



Annual Report 2025



childrenindistress.org

Building brighter futures for children, families and communities.

Partners with purpose

We're a small charity dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families in Romania and the United Kingdom.

Our vision is a world where every child can thrive.

Established in 1990, we've spent over three decades helping children facing poverty, disability, social exclusion and educational disadvantage. Through direct support, partnerships and community engagement, we've enabled thousands of children to access opportunities, care and support that have transformed lives.

In 2025, we continued our strategic development as a grant-giving organisation, supporting carefully selected community projects in the UK that align with our charitable objectives. We maintained our longstanding commitment to Casa Maria in Romania, providing residential care for children with severe disabilities and complex needs.

This report shares impact highlights and stories from the past year and looks ahead to our work in 2026 and beyond.



Chair's report



Dear supporters,

2025 has been a year of delivery, learning and continued transformation for Children in Distress.

Having established our strategic direction during 2024, this year has been focused on putting our plans into action. I am pleased to report that the charity has successfully launched and supported its first grant-funded community projects in the United Kingdom whilst continuing to provide vital support to our longstanding partners in Romania.

Throughout the year, the Board has remained focused on ensuring that every decision reflects our commitment to transparency, accountability and long-term sustainability. We have continued to strengthen governance arrangements, review financial controls and oversee the implementation of our new grant-making framework.

A particular highlight has been the successful introduction of community-based projects supporting Romanian children and families in Hull and London. These projects demonstrate how targeted grant funding can help communities address local needs while preserving cultural identity, promoting wellbeing and strengthening educational opportunities.

At the same time, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to Casa Maria, a home that continues to provide exceptional care and support for children with severe disabilities and complex needs in Romania.

Like many charities, we have faced financial challenges during the year. Reduced legacy income and wider economic pressures have affected charitable giving across the sector. The Trustees have carefully monitored the charity's financial position and remain confident that the actions taken during 2025 have positioned the charity well for the future.

None of our work would be possible without the dedication of our volunteers, supporters, donors and partners. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend my sincere thanks to everyone who continues to support Children in Distress.

Together, we are helping vulnerable children and families build brighter futures.

Anne-Marie Martin FCMI
Chair of Trustees



Snapshot – our 2025 impact

We continued to support vulnerable children, young people and families across Romania and the United Kingdom through grant funding, community engagement and direct charitable support.



Key achievements

- 4 grant-funded projects supported
- 200+ children reached by funded programmes
- 150+ families engaged through community activities
- Continued support for **Casa Maria** in Romania
- 5,000 shoeboxes distributed across Romania to children, teenagers and older adults
- 40+ volunteers dedicated thousands of hours to supporting our work
- We established new community partnerships in Hull and London
- We continued to invest in our charity retail operations and fundraising activities to ensure our long-term sustainability

Message from our Chief Executive Officer, Simon Errington



Dear supporters,

2025 has been a year of action, progress and purpose for Children in Distress.

Last year, we set out an ambitious vision to transform our charity into a strategic grant-giving organisation, building on more than three decades of experience supporting vulnerable children and families. I'm proud to say that in 2025 we moved beyond planning and began delivering that vision.

One of our greatest achievements this year has been the successful launch of our first grant-funded community projects in the United Kingdom while continuing our longstanding commitment to Casa Maria in Romania. Through these projects, we have begun supporting children, young people and families in new ways, extending our reach while remaining true to our founding purpose.

In Hull, we funded the *Flavours of Home* programme, helping children from Romanian families explore their heritage, build confidence and strengthen community connections through cultural activities and traditional cooking. We also supported the *Nicolae Iorga Sunday School*, providing opportunities for children to develop their Romanian language skills and maintain a strong connection to their cultural identity. In London, our partnership with Alexz Educational has enabled young people to develop wellbeing, employability and life skills that will help them thrive in education, employment and their communities.

Together, these projects represent the practical delivery of our new strategy and demonstrate how targeted grant funding can create meaningful and lasting impact.

