



# **Annual Report**

**2024/2025**

## About Us

**Children in Distress** is a **UK-based charity** registered in Scotland Charity Number SC039383 dedicated to **improving the lives of vulnerable children in Romania**. Established in 1990, our mission is to provide comprehensive care and **support to children** facing **severe health challenges, social deprivation** and **educational disadvantages**. Over the past three decades, Children in Distress has become a **beacon of hope for countless children and their families**, offering a lifeline in times of dire need and empowering them to build better futures.

In 2024, Children in Distress embarked on a **transformative journey** to become a **strategic grant-giving organisation**, with a renewed focus on supporting **impactful, sustainable and community-led initiatives across the United Kingdom and Romania**. Guided by our revised mission to empower and uplift vulnerable children, families and communities, we laid the foundations for a more **focused, transparent and accountable model of charitable impact**.

## Chair's Report 2024



**Dear Supporters,**

It is my privilege to present this year's **Chair's Report** at the close of what has been a **truly transformative year** for **Children in Distress**. 2024 has seen us step into a bold new chapter as we **evolve** from a **direct service provider** into a **strategic grant-giving organisation**. This significant transition reflects our **unwavering commitment** to creating a more **focused, transparent and accountable model** for delivering **long-term impact** to **vulnerable children, families and communities** across the **UK and Romania**.

# A Year of Purposeful Transition

Over the past twelve months, our Board and leadership team have worked diligently to redefine our vision, mission and governance. This **strategic overhaul** has ensured that our future direction is rooted in **sustainable, community-led change**. At the heart of this transformation lies our decision to concentrate efforts on **funding initiatives** that align with five core objectives: **strengthening communities** and **advocacy, advancing education** and **employment**, promoting **wellbeing** and **mental health**, ensuring **financial sustainability**, and fostering **innovation** and **collaboration**.

We began our move away from direct service delivery with renewed investment in long-term legacy initiatives like **Casa Maria in Romania**, alongside three new **community pilot projects**—two in the UK and one in Romania. These pilots have already begun offering valuable insights, informing our future strategy and refining the criteria for **impactful grant-making**.



# Strengthening Governance and Accountability

Throughout 2024, the Board has prioritised the development of **robust governance systems**. These include a **transparent application and selection process for grants**, clearly defined oversight mechanisms and a **practical impact measurement framework**. These steps reinforce our commitment to accountability and effectiveness in every project we fund. We are especially proud of the structured approach to our financial oversight and monitoring, including annual reporting, impact assessments and stakeholder engagement. These ensure that every pound entrusted to us makes a meaningful difference to the lives of those we serve.

We are pleased to have welcomed **two new Board members to the charity in 2024**. We are pleased to have been joined by **Christopher Paris** who brings with him significant experience business management in the supported living and outreach service for people with learning disabilities where he leads on grant applications and funding applications.

Secondly, we welcomed **Margaret Gibbs** as a Co-opted member of the board who brings vast experience as a pharmacist having worked in the hospital and hospices sectors. Margaret has a keen interest in the end-of-life care and brings extensive experience in palliative care and an MSc in Pain Management.





# Financial Resilience and Forward Momentum

Our **total income for 2024 stood at £574,511**—an encouraging result that reflects the generosity of our supporters, the dedication of our volunteers, and the sound financial stewardship exercised by our team. These funds have allowed us to not only support our existing commitments but also invest with confidence in the future of our new grant-giving model. We recognise the importance of diversifying income streams and are actively strengthening our fundraising strategies, corporate partnerships and reserve management. **We are also pursuing registration with the Charity Commission for England and Wales**—an important step to expanding our reach and securing future sustainability.

## Acknowledging Our Community

We could not achieve any of this without the support of our **incredible volunteers, partners and donors**. In 2024, over **7,500 volunteer hours were logged**—whether in charity shops, through the Shoebox Campaign, or in administrative support—demonstrating a remarkable collective commitment to our mission.



## Looking Ahead...

The coming year will be critical as we build on the foundations laid in 2024. Our focus will remain firmly on **delivering and evaluating the pilot initiatives** and continuing to **support Casa Maria**. The lessons we gather will shape a scalable, enduring model of **grant-making** that champions the needs of children and communities in a changing world. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who has stood with us during this pivotal year. Together, we are building a more **resilient and responsive organisation**—one that can bring about lasting, positive change for generations to come.

**Anne-Marie Martin FCMI**  
Chair of the Board

# Message from the CEO



**Dear Supporters,**

It is my privilege to present this year's **Chair's Report** at the close of what has been a **truly transformative year** for **Children in Distress**. 2024 has seen us step into a bold new chapter as we **evolve** from a **direct service provider** into a **strategic grant-giving organisation**. This significant transition reflects our **unwavering commitment** to creating a more **focused, transparent and accountable model** for delivering **long-term impact** to **vulnerable children, families and communities** across the **UK and Romania**.

As we draw 2024 to a close, I want to take this opportunity to share with our **valued supporters, donors, and friends** the significant **progress** we've made over the past year—and to look ahead with confidence to the future.

