposting to local and national organisations supporting children's mental wellbeing visit bbc.co.uk/cin.

~ENDS~

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- 30 second Heaviest Backpack film can be found [here](#).
- Celebrity images & videos can be found [here](#).
- Children's Society cheque presentation images with Dr Alex George can be found [here](#)

Notes to Editors

Survey:

Total sample size was 2,512 parents who have children aged 11-18, and 2,512 children aged 11-18. Fieldwork was undertaken online between 29 April 2024 – 7 May 2024. [The survey](#) was carried out online. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

Celebrity quotes:

Roman Kemp

"My childhood was full of so much love and I cherish the memories from that time in my life. But as soon as I hit those teenage years, that happiness faded away. School was the thing for me that helped me get out, for certain thoughts and for several hours a day they were no longer weighing me down. But I carried them always, like a cloud over me, and as soon as I walked through my front door, they all came flooding back. My mum often dreams of me at the age before all this started, as a parent it is one of the worst things you can watch your child go through. For any young person, it is important to have a trusted adult to check in and explain your thoughts to, and for me that was my mum, but not all kids are so lucky."

Katie Thistleton

"As a young person, I carried the weight of the world on my shoulders and often worried about things out of my control. At the time, I did not know what anxiety was or that it was the thing causing all these thoughts. We are not always honest with children when having difficult conversations, but I truly think if an adult talked me through the weight on my shoulders and realised it was anxiety, this early intervention might have meant my mental health would be better as an adult."

Jamie Laing

"I did not speak about my anxiety for so long as I thought it would make me different or people would look at me funny. For the longest time, I was scared of dying, the idea of leaving my parents was terrifying and equally, the thought of them dying was the scariest thing in the entire world. It was an

anxious thing. I stayed quiet for so long, but the truth is, we all have a backpack and things that weigh us down. This weight looks different for everyone but the key is understanding that people are there to help lessen this and that we are all in this together in that way.”

Vick Hope

“At school, I had a habit of taking on too much and all of this pressure would weigh me down. Luckily, I had one teacher who totally understood. She would always let me come into her classroom when I felt like I was going to explode and let me sit and tell me it’s ok and to take however long I needed. I don’t know if she will ever know how important it was to me that she provided this little safe space I could go to cool down. I will forever be grateful, everyone needs a Mrs Clough.”

Joe Wicks MBE

“As a young kid, I carried a lot of weight, I had quite a challenging homelife. I had two parents with mental health issues, my Dad was an addict and my Mum had severe OCD, anxiety and an eating disorder. So, from a young age I always had a lot on my mind, a lot of anxiety and fear around the uncertainty of what I was coming home to each day. At school, I felt like I couldn’t talk about what was going on in my life and I worried that if I did, I would be taken away from my parents, so I swept it under the rug. In hindsight, having an open dialogue around these issues is a powerful thing. Talking through what you’re going through and understanding what others around you are going through can really help lessen the load.”

Alex Scott

“Growing up I had a speech problem and spent a lot of my time in speech therapy. Going into the school environment, I did not feel comfortable sharing this and as a result, no one knew. When teachers asked me to speak aloud in class, I found it very hard and I would often go into my shell, feeling embarrassed and not knowing how to form words or sentences sometimes. The easiest thing for me to do on these occasions would be to stay quiet and be in the background. It was not until recently, when I openly started talking about my speech problem, that I realised how many people have been through the same thing. I often think and laugh to myself about how far I have come now that it is my job to talk and communicate with the world.”

Dr Alex George

“I was so honoured to be able to meet the brilliant team at The Children’s Society and present them with this powerful award. It was an absolute pleasure to see the immense passion and determination from the team and it was so great to hear about their digital and early intervention approach to mental health. It all starts with a simple conversation. We should all continue to join The Children’s Society in inspiring this everyday magic of positive relationships by continuously talking about emotional wellbeing.”

BBC Children in Need partners:

David Lloyd Clubs

To support the campaign, the official health and wellness partner for BBC Children in Need – David Lloyd Clubs – are asking their members to **move together and make a difference** by raising as much money as possible to create lasting, positive change across the UK for the children and young people who need it most.

Over the next four weeks, there will be a range of exciting fundraising events and activities taking place across David Lloyd Clubs to support members to **move together and make a difference** to help support children and young people across the UK.

Amazon

To support The Heaviest Backpack, Amazon volunteers will be packing 1,000 backpacks filled with items such as books and art materials which will get distributed to young people supported by BBC Children in Need funded projects in Glasgow, Swansea, London, Manchester & Birmingham.

About BBC Children in Need

BBC Children in Need believe every child and young person deserves the opportunity to thrive and be the best they can be.

BBC Children in Need's ambition is to create lasting, positive change across the UK for the children and young people who need it most. Together with the BBC and partners, BBC Children in Need aim to inspire the nation in support of their work.

BBC Children in Need's 1,500 local charities and projects work tirelessly in every corner of the UK to help children & young people overcome the additional challenges they currently face, including supporting children and young people living in poverty, providing emergency support to families in crisis, providing comfort to children feeling sad, lost and alone, helping children overcome social injustice and supporting children to feel safe and secure again.

Further information can be found at www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk

About BBC Creative

BBC Creative is the BBC's in house creative agency.

BBC Creative are responsible for all the BBC's Marketing and Branding – all designed to ensure audiences love & value the BBC and appreciate its unique role in British culture.

That leads to our mission: to leave a positive mark on popular culture in everything we do.