Alongside these new initiatives, our commitment to Casa Maria remains unwavering. The dedicated team at the Foundation continues to provide exceptional care for children with severe disabilities and complex needs. Throughout 2025, new children joined the Casa Maria family and continued to benefit from the safe, nurturing environment and specialist support.

I joined the delivery of shoeboxes to the children during Christmas 2025, as well as to other locations in Romania. We remain deeply committed to ensuring that Casa Maria continues to flourish for years to come.

None of this would be possible without the extraordinary support of our volunteers, donors, supporters and partners. Across our charity shops, fundraising activities and annual Shoebox Appeal, volunteers have continued to demonstrate remarkable generosity, dedication and compassion. Their contribution remains at the heart of everything we achieve.

Like many charities, we are operating in a challenging financial environment. Rising costs, pressure on household incomes and increasing competition for charitable giving have all affected the sector. We experienced a significant reduction in legacy income during the year. Despite these challenges, we have remained focused on using our resources wisely, strengthening our governance and ensuring that every pound entrusted to us delivers the greatest possible benefit to children and families.

Looking ahead to 2026, I am excited by the opportunity to increase our impact across both the United Kingdom and Romania. We will continue to develop our grant-giving programme, strengthen partnerships with community organisations and ensure that our support reaches those who need it most. At the same time, we remain firmly committed to Casa Maria and the children whose lives have been transformed through its work.

I want our supporters to know that while charities continue to face significant financial challenges, our commitment to vulnerable children and families remains stronger than ever. Together, we are building on a proud legacy while creating new opportunities for future generations.

On behalf of everyone at Children in Distress, thank you for your continued support, generosity and belief in our mission.

Warm regards,
Simon Errington, Chief Executive Officer

Delivering our grant-giving strategy

2025 marked the first full year of delivering our new grant-giving model.

Our grant programme is designed to support projects that promote:

- Community development
- Education
- Employment and life skills
- Wellbeing and mental health

We funded three new community-based projects, supporting children and families from Romanian communities living in the United Kingdom.

Alexz Educational

We funded a youth development programme delivered by Alexz Educational in London.

Supporting 15 young people aged 12–16, the programme provides mentoring, wellbeing workshops, employability support and social action opportunities.

The project helps participants develop confidence, resilience and practical skills that will support their future educational and employment opportunities.

"Your funding means so much to us. The young people had the opportunity to gain knowledge, build connections and share their thoughts, ideas and experiences." **Veronica Costache, Project Lead.**

Casa Maria – a lasting legacy

Casa Maria remains at the very heart of Children in Distress.

The home continues to provide specialist residential care for 12 children with severe disabilities and complex needs. Throughout 2025, children benefited from personalised care, therapeutic support, education and opportunities to participate in activities that enhance independence and wellbeing.

Children receive the love, security and everyday experiences of family life and those with life-limiting conditions are cared for with comfort, dignity and compassion. New children joined the Casa Maria family, continuing the home's important role in providing a safe, nurturing and supportive environment.

While costs continue to rise and Romanian local authority funding remains under intense pressure, we remain committed to supporting Casa Maria and ensuring that vulnerable children continue to receive the care they deserve.

"For these children, Casa Maria is the only place that functions as home."
Valentina Zaharia-Smith, President of Copii in Dificultate



Nicolae Iorga Sunday School

Launched in Hull in March 2025, the Nicolae Iorga Sunday School encourages Romanian children growing up in the United Kingdom to discover and cherish their language, culture and heritage.

Weekly sessions help them develop bilingual skills, explore Romanian traditions and build confidence in their identity.

The project has created a supportive environment where 30 children and families can learn together and celebrate their cultural heritage.



"My daughter started to say some words in Romanian. She had some speech delays and coming to the Romanian school has really helped her a lot. We are so grateful to your support for helping us to continue this project." **Sunday School parent.**

Flavours of Home

Delivered by REACH CIC in Hull, Flavours of Home connects children with their Romanian heritage through cooking, storytelling and cultural activities.