This year marked a momentous milestone: **the 35th anniversary of Children in Distress and our work in Romania**. For those who have been part of this journey from the beginning, and for those who have joined more recently, it has been a time of both reflection and transformation.

Since taking on the role of CEO, I have worked closely with the Board to ensure that Children in Distress is not only honouring its legacy but also evolving to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future. In 2024, we began the process of **digitising our retail operations** through the implementation of a **new donor system**. This centralises supporter data and enables us to better understand and engage with those who visit our shops. We also set in motion a **two-year plan to refresh and upgrade our stores in Guisborough and Kirkbymoorside**, enhancing both the shopping experience and community appeal.

Our digital transformation continued with the **launch of a new website**—our virtual shop window—to better tell the story of the charity and reach new audiences, supporters, and partners.

In May, we had the honour of welcoming **HRH Princess Maria of Romania as our guest of honour** at the Gala Dinner held at the Romanian Cultural Institute in London. This celebratory event marked our **35 years** of service and raised vital funds for our work.

Another highlight of the year was our annual **Shoebox Appeal**. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our volunteers and the extraordinary generosity of our supporters, we were able to **send out 5,000 shoeboxes**—each one a parcel of joy—to children across Romania. Father Christmas even made some special appearances, bringing cheer to children in key locations across the country.



The charity also saw some changes in personnel this year. We welcomed **Daniella Findlay as Charity Administrator** in our York office, and in March, **Neile Abbs joined as Yorkshire Hub Manager**, helping to coordinate and support activity across the region.

In August, we said **farewell to Lesleyann Connelly and her daughter Tiegan**, who had both contributed greatly to the development of our Scottish hub. Their dedication didn't stop there: in September, they completed the Edinburgh Kilt Walk, **raising over £1,500 for Children in Distress**.



In the spirit of connection and celebration, we attended a **supporter tour in Romania**, joining friends from Germany, the United States, and Romania itself. This visit included site tours of our key projects and offered a chance to express our heartfelt thanks to those who have supported our work over the years.

In November, we hosted a **Thanksgiving Service** in York at the former church of the Rev. Dr. John Walmsley—an important place in the history of our charity, where he and Eddie Errington first began their long and fruitful collaboration.

**On a personal note, I had the privilege of travelling to Romania twice this autumn**—once in October to consult with the Board and local partners on the charity's evolving strategy, and again in December to witness the delivery of the shoeboxes and see the profound impact they have on the lives of children and families.

Finally, I'm pleased to welcome **Beth Cameron** to the team. Beth will support us in building our **marketing, communications**, and digital presence across social media, the website, and printed materials—key elements as we take this next step in the charity's development.

I remain deeply grateful to everyone who has supported Children in Distress this year. Your generosity, energy, and belief in our mission have made everything possible. As we look forward, I am excited for what lies ahead, confident that together we can **build a stronger, more inclusive future for the children, families, and communities we serve.**

Warmest wishes,

**Simon**

Chief Executive Officer

## Organisational Review

Children in Distress is **reviewing its structure** to support **long-term legacy projects in Romania** alongside **new initiatives in both Romania and the UK**. This plan sets out the strategic steps required to transition to a **grant-giving charity**, providing funding to **key charitable initiatives** such as the **Casa Maria legacy project**, as well as one-off and **community-based outreach projects** in the UK and Romania.

Our objective is to **establish an efficient and transparent grant-giving model, pilot three community projects** and refine our **long-term vision** and **objectives** based on learnings from these initiatives.

The charity, currently registered in Scotland, will also **register with the Charity Commission for England and Wales** to expand its reach.





# Grant-giving Model Implementation

Core funding priorities include **continued support for Casa Maria in Romania**, a legacy children's home funded through a structured grant model. **Annual grants** will also be provided to **small Romanian charities and UK community hubs** that support children and their families and communities. Additionally, **three pilot community projects** will be launched: a London community hub, a Yorkshire community hub, and a Romanian outreach project.

## Grant Funding Objectives

Children in Distress UK will fund projects that align with the following objectives:

### Communities

Foster a **supportive environment for children, families and their communities**.

### Education

**Break down barriers to education** and ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the opportunity to thrive.

### Work

**Empower young people with the skills, opportunities and support** needed to achieve meaningful and sustainable **employment**, fostering their career growth and economic independence.

### Wellbeing

Promote an environment that empowers young people to thrive, supporting **mental, emotional and physical wellbeing**.

# Monitoring and evaluation

An effective impact measurement framework involves defining clear success indicators for each funded project, conducting regular financial audits and impact assessments, and sharing success stories to highlight effectiveness and encourage continued support. Additionally, implementing a risk assessment process helps identify and manage potential challenges. Stakeholder engagement is maintained through consistent communication with beneficiaries, sponsors, and supporters, along with annual review meetings to refine strategies. Transparency is ensured through detailed reporting and public updates, fostering trust and accountability.

## Grant funding process and project oversight

The application and assessment process will begin with **online submissions**, with immediate acknowledgment. The Business Development Manager will initially screen applications, rejecting non-compliant ones with feedback, while a Board subgroup conducts due diligence and prepares a summary for full Board review. Final approval is granted by the Board after **thorough accountability checks**.

Project management will involve **detailed contracts outlining expectations, branding guidelines and timelines for funding and reporting**. Projects will be continuously monitored with scheduled review points, and suspension clauses are in place for non-compliance. **An impact report is required at completion to inform future strategy**.

**Casa Maria** will follow a dedicated annual grant application process, reflecting its status as a **legacy project**, with a full funding review planned for 2025. Financial transparency is maintained through annual reporting and quarterly breakdowns, supported by a formal agreement between the grant giver and recipient. **All funding must directly benefit children's physical, mental or educational needs**, with the option to apply for additional one-off grants for specific project requirements.

# Conclusion

This **strategic plan** provides a **roadmap for Children in Distress** to become an **effective and sustainable grant-giving organisation** that is **fully compliant** with the requirements of the Charity Commission for England and Wales. Through continued support for **Casa Maria and pilot initiatives in the UK and Romania**, we aim to achieve **long-term impact for children, families and communities**.

Our success will be **measured by the positive change** we bring to communities, the transparency of our funding processes and the creation of a sustainable charitable foundation for the future.

## 2024 Financial Overview

**Total Income**

**£574,511**

**Donations & Legacies**

**£393,412**

**Trading Income**

**£174,518**

Full accounts are available to read on our website:  
[www.childrenindistress.org](http://www.childrenindistress.org)



## Volunteer Contributions

**Volunteers are the heart of Children in Distress.** Their unwavering commitment, compassion and generosity enable us to deliver meaningful support to vulnerable children and communities in Romania and the United Kingdom. In 2024, more than **30 dedicated individuals contributed over 7,500 volunteer hours** across our programmes and retail operations—making a lasting impact through their time, skills and kindness.

Their support has been **vital in several key areas:**

- **Shoebox Campaign:** This cherished initiative remains a cornerstone of our community outreach. Thanks to our volunteers, engagement reached new heights in 2024. As we look ahead, we are excited to grow and expand the campaign's reach and impact even further.
- **Retail Shops:** Our charity shops continue to thrive thanks to the tireless efforts of our dedicated volunteers. Their contributions are vital, not only to the daily operations of the stores but also in generating essential revenue that funds our projects. However, due to increasing constraints, some shops may face difficult decisions ahead, including the possibility of closure.

**We are deeply thankful to each and every volunteer. Their spirit of service reflects the very essence of our organisation and continues to inspire everything we do. Children in Distress is stronger, more resilient, and more hopeful because of them.**



# How You Can Help

**There are many ways you can help transform the lives of vulnerable children.** Whether through giving, volunteering or partnering, your support plays a vital role in our mission.

## Donate

**Financial support is the foundation of everything we do.** Your donation—whether large or small—enables us to provide **essential medical care, education, social services and operational support** to the children and families who need it most.

### One-Time Donation

**A single gift can make an immediate impact**—funding urgent medical treatments, supplying vital resources or supporting a specific programme.

### Monthly Giving

**Recurring donations provide us with a stable income stream**, helping us plan more effectively and ensure ongoing care for children throughout the year.

### Legacy Giving

Leave a lasting legacy by including Children in Distress in your will or estate plan. **Legacy gifts secure the future of our programmes** and continue your impact for generations to come.

## Volunteer

**Our volunteers are the driving force behind our work.** By giving your time, you become part of a compassionate community committed to improving children's lives.

- **Administrative Volunteers:** Help behind the scenes with event planning, outreach or office support. Your skills can strengthen our operations and enhance our reach.
- **Retail Volunteers:** Join our charity shop teams and support local efforts to raise funds through the sale of donated goods. Every hour you contribute helps generate income for our vital programmes.

## Partner

**Working together leads to stronger and broader outcomes.** We welcome **collaboration with businesses, foundations and community organisations** to grow our impact.

- **Corporate Partnerships:** Businesses can support us through sponsorships, financial contributions, employee volunteer programmes or in-kind donations. These partnerships bring expertise and resources that elevate our efforts.
- **Foundation Grants:** Grant funding from charitable foundations helps us deliver targeted high-impact initiatives enabling long-term change.
- **Community Collaborations:** Local groups can partner with us to co-create projects that respond to specific community needs, helping us reach more children in meaningful ways.

## Join Us

No matter how you choose to get involved, **your support helps create real, lasting change.** Be part of our mission—because together, we can **build a brighter future for every child.**

**Thank you for your support and dedication to improving the lives of vulnerable children.** Visit our website at [www.childrenindistress.org](http://www.childrenindistress.org) to learn more.

## Contact Information

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**Thank you for your support and dedication to our cause. This report was prepared by Children in Distress. For any enquiries or further information, please contact us at [adminyork@childrenindistress.org.uk](mailto:adminyork@childrenindistress.org.uk).**