The programme provides a welcoming environment where they learn traditional recipes, explore cultural traditions and strengthen their sense of identity and belonging.

Through intergenerational activities involving parents, grandparents and community members, the project has helped strengthen family connections and community cohesion.



"Thank you to our funders and every single person who trusts this project and helps it grow together. We are proving that even the most "hard-to-reach" communities can build bridges, preserve traditions, and thrive". **Andreea Salvage - Project Lead**

Valuing our volunteers

Our volunteers give hundreds of hours each year to support Children in Distress and the children and communities we serve.

As a small token of our appreciation, staff and volunteers enjoyed a day out together in Whitby in July 2025, sharing fish and chips and ice cream. It was an opportunity to celebrate their contribution and recognise that volunteering is about more than giving time – it also creates friendship, purpose and a genuine sense of community and belonging.



Volunteers at the heart of our work

We rely upon the commitment, compassion and generosity of volunteers who donate their time, skills and experience to our cause. Many volunteers have supported us right from the start – for over 35 years!

Whether supporting our charity shops, assisting with fundraising activities, helping with administration or supporting our annual Shoebox Appeal, volunteers are at the heart of everything we do.

More than 40 volunteers of all ages supported the charity during 2025, contributing thousands of hours of service and helping us extend our reach and impact.



Volunteer spotlight – Freddie Haley

Freddie has been volunteering in our Kirkbymoorside charity shop for the past ten months.

Working alongside staff and fellow volunteers, he assists customers, sorts donations and helps maintain the shop. Through volunteering, Freddie has developed confidence, independence and valuable workplace skills.

When asked what he enjoys most about volunteering, Freddie simply says that he enjoys helping people.

His enthusiasm, dedication and positive attitude have made him a valued member of the Children in Distress team.



Volunteer spotlight – Maureen Ingleby

Maureen has volunteered with Children in Distress for four years and is an important member of our Kirkbymoorside depot team.

She enjoys meeting people, supporting colleagues and helping customers find exactly what they are looking for.

Reflecting on her experience, Maureen says she enjoys *"Being with people and being able to give help and advice if needed."*

Volunteers like Maureen demonstrate the extraordinary commitment that enables Children in Distress to continue supporting vulnerable children and families year after year.



Celebrating cultural identity through food

One of our many 2025 highlights was the success of the *Flavours of Home* project.

30 children and 20 adults from the local Romanian community in Hull participated in the cooking programme. They learnt traditional Romanian recipes, listened to stories from older members of the community and explored customs that have been passed down through generations.

The project created opportunities for children and families to connect with their cultural heritage while building friendships, confidence and a stronger sense of belonging.

The lasting impact extended far beyond the kitchen, helping to build a sustainable community through volunteering, local partnerships and youth leadership, ensuring Romanian culture and community connections continue to thrive long after the initial funding ends. It has strengthened community ties, encouraged intergenerational learning and helped young people take pride in their heritage.



Spreading smiles with 5,000 shoeboxes

Every Christmas for over 35 years, beautifully decorated shoeboxes filled with love, essentials and little surprises, have brought happiness to those in need.

Our annual Shoebox Appeal involves hundreds of hours of support from our small staff team and our incredible volunteers.

Learning to be independent at Casa Maria

Every child at Casa Maria has unique needs and aspirations.

Thanks to the support of Children in Distress and our donors, children living at Casa Maria continue to receive personalised care and opportunities to develop important life skills.

Throughout the year, children participated in educational activities, therapeutic programmes and community visits designed to increase their independence, confidence and wellbeing.

Beyond specialist care, Casa Maria gives children with profound disabilities the opportunity to experience childhood through education, therapy, play and family life. Every milestone, from attending school to celebrating a birthday, reflects the belief that every child deserves to belong.

These experiences may seem simple, but they provide children with opportunities that can have a profound impact on their future development and quality of life.

The continued success of Casa Maria remains one of the clearest examples of the difference that long-term commitment and partnership can make.



We delivered over 5,000 shoeboxes in 2025 to children, teenagers and older adults. Shoeboxes were distributed at over 20 locations across Romania including schools, churches, residential care centres and community projects. Every shoebox represents far more than its contents. It is a tangible expression of kindness and solidarity from people here in the UK to those facing hardship thousands of miles away.



Financial Review 2025

2025 saw us invest significantly in our future vision.

Total income:
£343,868
(£574,511 in 2024).

£148,661
generated through
retail and fundraising.

£205,435
transferred to Romanian
partner organisations.

£18,500
granted to projects supporting
young Romanians in the UK.

Our reduced income was primarily due to a decrease in legacies, which by their nature can vary significantly from year to year. Despite this, donations, Gift Aid, shop income and supporter fundraising continued to provide a strong foundation for our charitable activities.

Over the last two years we have moved towards a more focused and sustainable grant-giving approach. This transition has enabled us to support a wider range of community-based projects whilst maintaining our long-standing commitment to Casa Maria.

To facilitate the transition, we made a conscious decision to utilise a proportion of our reserves to support our strategic development, strengthen governance arrangements, invest in fundraising infrastructure and deliver new charitable activities aligned with our vision.

During 2025, we received £343,868 in income and spent £557,369, resulting in a deficit of £213,501.

We ended 2025 with unrestricted reserves of £110,987. These funds provide a stable platform for our future development and service delivery.



Building a sustainable future

As we look to the future, our ambition remains clear: to ensure every child and young person we support has the opportunity to thrive.



A diverse funding model will help ensure we can continue supporting projects like Casa Maria while investing in new initiatives that improve education, wellbeing, community development and life opportunities for children and young people across the UK and Romania.

To achieve this, we must continue to build a more resilient and sustainable charity. Diversifying our income is a key priority for 2026 and beyond. While we remain deeply grateful for the extraordinary generosity of our individual supporters and those who choose to remember us through a legacy gift, we are committed to broadening our funding base by:

- Expanding our regular giving programmes.
- Developing new corporate partnerships.
- Strengthening grant and trust fundraising.
 - Increasing community fundraising activity.
 - Enhancing supporter engagement through digital communications.
- Maximising income from our charity retail operations.

How you can help

Everything we achieve is made possible by people who choose to stand alongside us.

Whether you make a donation, become a regular giver, leave a gift in your Will, volunteer your time, organise a fundraising event, partner with us through your business or simply help spread awareness of our work, you can make a lasting difference.



Moving forward with confidence

The year ahead presents exciting opportunities as we continue to strengthen our grant-giving programme and deepen relationships with community partners in the United Kingdom and Romania.

We recognise the financial pressures facing many charities and supporters, but we remain optimistic. Thanks to the commitment of our donors, volunteers, partners and communities, we are building brighter futures by creating opportunities, strengthening communities and changing lives.

Together, we can ensure every child has the opportunity not only to survive, but to belong, to grow and to thrive.



Join us – volunteer

We hope our stories have inspired you to use your time to help us make a lasting difference. We offer volunteering opportunities in our charity shops, our administrative office and to help with our annual Shoebox Appeal. Volunteering with us is a great way to make friends and gain new skills whilst supporting our life-changing work. Find out more on our website or contact our office for a chat.



Thank you

We would like to thank all our supporters, volunteers, donors, staff, trustees, ambassadors, sponsors and partner organisations. Your generosity, commitment and belief in our mission make everything we do possible.

Thank you for standing with us.





Support us – donate today

All donations, however small, help us to continue the fantastic work we've highlighted. It's simple and easy to donate. A single gift can make an instant impact and regular donations help safeguard our future, enabling us to plan for the longer term.

You can donate online at
www.childrenindistress.org/donate/
or call us to donate by phone.

You can also post cheques to us.
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